



Pew Internet
Pew Internet & American Life Project

The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008

A majority of American adults went online in 2008 to keep informed about political developments and to get involved with the election.

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Pew Internet & American Life Project

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Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings

More than half the adult population were online political users in the 2008 election.

Three-quarters (74%) of internet users went online during the 2008 election to take part in, or get news and information about the 2008 campaign. This represents 55% of the entire adult population, and marks the first time the Pew Internet & American Life Project has found that more than half the voting-age population used the internet to connect to the political process during an election cycle.

We call these individuals “online political users,” and we employed three separate metrics to identify them:

- *Going online for news about politics or the campaign.* Fully 60% of internet users did this in 2008.
- *Communicating with others about politics using the internet.* Some 38% of internet users talked about politics online with others over the course of the campaign.
- *Sharing or receiving campaign information using specific tools, such as email, instant messaging, text messages or Twitter.* Fully 59% of internet users used one or more of these tools to send or receive political messages.

If a respondent answered “yes” to any of the above questions, s/he was included in the overall population of people we counted as online political users in 2008. Of course, many respondents said “yes” to several of the online activities, but they were only counted once as a member of the online political user group.

This post-election survey finding comes after a similar poll in the spring of 2008. At that time, our survey found that 46% of Americans were online political users. In 2004, using a somewhat different set of metrics to define online political users, we found that they comprised 37% of the adult population.

As the online political news audience has grown, the importance of the internet has increased relative to other news sources.

Six in ten internet users went online for news or information about politics in 2008. This represents 44% of all American adults. Nearly one-fifth of the online population got political news on a daily basis during the campaign, as 12% of internet users said they got political news every day and 7% said they did so multiple times over the course of typical day. All told, the overall size of the political news audience has more than doubled since the 2000 elections.

The growing audience for online political news

The % of adults who go online for news or information about politics or the election

	1996	2000	2004	2008
	%	%	%	%
Among all adults	4	18	29	44
Among internet users	22	33	52	60

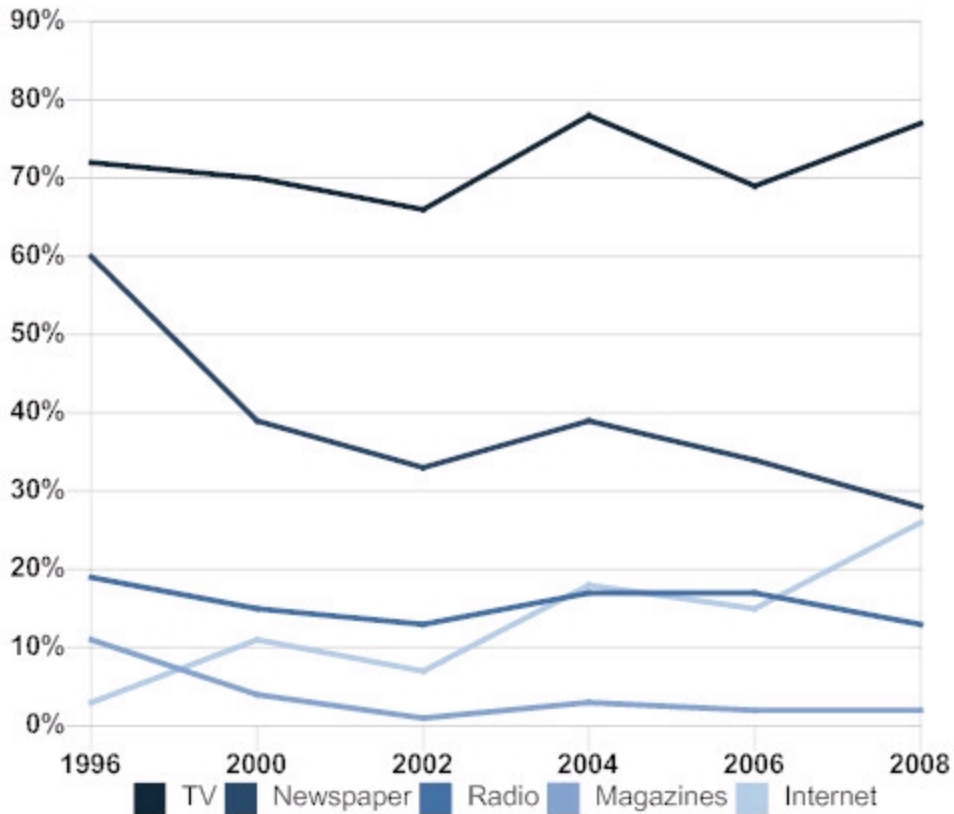
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Post-Election Surveys.



As the overall size of the online political news audience has grown, the internet has taken a front-and-center role within the media environment. Among the entire population, the internet is now on par with newspapers as a major source of campaign news—26% of all adults get most of their election news from the internet, compared with the 28% who get their election news from newspapers—although television remains the dominant source of political news in this country.

Major sources of election news

Where Americans get most of their news about politics and the election
(among all adults, up to two mentions allowed)



Pew Internet & American Life Project and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press post-election surveys.



For internet users and those under the age of 50, the internet plays an even more central role. Fully 35% of those who use the internet get most of their election news online (compared with 25% who point to newspapers), while 34% of both 18-29 year olds and 30-49 year olds rely on the internet, compared with the 20% of those in each age group who rely on newspapers as a major source of campaign news.

This trend is even more pronounced among those internet users with a broadband connection at home. They are twice as likely to use the internet as they are newspapers to get political news.

Politically-active internet users are moving away from news sites with no point of view to sites that match their political views, and this is especially true among younger voters.

Fully a third of online political users (33%) now say that when they get online political information most of the sites they visit share their point of view – up from 26% who said that in 2004. This rise in partisan information-seeking matches a decline in the number of online political users who say most of the sites they visit do not have a particular point of view. In 2004, 32% of online political users said most of the sites they visited had no particular point of view and that percentage dropped to 25% in 2008. There was no difference between 2004 and 2008 in the number of online political users who said most of the sites they visit challenge their point of view.

Both Democrats and Republicans are now more likely to gravitate towards online sites with an explicitly partisan slant than they were in 2004. Fully 44% of Democratic online political users (up from 34% in 2004) and 35% of Republican online political users (up from 26% in 2006) now say that they mostly visit sites that share their political point of view. However, the biggest change between elections occurred among the young. In 2004, 22% of online political users ages 18-24 said most of the sites they visit shared their views. That doubled to 43% of online political users in that age range in 2008.

Those who are most information hungry are the most likely to browse sites that match their views. Politically interested internet users have access to a wealth of political content online, along with new tools for finding, customizing and filtering highly targeted political commentary. As a result they are delving more deeply into the “long tail” of online political content, where they frequently seek out information that carries a

distinct partisan slant and comes from sources beyond traditional news content.

Searching for news with a point of view

% of online political users (the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet for political purposes in 2008) who typically visit political news sites that

	Share my point of view	Challenge my point of view	Do not have a particular point of view
All online political users	33%	21%	25%
Number of online political news sources			
Low (1-2)	27	20	31
Medium (3-5)	34	23	30
High (6+)	43	26	18
Engagement in political activities			
Low (1-2)	27	23	28
Medium (3-5)	39	22	25
High (6+)	54	27	12

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Categories based on number of online news sources visited, or number of online political activities participated in. For example, those with low levels of online news consumption visited 1-2 sources of online news this election period.



In this survey, we asked online political users whether they got political news or information from thirteen specific online sources. Although the most commonly mentioned sources of online political news are traditional media sites, online news consumers also sought out a wide range of non-traditional content—from portal news sites to user-generated content such as blogs and commentary sites. In total, nearly half of online news consumers accessed five or more different online types of news content in 2008.

This greater involvement with the online political debate seems to change some users' relationship to news content. As online political users get deeper into the world of online

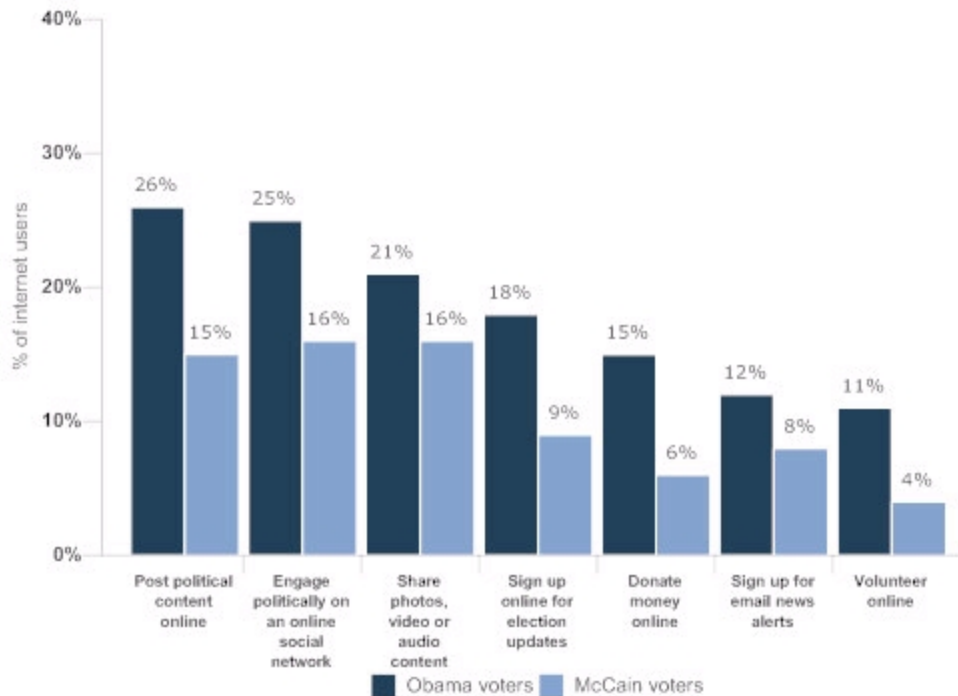
politics (whether by visiting a wider range of news sources or taking part in a wider range of political activities) they exhibit a pronounced shift towards news with an explicitly partisan slant.

Obama voters took a leading role engaging in online political activism this election cycle.

Supporters of Republican presidential candidate John McCain were more likely than backers of Barack Obama to be internet users (83% vs. 76%). This reflects the fact that McCain supporters and Republicans in general have higher amounts of education and income than Democrats – and those are two of the strongest predictors of internet use. However, online Obama supporters took part in a wider range of online political activities—from posting their own thoughts and comments about the election online to going online to volunteer for campaign activities or donate money.

Obama voters lead the way in online political activism

Key differences between online McCain and Obama supporters



Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/- 4% based on McCain voters who go online (n=579) and +/- 4% based on Obama voters who go online (n=637).



In addition to participating in a wider range of online political activities, Obama voters also took the lead in the use of email and text messaging for political communications. Among email users, 48% of Obama voters and 38% of McCain voters received email directly from a political party or candidate for office in 2008. Additionally, among voters who use text messaging:

- 49% of Obama voters shared text messages related to the campaign with others;

29% of McCain voters did so.

- 17% of Obama supporters and 7% of McCain supporters got text messages directly from a candidate or party.

