22% of online Americans used social networking or Twitter for politics in 2010 campaign

Republicans catch up to Democrats in social media use for politics

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http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Politics-and-social-media.aspx

Overview

Some 21% of online adults used social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace in the months leading up to the November, 2010 elections to connect to the campaign or the election itself, and 2% of online adults did so using Twitter. That works out to a total of 22% of adult internet users who engaged with the political campaign on Twitter or social networking sites in at least one of the following ways:

- 11% of online adults discovered on a social networking site who their friends voted for in the November elections
- 9% of online adults received candidate or campaign information on social networking sites or Twitter
- 8% of online adults posted political content on Twitter or a social networking site
- 7% of online adults friended a candidate or political group on a social networking site, or followed them on Twitter
- 7% of online adults started or joined a political group on a social networking site
- 1% of online adults used Twitter to follow the election results as they were happening

Republicans, who lagged behind Democrats in the 2008 campaign in some key aspects of social media use, caught up to Democrats in the midterm election cycle. The "political social media user" cohort represented by these 22% of internet users voted for Republican congressional candidates over Democratic candidates by a 45%-41% margin, and Republicans' enthusiasm for using social media matched that of Democrats. Among social networking site users, 40% of Republican voters and 38% of Democratic voters used these sites to get involved politically. Further, Tea Party supporters were especially likely to friend a candidate or political group on a social networking site during the 2010 election—22% of such users did this, significantly higher than all other groups.

Compared with the rest of the online population (i.e. those who go online but did not use Twitter or social networking sites for political purposes in 2010) the "political social media" user group differs in some respects from other internet users:

- **Political social media users stand out for their overall use of technology.** They are significantly more likely than other internet users to go online wirelessly from a cell phone or laptop (91% vs. 67%); own a laptop computer (79% vs. 63%); have a high-speed broadband connection (94% vs. 80%); and use the internet on their cell phone (61% vs. 40%).
- **Demographically, political social media users are younger and somewhat more educated than other internet users.** Two in five (42%) are under the age of 30 (vs. 22% for the rest of the online population) and 41% have a college degree (34% of other internet users have graduated from college). However, they look quite similar to the rest of the online population in their racial, gender and income composition.

How Twitter and social networking sites were used in the 2010 election

Three-quarters of US adults are internet users, and of these 61% use social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace and 8% use Twitter. As Americans increasingly use these sites to connect with public figures, find out about and respond to events in the news, and share their views on a range of topics, politicians and political groups on both ends of the ideological spectrum have begun using them to organize and communicate with their supporters and the public at large. In our 2010 post-election survey, the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project set out to evaluate the current state of political engagement on Twitter and social networking sites.

The results reported here are based on a national telephone survey of 2,257 adults conducted November 3-24, 2010. The survey included 755 interviews conducted on the respondent's cell phone, and interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. For results based on internet users, the margin of error is +/-3 percentage points. This is the first non-presidential election in which the Pew Internet project has conducted polling on the use of social networking sites for political purposes, and the first election of any kind in which we asked detailed questions about the use of Twitter for this purpose.

21% of online adults used social networking sites to engage with the 2010 elections

Six in ten online adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace, and one third (35%) of these social networking site users took to these sites during election season to get political information or to get involved in the campaign. Our definition of political use of social networking sites includes anyone who did one or more of the following activities on these sites in the months leading up to the 2010 elections:

- **Discover which candidates your friends voted for this year** – 18% of social networking site users did this (this represents 11% of all adult internet users)
- **Get candidate or campaign information** –14% of social networking site users (9% of all internet users) did this
- **Post content related to politics or the campaign** – 13% of social networking site users (8% of all internet users) posted their own content on these sites
- **Sign up as a friend of a candidate or group involved in the campaign**—11% of social networking site users (7% of all internet users) did this in 2010
- **Take part in political groups or causes** – 10% of social networking site users joined such a group, and 2% started their own group on these sites. This works out to 6% and 1% of internet users, respectively.