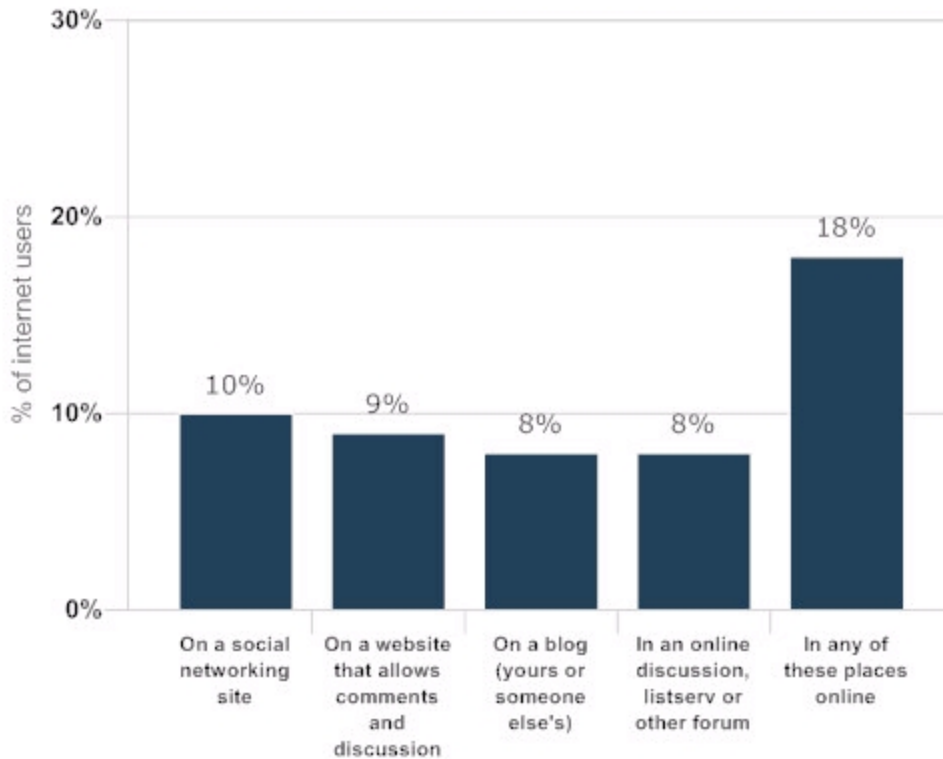
When these two activities are taken together, 22% of *all* Obama voters (text messaging users and non-users alike) communicated with others about the campaign or got information directly from a campaign or party on their cell phone, compared with 14% of McCain voters.

Nearly one in five internet users belongs to the online political participatory class.

Voters are increasingly taking an active role in the political process by contributing their own thoughts or comments to the online debate. In 2008, nearly one in five internet users posted their thoughts, comments or questions about the campaign on a website, blog, social networking site or other online forum.

The online participatory class

One in five internet users has posted political commentary online



Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591).



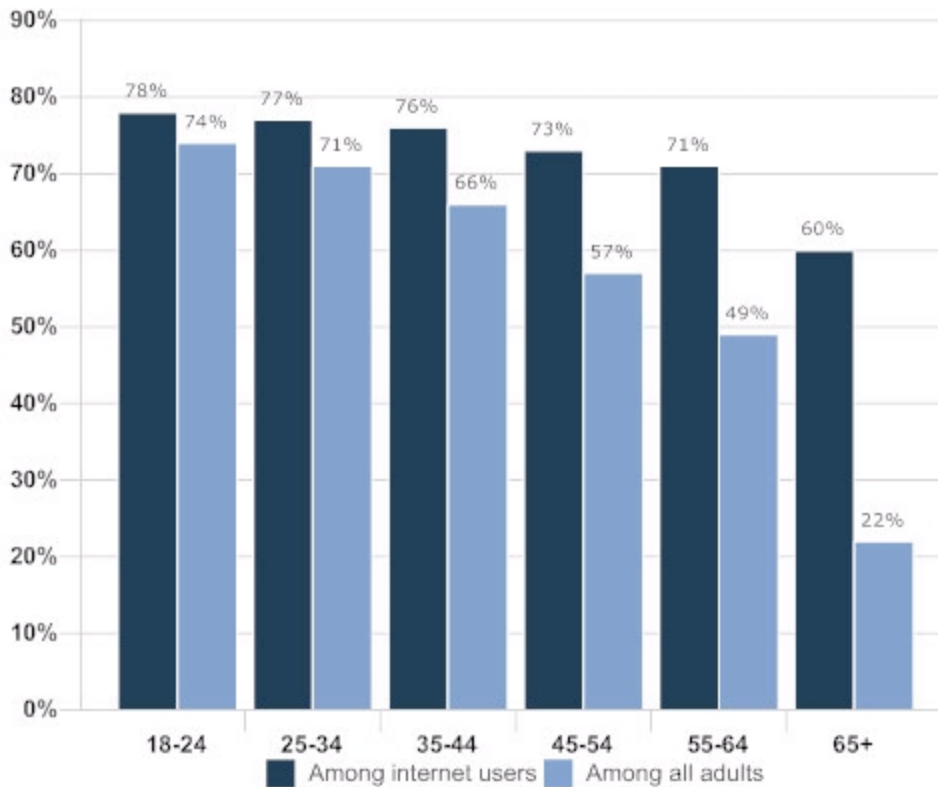
This online participatory class is composed largely of politically active young adults—fully 30% of those who post political content online are under the age of 25, and more than half are younger than 35. Political content creation is also tightly linked with the use of social media platforms such as online social networks, video sharing sites, blogs and status update services such as Twitter.

Young Americans engage most deeply in the online political process, but online political involvement is something all generations do to some extent.

More than half of the internet users in every major age cohort took part in the political process in one way or another during the 2008 campaign. Indeed, the oldest Americans (those individuals age 65 and older) are the only age cohort for which substantially fewer than half of *all* members of that cohort are online political users. This is due to the relatively low levels of internet usage by seniors—although 60% of online seniors are online political users, just 37% of seniors use the internet. As a result, 22% of the entire senior population got engaged politically online in 2008. For other age groups (including those only slightly younger than 65) half or more of all adults took part in the online political process in 2008.

Internet users of all ages were active online during the campaign

The proportion of online political users (those who used the internet for political purposes in 2008) within each age group



Pew Internet and American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Although online political involvement is widely dispersed throughout the population, young adults tend to be the most intense of the online political user cohort. Online political users under the age of 30 are much more likely than other age groups to:

- Get customized political or campaign news (as through an RSS feed, automated

email updates or a customized web page).

- Post their own original content online.
- Take part in political activities on social networking sites.

However, other online political activities are far from dominated by the youngest of online political users. While two-thirds of online political users under the age of 30 watch online political videos, this activity is relatively popular among other age groups as well. And online political users in all age groups are equally likely to share or forward interesting political nuggets to others. Indeed, older online political users are actually the group that is most likely to forward political content or commentary to others. Since seniors are regular users of email in other contexts (such as communicating with family members) it is a small leap for these individuals to share political content.

Among politically engaged internet users, young adults have the highest level of involvement

Online activities among online political users (the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes during the 2008 campaign)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
% who are online political users	72%	65%	51%	22%
These activities are engaged in by a range of age groups				
Watch online political videos	67	62	54	40
Share/forward political or election news	44	44	41	47
Young online political users dominate these activities				
Engage politically on a social networking site	49	22	7	2
Post original content related to the campaign	40	21	17	9
Customize political or election news	32	21	19	15

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Technology helped Americans to navigate the voting process and share their experiences at the polls.

In addition to using technology to help make sense of the campaign, voters also went online to help prepare for Election Day and to share their experiences at the polls. Fully 26% of all wired voters used the internet to help them navigate the voting process, as one in five (18%) went online to find out where to vote; 16% did so for information about absentee or early voting; and one in ten (9%) went online to find out if they were registered to vote. Young voters and those who were politically involved online during the campaign were especially likely to turn to the internet for assistance with the voting

process.

Voters also jumped at the opportunity to share their experiences on Election Day with others, mainly in person and over the telephone but also using digital technologies such as email, text messaging and social networking sites. Again, young voters were especially likely to go online to share their voting day experiences relative to older voters.

Many voters shared their experiences on election day with others. Young voters, in particular, did so using digital technologies.

The % of those who voted in 2008 who shared their experiences at the polls in the following ways

	All voters	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%
Talked in person to people	59	68	64	58	42
Talked on the telephone to people	45	57	49	44	31
Sent email	11	18	13	9	3
Sent text messages	8	23	10	--	**
Posted your experience on a social networking site	4	13	4	1	**
Wrote about your experience on a personal website or blog	2	8	2	1	--
Commented on someone else's website or blog	4	14	3	--	--

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. **Sample size of SNS / text messaging users is too small to analyze.



All these results come from a national telephone survey of 2,254 American adults between November 20 and December 4, 2008. Some 1,591 of them are internet users and 1,186 are those we call online political users. This sample was gathered entirely on landline phones. There was no extra sample of cell-phone users, who tend to be younger and slightly more likely to be internet users.

Online Politics in 2008

Introduction

From the beginning of primary season, many voters seemed to have limitless interest in the twists and turns of the 2008 presidential and other races. This fascination manifested itself in numerous ways, from record numbers of citizens following election news and tracking the progress of the race to extensive waiting-lines on polling day caused by high voter turnout. This upswing in interest in the political process was inspired by many factors: a tightly-contested Democratic primary between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton that extended well into the spring; an open Republican primary without an incumbent running for president; a general election featuring the first African-American major party candidate and one of the most well-known Republican Senators; a general election season that overlapped with the collapse of the housing market and banking sector; and a political climate in which there was widespread dissatisfaction among voters with the overall direction of the country.

Voters frequently turned to technology to help them stay up to date with campaign developments, express themselves politically and encourage others to vote for their candidate of choice. While usage of the internet for political purposes has been steadily growing over the last decade, the online political experience was qualitatively different this year than it was in 2000, 2004 or even 2006, as many social media features that were in their infancy during the previous presidential race had become commonplace by 2008.

A few examples: The percentage of internet users who visit online video-sharing sites rose from 33% in December 2006 to 52% in May 2008. Usage of social networking sites has nearly quadrupled over the past four years—from fewer than one in ten online adults in early 2005 to more than one in three today. Citizens are also increasingly talking to others and consuming news and information on the go, as more than six in

ten Americans connect to the internet wirelessly or engage in non-voice data applications on their cell phone or personal digital assistant.¹

These two factors—increased interest in politics combined with greater opportunities for online political involvement—met head-on during the 2008 campaign. The result was an upsurge of political content, chatter and mobilization in various online venues. Put simply, voters in 2008 were not just passive followers of the political process. They also used a wide range of digital tools and technologies to get involved in the race, to harness their creativity in support of their chosen candidate, and to join forces with others who shared their same political goals and interests.

In this report, we look at the results of a national post-election survey that focused on the role that the internet and cell phones played in the 2008 race at all levels. In addition to updating participation in various online activities that we have tracked since the Project's earliest political surveys in 2000, this survey examined the role of social media tools in an effort to place them in the context of the overall online political debate.

More than half of all adults used the internet to get involved with politics in one way or another this past election season.

The internet passed a significant marker in the 2008 election season, as more than half of the entire adult population (internet users and non-users alike) went online to learn about the campaign or get involved in the political process.

We define engagement in the online political environment using three separate metrics. First, we asked members of the wired population whether they went online for news and information about politics during the 2008 election season. Six in ten internet users (60%) said that they had done so at least occasionally over the course of the campaign.

Next, we asked whether they used the internet to communicate with others about the

campaign and 38% internet users said that they had done this. Indeed, nearly one in ten internet users went online to talk politics on a daily basis during campaign season—5% did so every day and an additional 4% said that they did so multiple times a day.

Finally, we asked whether they had gotten campaign information or communicated with others about politics using specific tools such as email, text messaging, instant messaging or Twitter. All told, six in ten internet users (59%) received or shared political information over the course of the campaign using one or more of these technologies.

Taken together, this means that fully 74% of internet users—or 55% of all American adults—went online during the 2008 election season to get news or information about the campaign, to communicate with others about politics, or to contribute to the online debate.² Throughout this report, these individuals are referred to as “online political users.”

While the overall size of the online political user population is notable in its own right, it is also striking to observe the broad base of demographic groups it represents. To be sure, certain demographic cohorts contain a relatively small number of online political users: For example, 22% of all adults age 65 or older and 31% of those with a household income of less than \$30,000 per year took part in the online political process this year. However, this is largely due to the fact that these groups are relatively unlikely to go online in the first place. Among those who go online, more than half of most major demographic subgroups (seniors, African Americans, etc) were politically engaged online in one way or another this election season.

Online participation by demographic groups

The % of adults within each group who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes in 2008. As an example, 75% of online males and 58% of all males are online political users.

	Percent of <u>internet users</u> in each group who are online political users	Percent of <u>all adults</u> in each group who are online political users
Total	74%	55%
Gender		
Male	75	58
Female	73	53
Age		
18-29	77	72
30-49	77	65
50-64	71	51
65+	60	22
Race/Ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	76	58
Black, non-Hispanic	66	40
Hispanic	64	52
Education		
Less than high school	**	18
High school grad	62	42
Some college	78	67
College grad	87	81
Annual Household Income		
Less than \$30,000	56	31
\$30,000-\$49,999	70	57
\$50,000-\$74,999	79	73
\$75,000 or more	87	84

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-2% based on all adults (n=2,254) and +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591). Margins for error within subgroups are smaller. **Subgroup is too small for detailed analysis.



Another way to examine this issue is to compare the demographics of the online political user population to that of all internet users and to the adult population as a whole.

When viewed in this manner, one can see that online political users are similar in their demographic composition to these other groups with respect to gender, race and geography. On the other hand, the online political user audience is indeed younger, and has greater levels of income and education, than the population as a whole.

Demographic profile of the online political user population

The demographic composition of online political users in comparison to all adults and the online population. Online political users are the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet for political purposes in 2008. To read this chart: males make up 49% of the total population, 50% of internet users and 51% of online political users

	All adults	Internet users	Online political users
	%	%	%
Gender			
Male	49	50	51
Female	51	50	49
Age			
18-29	19	24	25
30-49	37	42	43
50-64	26	25	24
65+	17	8	7
Race/Ethnicity			
White, non-Hispanic	70	71	73
Black, non-Hispanic	11	9	8
Hispanic (English-speaking)	11	12	11
Education			
Less than high school	13	6	4
High school grad	36	32	27
Some college	23	27	28
College grad	27	34	40
Annual Household Income			
Less than \$30,000	26	19	15
\$30,000-\$49,999	17	19	17
\$50,000-\$74,999	14	17	18
\$75,000 or more	24	32	37
Geography			
Urban	30	29	29
Suburban	53	55	58
Rural	18	15	13

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-2% based on all adults (n=2,254), +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591) and +/-3% based on online political users (n=1,186).



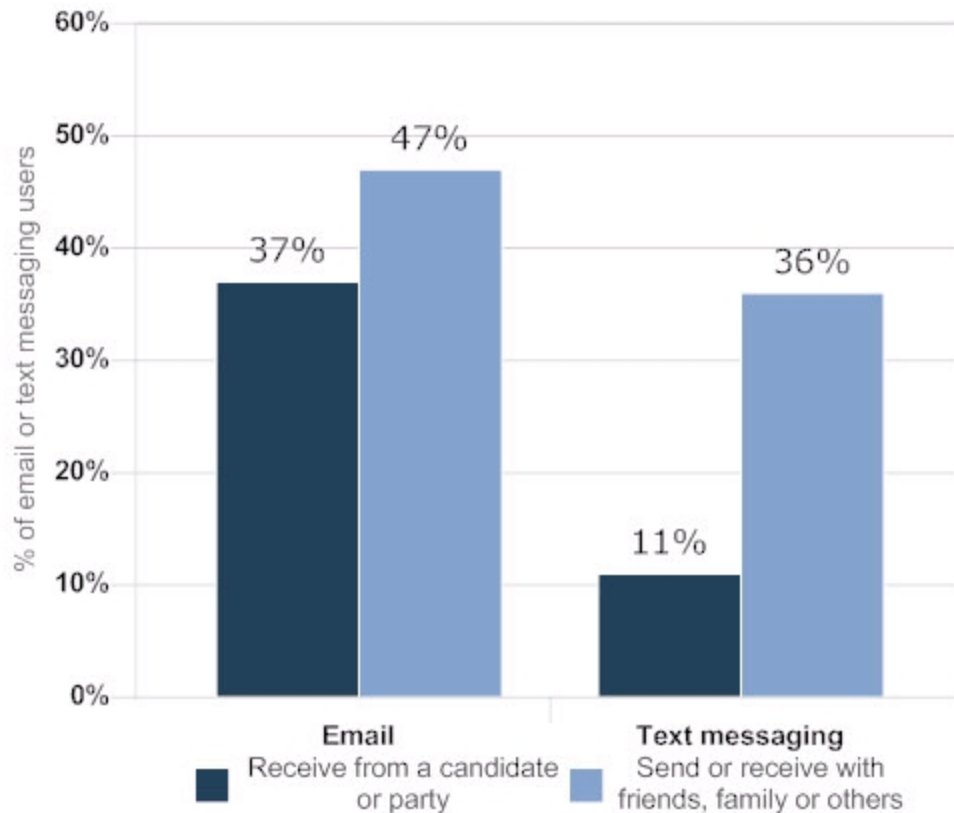
Email and text messaging continue to develop as tools of political communication.

Email and text messaging continued to integrate themselves into voter's political communication and information gathering habits in 2008. Six in ten (59%) email users exchanged emails about the campaign and 39% of cell-phone owners used text messaging to communicate with others about the race. Some 17% of email users exchanged emails about the race every day, and 8% of cell owners texted about the race every day during this year's campaign.

Generally speaking, email and text messaging were used more often this election season for *sharing and communication* than for *information gathering*. This is especially true for text messaging: While one in ten (11%) text messaging users got text messages directly from a candidate or political party this election cycle (1% on a daily basis), more than one-third (36%) used mobile text messaging to communicate with friends, family members or others about the state of the campaign (with 8% doing so daily). With email, the trend is less strong but points in the same direction: nearly half (47%) of email users shared political emails with their friends and family over the course of the campaign (9% daily) compared with the 37% who got email directly from a candidate or political party (11% daily).

Political communication using email and text messaging

The proportion of email and text messaging users who sent or received political communications in 2008 using these tools



Pew Internet and American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Voters used other technologies over the course of the campaign to chat with friends about the election, although email is by far the most popular. For instance, 34% of instant messaging users used IM to talk with friends or family members about the campaign. This works out to 10% of the entire adult population who communicated about politics over IM in 2008. Additionally, 19% of Twitter users used Twitter to post

their thoughts or experiences about the campaign, although this comes to a relatively small number of people given the low incidence of Twitter users in the population as a whole.

When all of these methods of political communication are placed into the context of the entire adult population, email clearly emerges as the dominant mode of digital political communication, followed by text messaging and IM. Fully 40% of all adults engaged in some type of email-based political communication in 2008, with one in ten doing so on a daily basis.

How voters communicated about campaign 2008

The % of all adults who sent or received political communications in 2008 using

	Ever	Daily
Mail	69%	17%
Email	40	12
Text messaging	15	3
Instant messaging	10	2
Twitter	1	

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-2% based on all adults (n=2,254).



View it, customize it, pass it along – the activities online political users engaged in this election cycle.

Online political users went online for a range of reasons this election season, from watching political videos to donating money or volunteering for campaign activities. Here are some of the activities in which they engaged online.

Get basic campaign information about the candidates

Fully 57% of online political users (representing 42% of all internet users) went online this election season to get information about the candidates' positions on the issues or about their voting records, making this activity one of the most common outside of looking for election news. This type of political information gathering is also widely

dispersed throughout the online politically engaged population, even among those who are not typically highly engaged in the online political debate. For instance, among online political users 45% of those with only a high school education went online for candidates' voting records and stances on issues, as did 47% of those earning \$30,000 or less per year. Like email for the general population, going online for basic candidate positions and voting histories seems to offer an entry point for access to the world of online politics.

Our wording of this question has evolved over time, making direct comparisons across election seasons somewhat problematic. However, it does appear that the size of the population looking for basic candidate information has grown since the last presidential election cycle. In 2004, 31% of internet users said that they had gone online for information about the candidates' positions on the issues, compared with the 42% this past election cycle who went online for information about the candidates' positions or voting records. While just 10% of internet users did this in 2000, our question wording at that time referred only to looking up voting records, and not the more general issue of the candidates' issue positions.

Watch political videos

By the end of the campaign, fully 60% of online political users (representing 45% of American internet users) had gone online to watch some sort of video related to politics or the election. A great deal of this video-watching involved "official" online videos from either a campaign or a new organization, as 50% of online political users watched these types of videos over the course of the campaign. However, unofficial (often user-generated) content was nearly as popular: 43% of online political users watched videos that did *not* come from either of these two sources.

Young adults are leading the way in their consumption of online video. Among online political users, 57% of 18-29 year olds watched online videos from a campaign or news organization and 54% watched video from sources other than the campaigns or

traditional media. In total, two-thirds (67%) of online political users age 18-29 watched some form of online campaign video this election season. This equates to nearly half (48%) of *all* 18-29 year olds (political users and non-users, online and offline alike) who watched online political videos in 2008. Members of the under-30 age group are the most intense online video watchers, but older voters hardly shunned online video. Six in ten online political users age 30-49 watch online political videos—this represents 41% of all adults in this age cohort.

Political video consumption by age

The % of online political users within in each group who watch political videos online. Online political users are the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes in 2008.

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
% within each group who are online political users	72%	65%	51%	22%
Watch online video from a campaign or news organization	57	52	43	30
Watch online video that did not come from a campaign or news organization	54	44	36	26
Watched any type of political video online	67	62	54	40

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Customize their political news

Voters also took advantage of tools such as RSS feeds and email alerts to get customized political news tailored to their specific interests. In total, nearly one-quarter (23%) of online political users went online for customized news about politics or the 2008 election. This represents 17% of all internet users.

Political news customization

The % of internet users and online political users who did the following in 2008. Online political users are the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes during the 2008 campaign.

	Among online political users	Among internet users
	%	%
Sign up online to receive updates about the campaign or the elections	15	11
Set up email news alerts about political or campaign information	12	9
Customize a web page to display political or campaign information that is particularly important to you	6	5
Subscribe to receive campaign or political information through an RSS feed	5	4
Have done any of these	23	17

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591) and +/-3% based on online political users (n=1,186).



Younger voters (particularly those under the age of 30) took great advantage of the ability to customize their news and get the latest updates on the campaign. Among online political users age 18-29, 21% signed up online to receive updates about the campaign, 12% customized a web page to display political information tailored to their interests, and 8% set up a politics-related RSS feed.

Users of various social media applications were also interested in obtaining timely customized information—perhaps so they could be the first to share them with their friends—with Twitter users leading the way. Compared with other online political users, Twitter users were much more likely to sign up online for updates about the election

(26% did this, vs. 14% of non-users) and to subscribe to political RSS feeds (14% vs. 4%).

Minority voters also show a strong affinity for having customized political news delivered to them. Among online political users fully one-quarter (25%) of African-Americans and English-speaking Hispanics³ signed up to receive online updates about the election; 23% of blacks set up political email news alerts; and 18% of Hispanics set up a customized web page to show them especially relevant political information during the campaign. In each case minorities are significantly more likely to do these activities than whites, although due to the relatively small number of black (n=84) and Hispanic (n=70) online political users in our survey, these results should be interpreted with some caution.

Share or pass along the things they find online

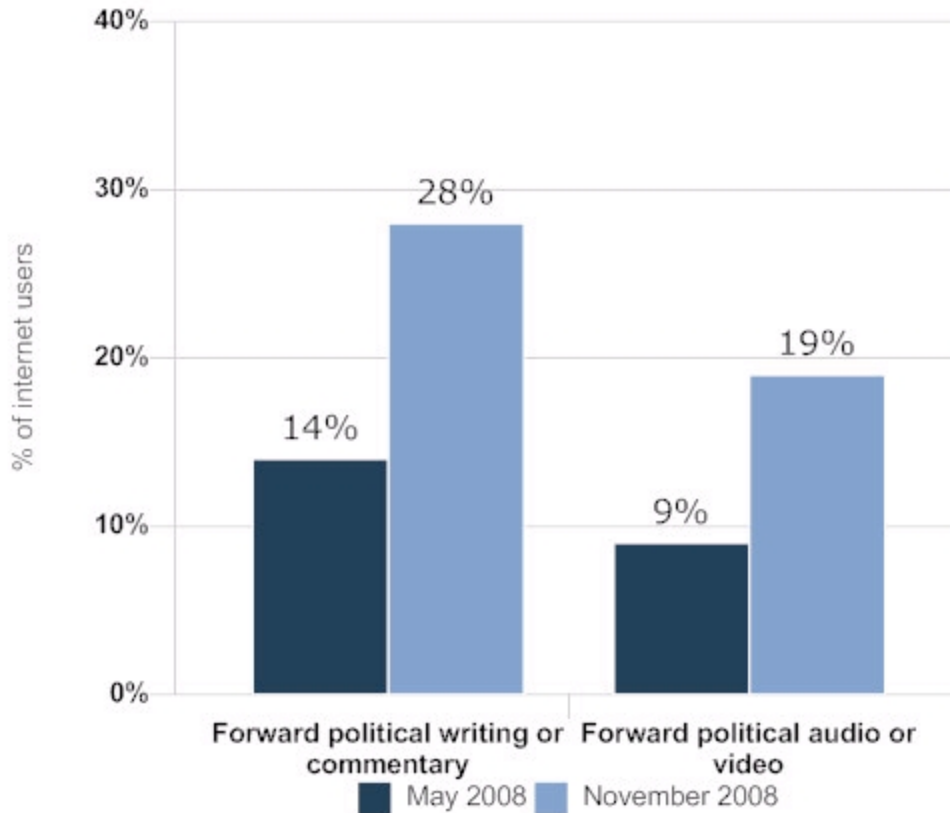
Unlike traditional methods of political communication, tools such as email are designed for sharing—they allow voters to instantly and easily forward things that interest them to their friends and family. As such, it does not come as a surprise that sharing and forwarding political information is one of the most common activities outside of watching political videos online. Fully 44% of online political users (representing 33% of internet users and 24% of all adults) did one or more of the following activities related to political content sharing in 2008:

- 37% of online political users forwarded political commentary or writing to others
- 25% forwarded political audio or video recordings to others
- 22% shared photos, videos or audio files online related to the campaign or the elections

In contrast to online video (which already had high levels of usage at the time of our May 2008 pre-election survey) political content sharing experienced significant growth over the course of the 2008 race. Compared with our pre-election survey conducted in May 2008, voters in the final stages of the campaign were far more likely to have

forwarded both written political commentary and political audio or video recordings to their friends.

Political content sharing grew dramatically over the course of the 2008 campaign



Pew Internet & American Life Project surveys. Margin of error is +/-3% based on internet users in May 2008 (n=1,553) and +/-3% based on internet users in November 2008 (n=1,591).



Also notable is the extent to which older Americans took part in sharing and passing along political links and commentary during this election cycle. Among those age 65 and older who engaged in the online political process, fully 41% forwarded political writing or commentary to their friends and family, and an additional 32% forwarded on political audio or video recordings. This is likely related to those seniors' familiarity with email as a tool for non-political communications with friends and family members—while

younger adults dominate political video and using social networking sites for political purposes, seniors more than hold their own in keeping the political conversation going via email.

Voters from a range of age groups share political content online

The % of online political users in each age group who did the following in 2008. Online political users are the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes during the campaign.

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Among online political users				
	%	%	%	%
Forward political commentary or writing	33	39	37	41
Forward political audio or video	23	26	23	32
Among internet users				
Forward political commentary or writing	26	30	27	24
Forward political audio or video	19	20	17	19

Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



In an election featuring the first African-American general election candidate for president, African-American voters were excited to share photos, audio or video files with their friends and family. Fully 39% of black online political users did this during the campaign, significantly higher than the figure for whites (20%) or Hispanics (22%). However, as noted above the number of African-American online political users in our survey was relatively small (n=84) so these results should be interpreted with some caution.

Engage in traditional political activities like donating money or volunteering their time

Many of the online activities discussed here led to engagement in traditional forms of political activism. Indeed, they were designed for this purpose. One in ten online political

users (11%, representing 9% of internet users) went online to contribute money to one or more candidates for office and 8% (6% of internet users) went online to sign up for volunteer activities related to the campaign—such as helping to register voters or helping get people to the polls.

Not surprisingly, donating money online is mostly the province of older, college-educated and higher-income voters, although younger adults are much more likely than other age groups to volunteer online to help out a campaign or candidate. Fully 14% of online political users age 18-29 volunteered online, compared with 6% of 30-49 year olds, 8% of 50-64 year olds and 5% of those ages 65 and older.

Nearly one in five internet users is a member of the political participatory class.

Over the course of the 2008 election, many voters took advantage of the two-way flow of communications offered by new internet technologies to become active participants in the online political debate. One-quarter (24%) of online political users (representing 18% of all internet users) contributed to the online political debate this election season by posting their questions, comments or commentary where others could read them.

The online political participatory class

The % within each group who have posted comments, queries or information about the campaign or election online. Note: online political users are the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political puposes during the 2008 campaign.

	Among online political users	Among internet users
On a social networking site	14%	10%
On a website of any kind, such as a political, campaign or news site that allows comments and discussion	12	9
On a blog (your own or someone else's)	11	8
In an online discussion, listserv or other group forum	10	8
Have done any of these	24%	18%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591) and +/-3% based on online political users (n=1,186).



Those who post their commentary online seldom limit themselves to a single forum, choosing instead to speak out in multiple venues. Within this class of online political “creators,” fully 57% posted their thoughts in more than one of the outlets listed above (a group forum, a blog, a social networking site, or other website). Among those who posted their thoughts online:

- 26% did so in two locations
- 20% did so in three locations
- 11% did so in four locations

Among demographic groups, young voters are by far the most likely to post their own political content online. Fully 40% of online political users age 18-29 are online content creators compared with 21% of those age 30-49, 17% of those age 50-64 and 9% of those

age 65 and older. Put another way, more than half of all online political content creators are under the age of 35, and 30% of these individuals are younger than 25 years old. In a related finding, students are also devoted political content creators—44% of online political users who are currently enrolled as students (whether full- or part-time) post their own political commentary, compared with 20% of those who are not currently enrolled in school.

Online political participation by different demographic groups

The % within each group who post their own thoughts about politics online.
 Note: online political users are the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes during the 2008 campaign.

	% of online political users within each group who are online political content creators	% of all adults within each group who are online political content creators
Total	24%	13%
Gender		
Male	24	14
Female	24	12
Age		
18-29	40	29
30-49	21	14
50-64	17	9
65+	9	2
Race/Ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	22	13
Black, non-Hispanic	23*	9
English-speaking Hispanic	32*	17
Education		
Less than high school	**	4
High school grad	21	9
Some college	30	20
College grad	21	17
Annual Household Income		
Less than \$30,000	35	11
\$30,000-\$49,999	22	13
\$50,000-\$74,999	25	18
\$75,000 or more	24	20

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-2% based on all adults (n=2,254) and +/-3% based on online political users (n=1,186). Margins for error within subgroups are smaller. *Due to relatively small sample size of Black (n=84) and Hispanic (n=70) online political users, please interpret these results with some caution. **Sample size is too small to analyze.

Since all online content is often generated to create conversation and debate, there is also a high level of correlation between the use of various social media applications and posting one's thoughts about politics online. Among online political users, fully 46% of those who use Twitter or other status update services post their own original political content online (vs. 22% for non-users) as do 41% of online political users who use social networking sites (vs. 12% for non-users) and 34% of those who watch political videos online (vs. 9% for non-watchers). Each of these technologies serves as a platform for information gathering, sharing and content creation.

Online social networking sites served as a hub for sharing political interests and affiliations with friends.

Over the course of the entire election, more than half (52%) of online social network users (representing 14% of all adults) used these sites for political information or to take part in the some aspect of the campaign. As with text messaging and email, users tend to view these sites as more useful for *sharing and communication* than for *information gathering*. The most common political activities on these sites (of the six evaluated) tend to be primarily “social” in nature, even if they do each have an informational component:

- 41% of online social network users discovered which candidate their friends voted for on these sites
- 33% posted political content for their friends to see
- 26% revealed on these sites which Presidential candidate they voted for
- 23% used them to get candidate or campaign information
- 16% started or joined a political cause or group

- 12% signed up as a friend of one or more candidates

Young adults are more likely than older adults to use social networking sites in general,⁴ and even within the universe of social network users young adults (those under the age of 30) use these sites much more intensely for political purposes.

Young adults are most likely to use their online social networks for political purposes

The % of social networking site users within each age group who have done the following on a social networking site.

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45+
% within each group with a social networking profile	83%	53%	36%	15%
Political activities among SNS users within each age group				
Get candidate or campaign information	26	24	19	19
Start or join a political group or cause	20	15	16	11
Reveal which Presidential candidate you voted for this year	32	29	24	14
Discover which candidate your friends voted for this year	54	51	30	17
Sign up as a friend of any of the candidate	15	13	13	6
Did any of these	65	56	41	36

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



NOTES

¹ See <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Mobile-Access-to-Data-and-Information.aspx>

² In this post-election survey, we found that 74% of American adults are internet users.

³ Note: this survey was conducted in English only.

⁴ For more information on the demographics of online social network users, see http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/272/report_display.asp

The Internet as a Source of Political News and Information

Introduction

The political news environment has changed dramatically in recent years. Long gone are the days when political information was confined to a few network news channels and major national newspapers or magazines. Today, newspapers and network TV compete with 24-hour cable channels and a host of online news services—from online efforts by traditional publishers to user-generated content on blogs, personal webpages, social networking sites and elsewhere. Political news junkies can customize their news using RSS feeds or news aggregators, get updates on the topics they are specifically interested in at any time of day and in multiple formats, and then contribute their own thoughts to the discussion on their personal blog or Twitter feed.

These changes inspire a host of questions. In a world of dispersed media, where are politically engaged citizens going for their news? How do alternative outlets such as blogs fit into the overall media environment? How are mobile devices used for gathering political information, particularly with respect to the consumption of traditional media content? And as voters move down the long tail of media content, are they able to more narrowly focus in on content that fits their existing political philosophy?

We address these and other issues in the section that follows.

The online political news audience has grown dramatically over the past two presidential election cycles.

The proportion of Americans going online for election-related news and information has more than doubled since the end of the 2000 race. Six in ten internet users went online

in 2008 for campaign news, up from 52% at a similar point in 2004 and 33% in 2000. Moreover, because the total population of internet users has also grown over that time, the overall size of the online political news consumer audience has grown from 18% of all adults in 2000 to 44% of all adults today.

The growing audience for online political news

The % of adults who go online for news or information about politics or the election

	1996	2000	2004	2008
	%	%	%	%
Among all adults	4	18	29	44
Among internet users	22	33	52	60

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Post-Election Surveys.



One-third of these online news consumers went online for political news or information on a daily basis during the campaign. Within the cohort that went online for political news:

- 12% did so multiple times each day
- 21% did so every day
- 20% did so 3-5 days per week
- 26% did so 1-2 days per week
- 21% did so less often.

Young adults and those with relatively high levels of income and education are generally more inclined to go online for political and election-related news, largely because these groups are most likely to go online in the first place. At the same time, it is also clear that a diverse range of internet users go online for political content at least occasionally. For example, while seniors and those without a college education are generally less intense internet users relative to those who are younger or have higher

levels of education, one-third (32%) of online seniors and nearly half (45%) of internet users with a high school education or less went online in 2008 for campaign news.

Online political news consumption by different demographic groups

The % within each category who get political news online

	% of internet users who go online for political news	% of all adults who go online for political news
Total	60%	44%
Gender		
Male	64	49
Female	56	40
Age		
18-29	64	58
30-49	66	56
50-64	56	40
65+	32	12
Race/Ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	61	46
Black, non-Hispanic	51	29
Hispanic	62	48
Education		
Less than high school	**	13
High school grad	47	31
Some college	63	54
College grad	75	70
Annual Household Income		
Less than \$30,000	43	23
\$30,000-\$49,999	55	45
\$50,000-\$74,999	64	59
\$75,000 or more	75	72
Party Affiliation		
Republican	64	54
Democrat	61	43
Independent	59	44

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591) and +/-2% based on all adults (n=2,254). Margins for error within subgroups are smaller. **Sample size is too small to analyze.

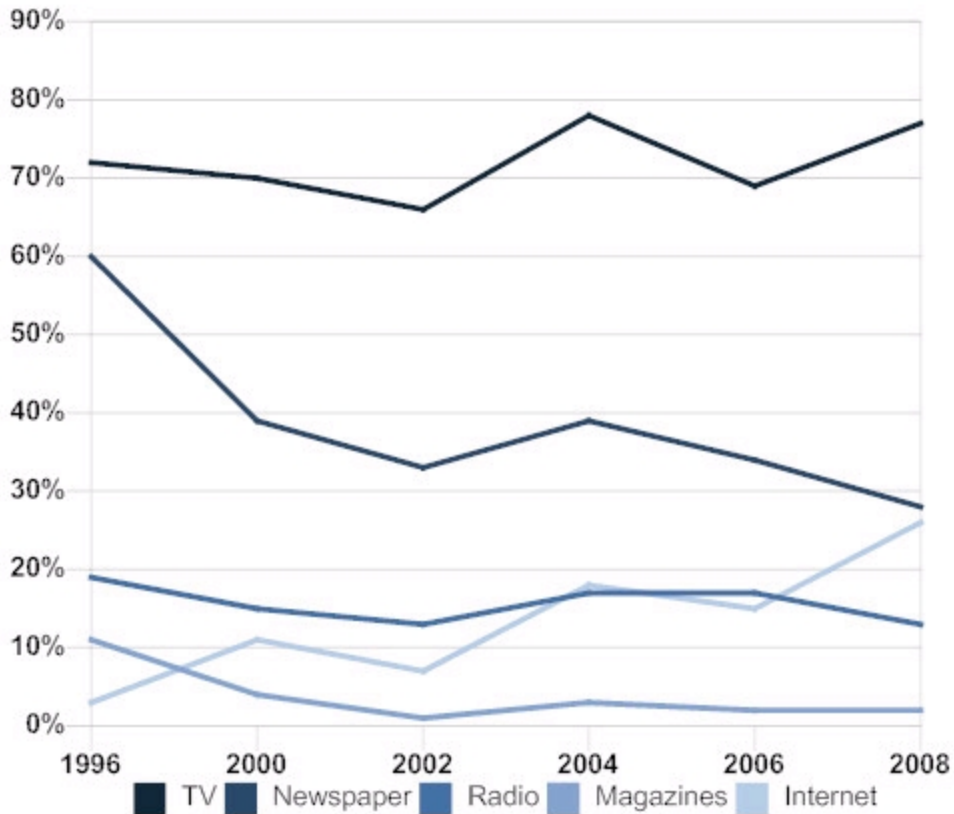


The internet now greatly outpaces radio and rivals newspapers as a source of election news among the population as a whole.

For the first time since the Pew Internet Project began surveying Americans' news consumption habits, the internet now clearly exceeds radio, and is on par with newspapers, as a major source of campaign and election news among the entire adult population (including internet users and non-users). Fully 26% of all adults now get most of their election news from the internet, nearly equal to the 28% who cite newspapers and double the 13% who listen to the radio. Television remains the most common source of election news, as 77% of Americans turn to election-related television programming for their campaign information (respondents were allowed to provide up to two sources of campaign news when answering this question). Since November 2000, the percentage of Americans relying on the internet as a major source of election news has more than doubled (from 11% to 26%) while the proportion relying on newspapers has fallen from 39% to 28% today.

Major sources of election news

Where Americans get most of their news about politics and the election
(among all adults, up to two mentions allowed)



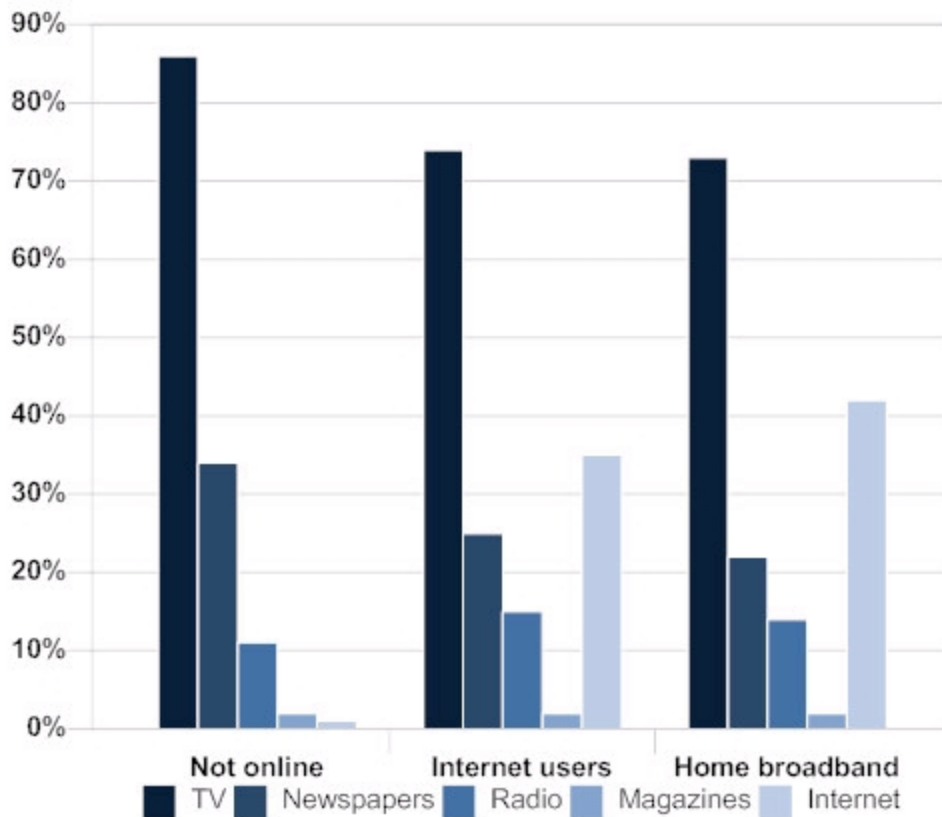
Pew Internet & American Life Project and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press post-election surveys.



The influence of the internet on news consumption habits is especially apparent when looking at internet users in general and those with a home broadband connection specifically.⁵ Within the broadband population, the internet is by far the second-most important source of campaign news, behind only television and well ahead of newspapers, radio and magazines.

Most important sources of election news for all adults, internet users and home broadband users

Among all adults, up to two mentions allowed



Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-2% based on all adults (n=2,254), +/-3% based on internet users (n=1,591) and +/-3% based on home broadband users (n=1,193).



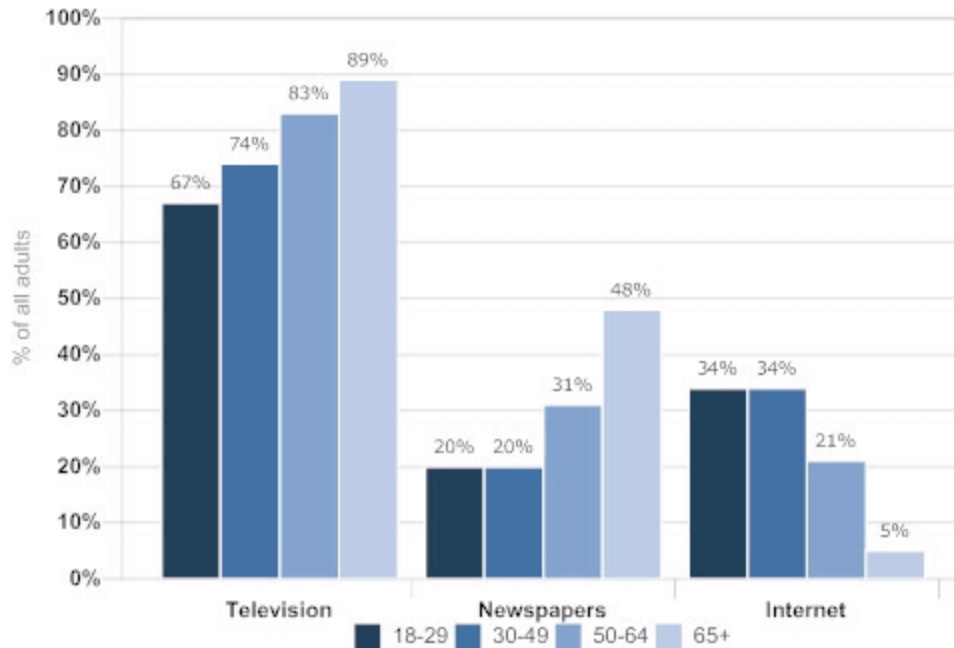
Those with college degrees or high levels of income (who also have high levels of broadband adoption) are also likely to cite the internet as a major source of election news. For example, 41% of college graduates and 33% of those with some college

experience cite the internet as a major source of campaign news, compared with 18% of high school graduates and just 3% of those without a high school degree.

In a similar vein, young adults continue to move away from television and newspapers and towards the internet as their primary source for a wide range of content—and election news is no different. Indeed, this is true even for a wider swath of the population. Among all Americans (internet users and non-users alike) under the age of 50, the internet well outpaces newspapers as a major source of election news. One-third (34%) of all adults in this age cohort cite the internet as a major source of campaign news, compared with just one in five who use newspapers. Similarly, while 83% of 50-64 year olds and 89% of those 65 and older get most of their election news from television, this falls to 74% for 30-49 year olds and just 67% for those under the age of 30.

Young adults rely heavily on the internet for political news

Most important sources of campaign or election news (among all adults, up to two mentions allowed)



Pew Internet and American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Within the 77% of the population that gets much of its campaign news from television, the most common sources of programming remained stable between 2004 and 2008. As in 2004 CNN, Fox News and local news programming are the three primary sources that political news viewers turn to for election coverage.

Most common sources of televised election news

Based on those who get most of their campaign news from television

	2004	2008
	%	%
CNN cable news	25	29
Fox News cable channel	24	25
Local news programming	23	21
ABC network news	16	15
NBC network news	17	15
CBS network news	13	11
MSNBC cable news	8	10
CNBC cable news	3	3
Don't know	7	6

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-3% based on those watch television as a major source of election news (n=1,788).



Significant numbers now read newspapers and watch newscasts on their computer or mobile device.

In light of the growing use of the internet and concurrent decline in the importance of newspapers discussed above, it is worth pointing out that newspapers (as well as video newscasts) can now be consumed in a number of formats—on paper, online on a computer, or on a cell phone or other mobile device. In order to capture some of these nuances, we asked a series of questions about the formats in which Americans consume news from traditional television and print media sources.

First, we asked all of our survey participants whether they had read a news story from a newspaper organization in any format on the previous day, and 52% said that they had. We then asked those individuals where they read that newspaper story or stories in a print edition of the newspaper, online on a computer, on a cell phone, or on a smartphone such as a Blackberry or iPhone (respondents were allowed to mention multiple news channels). Their responses confirm that many news consumers are turning to alternate distribution channels and different “screens” even for news that comes from traditional media sources. Among those who had read a news story from a newspaper organization on the previous day:

- 69% read a printed copy of a newspaper
- 61% of those who use the internet (representing 52% of all news readers) read a news story online on a computer
- 6% of cell phone owners read a news story on a cell phone, and 7% did so using a Blackberry, iPhone or other smartphone.

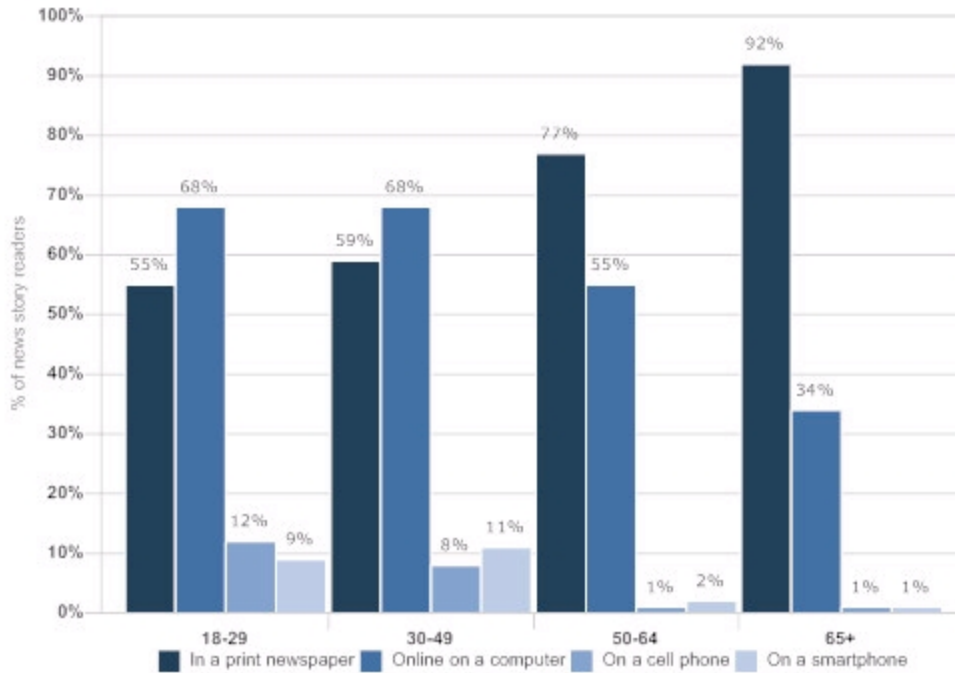
Put another way, more than half of those who read a story from a news organization on a typical day during the post-election period did so online on a computer or on a mobile device. This comes to 27% of *all* Americans (news readers and non-readers, internet users and non-users alike) who read digital content from a newspaper organization on a typical day.

In contrast to print news stories, video newscasts are still far more likely to be viewed on an actual television than on a computer or mobile device. Among the two-thirds of adults who watch a video newscast on a typical day, fully 97% do so on their television. By contrast, 28% of news-watching internet users watched a news story online on a computer. At the moment very few Americans are reaching for their cell phone or mobile device for video news, particularly compared with print news: Among cell phone owners who watched a video newscast the previous day, just 2% watched on a smartphone and just 1% did so on a cell phone.

In addition to relying more heavily on the internet as a source of election news, younger Americans stand out with respect to the devices they use to consume their news. In general, adults in different age groups are similarly likely to read a story from a newspaper organization on a typical day: 45% of 18-29 year olds, 51% 30-49 year olds, 57% of 50-64 year olds and 53% of those 65 and older do this. However, among this population of news consumers, those under age 50 are far more likely to eschew traditional print media and obtain their news online or using a mobile device.

Younger generations frequently turn to their computer or mobile device for news content

Among those who read a story from a news organization the previous day



Pew Internet and American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



While most age groups consume print news in relatively equal quantity, older adults (those age 50 and up) are far more reliant than are younger Americans on video news, and are much more likely than younger adults to watch a video news story in any format on a typical day. Seven in ten of those age 50-64 (71%) and three-quarters (75%) of those age 65 and up watch a news story or video newscast in any format on a typical day—these are both significantly greater than the 63% of 30-49 year olds and the 59% of 18-29 year olds who do this. Among this cohort who watches a newscast on a typical

day, the age group that is most likely to do so online is 30-49 year olds. More than one-third of online 30-49 year olds (35%) who watch a video newscast on a typical day do so online a computer, compared with one-quarter (25%) of 18-29 year olds, 22% of 50-64 year olds and 18% of those age 65 and older.

In other words, while young adults (those age 18-29) are voracious consumers of *certain types* of video content (see Part 1) they do not necessarily sit down to watch traditional video news stories in any location—whether online on their computer or on the television in their living room.

Online political users delved deeply into the long tail of political commentary in 2008.

In addition to using a range of devices for their election news, many political news consumers take full advantage of the range of content the internet has to offer. To be sure, the online presences of big network news organizations such as CNN are the single-most commonly visited genre of online news site, as 64% of online political users went to these sites during election season. Still, many political news consumers travel well beyond the major news sites in their quest for political information and analysis. Among online political users:

- 64% got news or information about the November elections from *network TV websites* such as *cnn.com*, *abcnews.com* or *msnbcnews.com*. Despite their relative lack of interest in video news, younger online political users flock to the online presences of mainstream video news outlets: 72% of 18-29 year olds, 69% of 30-49 year olds, 52% of those age 50-64 and 38% of online political users age 65 and up visit these sites for political news and information. Obama voters also make great use of these sites: 70% of Obama-supporting online political users do so, compared with 56% of McCain voters.
- 54% visited *portal news services* like Google news or Yahoo news. Two-thirds (66%)

of online political users under the age of 30 visit these sites for election news, as do 71% of Twitter users and 58% of Obama supporters. Mobile internet users also rely heavily on these sites.

- 43% visited the websites of *local news organizations*.
- 40% read *someone else's commentary* on the campaign on an online news group, website or blog, led by those under the age of 30 and social media aficionados.
- 34% visited the websites of *major national newspapers* such as USA Today, the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal. Men, college graduates and wireless internet users are especially interested in this type of news.
- 26% visited *blogs* that cover news, politics or the media. Democrats and users of other social media tools such as Twitter and social networking sites are particularly fond of reading blogs.
- 24% each visited *issue-oriented websites*; the website of a *state or local government*; or the website of an *international news organization*, such as the BBC. Online political users under the age of 30, college graduates, Obama voters and political independents frequently go online for an international perspective on the political news of the day.
- 21% each visited the *website of a radio news organization* like npr.org; or a *fact-checking site* such as snopes.com, factcheck.org or polifact.com. Democratic voters and political independents are especially likely to go online to visit the website of a radio organization.
- 19% visited news *satire websites* like The Onion or the Daily Show. More than one-quarter (27%) of online political users under the age of 30 visit these sites, although one in five 30-49 year olds (21%) do so as well. Republicans, on the other hand, stay away from these sites in droves—just one in ten Republican online political users visit news satire websites, compared with 26% of Democrats and 21% of independents.
- 12% visited the website of an *alternative news organization* such as altnet.org or newsmax.com. Men are twice as likely to visit these sites as women: 16% of male online political users has done so, compared with just 8% of women.

Online political news junkies don't just read a wide range of online news sources in the aggregate, many also visit a wide range of sources on an individual level as well. Among those who got election news from one or more of the thirteen specific sources listed above:

- 13% visited just one source
- 13% visited two sources
- 14% visited three sources
- 15% visited four sources
- 10% visited five sources
- 35% visited six or more sources

Put another way, 87% of political news consumers sought out multiple genres of online news over the course of the election. Men, young adults, those who are affiliated with the Democratic party and those with high levels of income and education tend to be the most intense online news consumers.


Demographic characteristics of online news consumers

Demographics of online news consumers based on number of news site genres visited. To read this chart: males make up 43% of those with low levels of online news consumption and 59% of those with high levels of online news consumption.

Online news consumption (# of online sources visited)	Low (1-2 different sources)	Medium (3-5 different sources)	High (6+ different sources)
% of online political news consumer population	26%	39%	25%
Gender			
Male	43	47	59 [^]
Female	57 [^]	53	41
Age			
18-24	5	9	12 [^]
25-34	12	16	16
35-44	17	18	21
45-54	25	28	25
55-64	20	18	18
65+	22 [^]	10	8
Race/Ethnicity			
White, non-Hispanic	84	83	82
Black, non-Hispanic	7	6	9
Hispanic (English-speaking)	6	7	6
Education			
Less than high school	2	2	1
High school grad	24	19	18
Some college	29	29	26
College grad	46	50	56 [^]
Annual household income			
Less than \$30,000	16 [^]	14	9
\$30,000-\$49,999	20	19	19
\$50,000-\$74,999	22	23	21
\$75,000 or more	42	45	50 [^]
Party affiliation			
Republican	36 [^]	35	24

Democrat	31	30	41 [^]
Independent	28	29	29

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. [^]Indicates statistically significant differences between low and high news consumption categories.



In addition to ranging far and wide for political content online, the most intense online news consumers also rely on a host of social media tools to help them find, comment on and share the news that they find online. Online political users who visit a wide range of different sources for political news are significantly more likely to: post their own political content online, use online social networking sites for political purposes, watch online political videos, customize their political news using RSS feeds and other tools, and share the information they find online with others.

Online news consumption and social media

The heaviest online news consumers are also most engaged in online social media tools

Online news consumption (# of online sources visited)	Low (1-2 different sources)	Medium (3-5 different sources)	High (6+ different sources)
Proportion of political news consumer population	26%	39%	35%
Social media activities			
Watch political videos	39	62	91
Share or forward election material with others	29	42	68
Customize political news	14	17	44
Engage politically on an online social network	13	24	38
Post content related to the elections	11	19	49

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Online news consumers are increasingly seeking out news sites with a partisan slant.

At the close of both the 2004 and 2008 elections we asked those who seek out online news whether they typically visit online news and information sites with a particular partisan “slant.” In 2004, 32% said that they usually go to sites that *don’t have a particular point of view*, while 26% said that they go to sites that *share their own point of view* and 21% said they went to sites that *challenge their point of view*.

Four years later, these figures have reversed. Today, one-third (33%) of online political users say that they usually go to sites that *share their own point of view*, while one-

quarter (25%) typically go to sites that *don't have a particular point of view*. The proportion of respondents who usually visit sites that challenge their existing viewpoint (21%) remained unchanged over this period.⁶

This increase is driven in large part by partisans on both sides of the political spectrum. The percentage of Republicans who say they usually visit sites that share their point of view has grown from 26% in 2004 to 35% in 2008, while the percentage of Democrats who say this has grown from 34% to 44% over the same period of time. Responses among political independents to this question were nearly unchanged between 2004 (19%) and 2008 (22%).

However, the most notable change occurred among the youngest cohort of online news consumers. The percentage of online political users age 18-24 who typically seek out sites that share their point of view has grown from just 22% in 2004 to 43% in 2008, a nineteen percentage point increase.

Changes in online news seeking habits, 2004-2008

The % who usually seek out political information online from sites that share their point of view

	2004	2008	Change
All online political users	26%	33%	+7%
Age			
18-24	22	43	+21
25-34	24	27	+3
35-44	28	28	0
45-54	30	35	+5
55-64	31	39	+8
65+	28	28	0
Education			
High school grad	27	29	+2
Some college	22	35	+13
College grad	30	36	+6
Annual household income			
Less than \$30,000	23	33	+10
\$30,000-\$49,999	31	38	+7
\$50,000-\$74,999	28	35	+7
\$75,000 or more	27	32	+5
Partisan affiliation			
Democrat	34	44	+10
Republican	26	35	+9
Independent	19	22	+3

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project post-election surveys.



As online political users take part more intensively in the online political process, or delve

more deeply into the long tail on online political news content, they increasingly seek out sites with an overtly partisan point of view at the expense of sites that profess to be neutral. For instance, those who visit a wide range of online news sources are far more likely than those who visit a narrow range of news sources to say that they generally visit sites that share their point of view, and slightly more likely to visit sites that challenge their point of view. By contrast, less intense online news consumers are much more likely to look for news that is unbiased or does not have a political point of view.

Searching for news with a point of view

% of online political users (the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet for political purposes in 2008) who typically visit political news sites that

	Share my point of view	Challenge my point of view	Do not have a particular point of view
All online political users	33%	21%	25%
Number of online political news sources			
Low (1-2)	27	20	31
Medium (3-5)	34	23	30
High (6+)	43	26	18
Engagement in political activities			
Low (1-2)	27	23	28
Medium (3-5)	39	22	25
High (6+)	54	27	12

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Categories based on number of online news sources visited, or number of online political activities participated in. For example, those with low levels of online news consumption visited 1-2 sources of online news this election period.



While the presidential campaign was at the center of the online action, other races were popular as well.

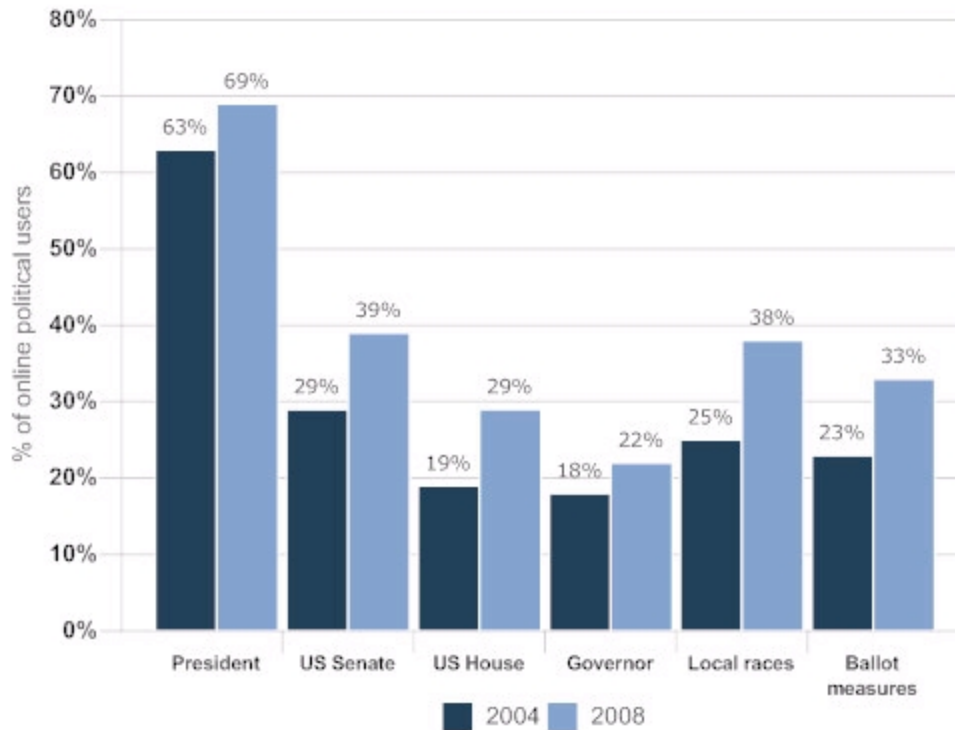
Considering the high levels of interest in the presidential election this year, it is not surprising that more people sought out information about that race than about any other type of election or campaign. Yet while nearly seven in ten (69%) online political users went online for information about the race for President, other types of races drew political junkies online as well. Among online political users:

- 39% went online for information about races of U.S. Senate
- 38% did so for information about local races
- 33% went online for information about ballot measures or initiatives
- 29% got information about U.S. House races
- 22% did so for information about a gubernatorial contest

Online political users expressed a greater interest in all aspects of the election this year, as a significantly greater percentage of online political users went online to get information about each of the different races this year compared with 2004. This includes a ten percentage point increase in the number of online political users going online for information about ballot measures and races for US House and Senate, as well as a thirteen percentage point increase in the use of the internet for information about local ballot measures and initiatives.

Campaign information seeking online, 2004-2008

The types of races online political users look up online; online political users represented 37% of internet users in 2004 and 74% of internet users in 2008.



Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election surveys. Margin of error is +/-4% based on online political users in 2004 (n=937) and +/-3% based on online political users in 2008 (n=1,186).



NOTES

⁵ At the time this survey was conducted, 56% of all adults reported having a high-speed broadband connection at home.

⁶ Our 2006 post-election survey showed a two-point increase (from 26% to 28%) in the percentage of online political users saying that they usually went to sites that shared their point of view. However, this increase was within the margin of error for that survey. Our findings for 2008 show a statistically significant difference relative to both 2004 and 2006.

The Partisan Story Online

Democratic voters are less likely to go online and to be online political users than Republicans, but the Democrats who engage in the online political process do so more intensely than their GOP counterparts.

Despite the great success Democrats had in using the internet this election cycle, Republicans as a whole (68%) are actually more likely to be online political users than Democrats (53%) or Independents (56%). This is largely a function of partisan differences among internet users as a whole: 84% of Republicans go online compared with 71% of Democrats. Republicans are more likely to be socio-economically upscale, which is also the case with internet users. And groups with relatively low rates of internet usage such as African-Americans and low-income voters tend to vote disproportionately Democratic. Among internet users, 79% of Republicans and 73% of Democrats are online political users, a much smaller difference than is present in the population as a whole (although still statistically significant).

Moreover, because there are currently more Democrats than Republicans in the overall population, Democratic voters actually make up a slightly larger percentage of the online political user population—Democrats comprise 36% of the overall population and 34% of online political users, while Republicans comprise 25% of the population and 30% of online political users.

These partisan differences are less pronounced when comparing McCain voters with Obama voters, rather than Republicans with Democrats. Among all voters, 68% of McCain supporters and 61% of Obama supporters are online political users. However, online political engagement among wired supporters of each candidate is nearly identical—80% of online Obama voters and 81% of online McCain supporters are online

political users. This divergence between party analysis and voting analysis appears to arise at least partially from the fact that the independent voters who go online were more likely to vote for Obama/Biden ticket in the fall, while those who do not go online were relatively more likely to vote for the McCain/Palin ticket.

Even though Republican voters are generally more likely than Democratic voters to be online political users, Democrats who get involved online tend to do so more intensely than their Republican counterparts. Just as a reminder, our online political user definition contains three separate components:

- Going online for political news and information
- Communicating with others about politics on the internet
- Using specific tools such as email, text messaging, IM or Twitter to interact with other voters or the campaigns themselves

Within the cohort of online political users, Democrats and Obama voters tend to engage in a wider range of activities than Republicans or McCain voters. Among online political users fully 50% of Democrats do all three of the above activities compared with 40% of Republicans. Similarly, 48% of Obama voters who get engaged politically online do all three kinds of online political activities, compared with 41% of McCain supporters.

This greater intensity among Obama-supporting online political users arises from partisan differences in the use of email and text messaging. Online Obama voters and wired McCain supporters are equally likely to go online for political news and information (66% of Obama voters and 65% of McCain voters did this) and to communicate with others about politics or the election online (45% vs. 44%). However, Obama voters are significantly more likely to use text messaging and email for political purposes:

- 48% of Obama voters who use email received email from a campaign or political party this election season, compared with 38% of email-using McCain voters.

- Among those who use cell phone text messaging, 17% of Obama supporters and 7% of McCain supporters got text messages directly from a candidate or party.
- Also among text messaging users, 49% of Obama voters shared text messages related to the campaign with others; 29% of McCain voters did so.

Supporters of the two campaigns were equally likely to communicate about politics using instant messaging. The small number of Twitter users in our sample showed a tilt towards Obama, but the number of respondents was too small to make meaningful partisan comparisons on this topic.

With respect to their sources for political news, Democrats are somewhat more likely to rely on television news, while Republicans are somewhat more likely to rely on the internet and radio. Partisans of all stripes tend to watch similar television news content, with two major exceptions. CNN is particularly popular with Democrats and independents (38% of Democrats, 31% of independents and 16% of Republicans cite CNN as a major source of television news), while Fox News Channel is most popular with Republicans (43% of Republicans, 27% of independents and 13% of Democrats watch Fox News).

Sources of Political News for Democrats and Republicans

How have you been getting most of your news about the November elections?

	Republicans	Democrats
Television	72%	82%^
CNN cable news	16	38^
Fox News cable channel	43^	13
Local news programming	19	20
ABC network news	14	18
NBC network news	14	15
CBS network news	10	12
MSNBC cable news	8	12
CNBC cable news	5	2
Newspapers	27	30
Radio	21^	11
Magazines	1	3
Internet	30^	23

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. ^Indicates statistically significant difference between Democrats and Republicans.



Obama voters are out in front on a host of online political activities.

Among internet users, Obama voters outpaced McCain supporters in their use of the internet to customize political content, to share campaign news with others and to facilitate their participation in campaign activities such as volunteering and donating money. Wired Obama voters were nearly twice as likely to sign up online for election

alerts (18% did this, compared with 9% of online McCain supporters), to contribute money online (15% vs. 6%) and to sign up for campaign-related volunteer activities online (11% vs. 4%). Obama voters also took the lead in setting up custom political news alerts (12% vs. 8%) and in sharing multimedia content with others (21% vs. 16%).

Obama voters lead in online activism

The % of internet users within each group who do the following online activities

	Online Obama voters	Online McCain voters
	%	%
Obama voters more likely to:		
Share photos, videos or audio files online related to the campaign or election	21 [^]	16
Sign up online to receive updates about the campaign or the election	18 [^]	9
Contribute money online to a candidate	15 [^]	6
Set up news alerts to get political or campaign information emailed to you	12 [^]	8
Sign up online for volunteer activities related to the campaign	11 [^]	4
Obama and McCain voters equally likely to:		
Look for more information online about candidates' positions or voting records	51	45
Watch video online from a campaign or news organization	44	39
Watch video online that did not come from a campaign or news organization	39	35
Forward someone else's political commentary or writing to others	32	34
Forward someone else's political audio or video recordings to others	23	22
Customize a web page to display new political or campaign information	5	5
Subscribe to receive campaign or political information through an RSS feed	5	3

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-4% based on online Obama voters (n=637) and +/-4% based on online McCain voters (n=579).
[^]Indicates statistically significant difference between Obama and McCain voters.



Obama voters also led the way in creating their own online political content. One-

quarter (26%) of online Obama voters posted their thoughts about the election on a blog, listserv, social networking site or other website, compared with 15% of McCain supporters.

Political content creation is dominated by Obama supporters

The % of internet users within each group who posted comments, queries or information about the campaign in the following places online

	Online Obama voters	Online McCain voters
In an online discussion, a listserv or other online group forum	11%	8%
On a blog (your own or someone else's)	11 [^]	7
On a social networking site	16 [^]	8
On a website of any kind, such as a political, campaign or news site that allows comments and discussion	13 [^]	9
Any of these	26[^]	15

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-4% based on online Obama voters (n=637) and +/-4% based on online McCain voters (n=579).
[^]Indicates statistically significant difference between Obama and McCain voters.



Among the subset of voters who use online social networking sites, McCain and Obama supporters use these sites quite similarly. Among users of these sites, there are no statistically significant partisan differences on any of the following measures:

- Getting candidate or campaign information (27% of SNS-using Obama supporters and 26% of SNS-using McCain supporters did this)
- Starting or joining a political group or cause (18% each)
- Revealing their own vote for president (33% vs. 30%)
- Discovering who their friends voted for (43% vs. 47%)
- Signing up as a friend of a candidate (17% vs. 11%)

However, Democrats and Obama supporters are more likely than Republicans and

McCain voters to use social networking sites in the first place (41% of online Democrats and 33% of online Republicans do this, as do 44% of online Obama voters and 29% of online McCain voters), largely because young adults are disproportionately Obama supporters. As a result, Obama voters tend to be more politically active on social networking sites when viewed as a whole—25% of online Obama voters got involved politically on an online social network, compared with 16% of online McCain voters.

Visits to both Democratic and Republican presidential campaign websites were up notably compared to 2004, and voters received email from numerous public officials over the course of the campaign.

Compared with the previous presidential election, voters in 2008 showed significantly greater interest in visiting the websites of the two major candidates for office. Fully 30% of all internet users visited the Obama/Biden campaign website (up from the 18% of wired adults who visited the Kerry/Edwards website in 2004) and 21% of internet users visited the McCain/Palin site (compared with the 14% who visited the Bush/Cheney site in the previous election cycle). Nearly half (45%) of online Obama voters and one-third (32%) of online McCain voters visited the website of their “team” for news or information during the campaign.

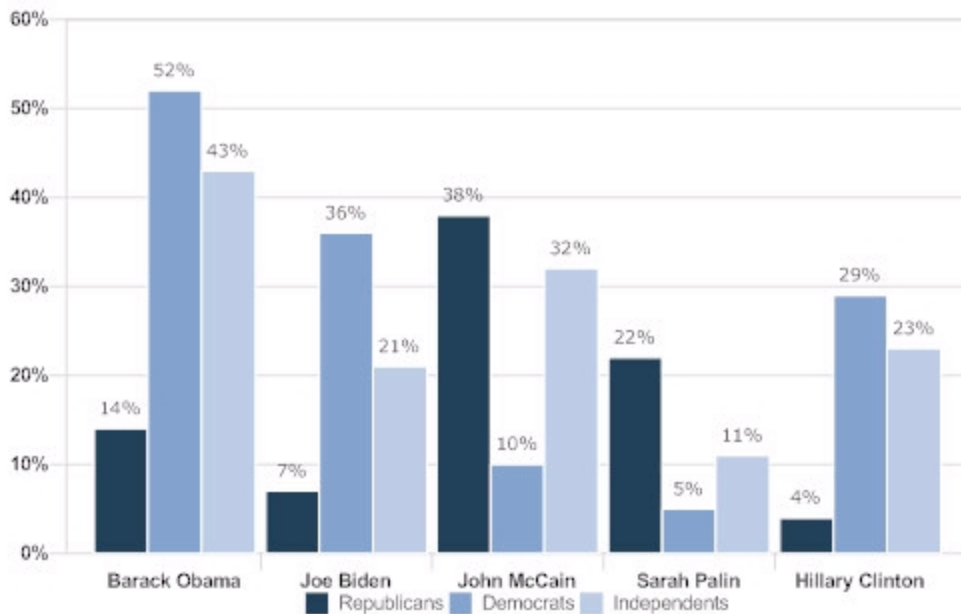
In addition to visiting the web presences of the respective candidates, voters also received a range of direct email communications from the different candidates in the race. As noted earlier, 37% of all email users got email messages from a candidate or campaign over the course of the election and those emails frequently contained the byline of the Democratic presidential ticket—among those who received political emails, 37% received messages signed by Barack Obama and 22% received messages signed by Joe Biden. By contrast, among this group 24% got email signed by John McCain and 12% got email signed by Sarah Palin. Indeed, emails from Hillary Clinton were nearly as common as those from the McCain/Palin ticket—one in five email users who received email from a

candidate (19%) got a message from Hillary Clinton over the course of the campaign.

A comparison of the candidate emails received by different partisan groups tells a similar story. Half of all Democrats who received email from a candidate (52%) over the course of the election received a message from Barack Obama, as did 43% of independents. Meanwhile on the Republican side, 38% of email-receiving GOP voters got an email signed by John McCain—put another way, nearly as many Democrats heard from Vice Presidential candidate Joe Biden (36% did so) as did GOP voters from the man at the head of their ticket.

Voters received email from a wide range of politicians in 2008

The proportion of email users who received email from the different candidates for office (among individuals who received email from a candidate or political party)



Pew Internet and American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Technology on Voting Day

Introduction

In recent years, a wide range of groups—from state and local governments to voting advocacy organizations to campaigns and parties themselves—have placed an emphasis on making it easier for people to register and vote. Prospective voters in 2008 were offered an array of channels for determining whether or not they were registered, finding out when and how to register for elections in their state, and for locating the proper polling place to cast their ballot on Election Day. Whether a voter spent most of her time on MySpace, Google Maps or barackobama.com (to name just a few of the many sites offering these services), she was likely able to access voting and registration information online.

At least in part due to the success of these efforts this year's voting period was marked by high turnout and long lines at many polling locations, and both the media (much of the early coverage on November 2 featured overhead shots of voters queuing down the block at various voting stations) and individual voters were eager to share their experiences on voting day. This communication took place in numerous ways—via in-person conversations, telephone calls or text messaging, and through online discussions over email, social networking sites, blogs or status update services.

In the final part of this report, we examine the role of technology in the voting process itself.

One-quarter of wired voters went online for voting information prior to casting their ballot in the 2008 election.

Many Americans turned to the internet this year for information and assistance in the

weeks leading up to voting day. In total, 26% of all internet users who voted in the 2008 election went online for help with the voting process. Among voters who use the internet:

- 18% went online to find out where they were supposed to vote
- 16% went online for information about absentee or early voting
- 9% went online to find out if they were registered to vote

In addition to going online prior to voting day to make sure they were registered and to get information on the logistics of voting, an additional 5% of wired voters went online to find out what people in their area were saying about possibly long lines at their polling location.

First-time voters were especially proactive in going online to ensure that they were registered and aware of the location of their polling place. Fully 30% of wired first time voters went online to find out where they were supposed to vote (compared with 16% of internet users who had voted in the past) while 17% did so to find out whether or not they were registered to vote in this election (just 8% of other online voters did the same). Younger internet users (many of whom voted for the first time in 2008) were also much more likely than older adults to go online for information on voting day.

Preparing for Election Day Online

Among internet users who voted in 2008

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Go online to find out if you were registered to vote	16%	11%	5%	1%
Go online to find a place where you could go to vote	28	22	10	3
Go online for information about absentee or early voting	22	17	15	5
Go online to find out what others in your area were saying about possibly long lines where you were going to vote	9	5	5	1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



There is also some indication that exposure to the online political debate during the election campaign led to greater use of the internet for voting-related information. Compared with those who go online but do not use the internet for political reasons, online political users were much more likely to go online to find their voting location (22% did this, vs. 5% of non-political users); to look up information about early or absentee voting (20% vs. 2%); to find out if they were registered to vote at their current address (11% vs. 2%); and to look for information about long lines at their polling location on voting day (6% vs. 1%).

Voters shared their experiences at the polls in a number of ways, both online and offline.

Between the hotly contested nature of the election, extensive get-out-the-vote efforts by both parties and lengthy lines at many voting locations produced by high turnout,

Election Day in 2008 was clearly a time of great excitement on the part of voters, who rushed to share their Election Day stories with their friends and neighbors through a variety of channels. Chief among these was the time-honored tradition of simply walking up and talking to people: six in ten voters (59%) said that they shared their experiences casting a ballot by talking with others in person, while nearly half (45%) picked up the telephone to tell others about their trip to the voting booth.

Others used technology to share their experiences at the polls. One in five (19%) voters who use text messaging shared their experiences at the ballot box by text messaging their friends and family members; 15% of email users sent email about their day at the polls; and 14% of those who use social networking sites shared their experiences on these sites, as did 14% of Twitter users. In addition, 5% of voters who go online commented on someone else's blog about the experience and 3% chronicled their Election Day activities in their own personal blog.

As with many of the political activities discussed in this report, young adults were especially interested in discussing their experiences on voting day. This is true for all forms of communication including face-to-face and telephone interactions, but especially so for digital communications like text messaging and posting to social networking sites.

Many voters shared their experiences on election day with others. Young voters, in particular, did so using digital technologies.

The % of those who voted in 2008 who shared their experiences at the polls in the following ways

	All voters	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%
Talked in person to people	59	68	64	58	42
Talked on the telephone to people	45	57	49	44	31
Sent email	11	18	13	9	3
Sent text messages	8	23	10	--	**
Posted your experience on a social networking site	4	13	4	1	**
Wrote about your experience on a personal website or blog	2	8	2	1	--
Commented on someone else's website or blog	4	14	3	--	--

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008. **Sample size of SNS / text messaging users is too small to analyze.



Methodology

Methodology

Summary

This report is based on the findings of the Post-Election survey, a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between November 20 to December 4, 2008, among a sample of 2,254 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,591), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid “listing” bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each household

received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's March 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 1: Sample Disposition

26,690	Total Numbers Dialed
1,563	Non-residential
1,369	Computer/Fax
17	Cell phone
10,498	Other not working
1,842	Additional projected not working
11,401	Working numbers
42.70%	Working Rate
614	No Answer / Busy
961	Answering Machine / Voice Mail
122	Other Non-Contact
9,704	Contacted numbers
85.10%	Contact Rate
200	Callback
6,453	Refusal
3,051	Cooperating numbers
31.40%	Cooperation Rate
457	Language Barrier
2,594	Eligible numbers
85.00%	Eligibility Rate
340	Break-off
2,254	Completes
86.90%	Completion Rate
23.30%	Response Rate

PSRAI calculates a response rate as the product of three individual rates: the contact rate, the cooperation rate, and the completion rate. Of the residential numbers in the sample, 85 percent were contacted by an interviewer and 31 percent agreed to participate in the survey. Eighty-five percent were found eligible for the interview. Furthermore, 87 percent of eligible respondents completed the interview. Therefore, the

final response rate is 23 percent.