Taken together, that means that 35% of all social networking site users got involved politically on these sites during the 2010 elections. That works out to 21% of all adult internet users. Half of these political social networking users took part in one of the six activities we asked about in our survey, while the other half engaged in two or more activities.

Using social networking site for political purposes

% of social networking site users within each group who use these sites for political purposes in 2010*

All social networking site users	35%
Gender	
Men	38
Women	32
Age	
18-29	42
30-49	29
50+	33
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	35
Black, non-Hispanic	34
Hispanic	33
Household Income	
Less than $30,000	31
$30,000-$49,999	42
$50,000-$74,999	33
$75,000+	38
Education level	
High School Diploma or less	27
Some College	38
College+	39
Congressional vote	
Republican	40
Democrat	38
Did not vote	29

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. n=2,257 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=925 based on social networking site users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. *Using social networking sites for political purposes includes doing one or more of the following: getting candidate or campaign information; discovering which sites one's friends voted for; "friending" a candidate or political group; posting political content; and joining or starting a political group or cause

Young adults lead the way in their use of social networking sites for political reasons, but older users are active as well

Recent Pew Internet research indicates that adults over the age of 50 are one of the fastest-growing cohorts when it comes to using social networking sites, [1] and in 2010 older users took to these sites in relatively large numbers to get involved in the political debate. Fully 33% of social networking site users over the age of 50 used these sites during election season to get political news, post political content, get engaged with a candidate or cause, or discover who their friends voted for—that is only slightly less than the 42% of profile owners ages 18-29 who did so.

To be sure, young adults overall are much more likely than their elders to use social networking sites (three-quarters of 18-29 year olds use these sites, compared with one-quarter of those 50 and older), so the use of social networking sites for political purposes is more widespread within the young adult population. However, to the extent that people are users of social networking websites they are increasingly likely to use those sites for political purposes—regardless of their age.

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[1] See "Older Adults and Social Media", http:// pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx

Political use of social networking sites, by age
% within each group who used social networking sites for political purposes during the 2010 campaign
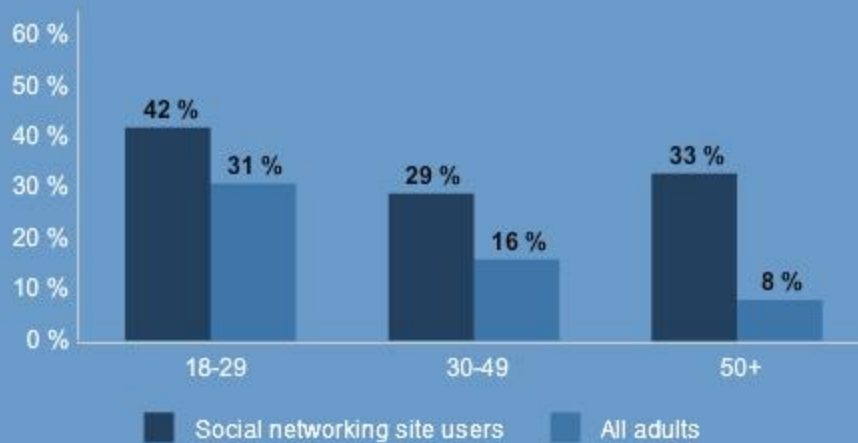
■ Social networking site users   ■ All adults

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=925 based on social networking site users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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Looking more deeply at the individual political social networking activities we measured, the main difference between young and old social network users pertains to using the sites to discover who one's friends voted for in the most recent election—social network users ages 18-29 were roughly twice as likely to do this as those ages 50 and older. This is most likely due to how many more young adults use social networking sites; the more of your friends are on these sites, the more likely you are to know someone who publicized who they voted for. Young social network users are also somewhat more likely than older users to post political content on these sites, although for the other activities in our survey there no major differences between young and old social networking site users.

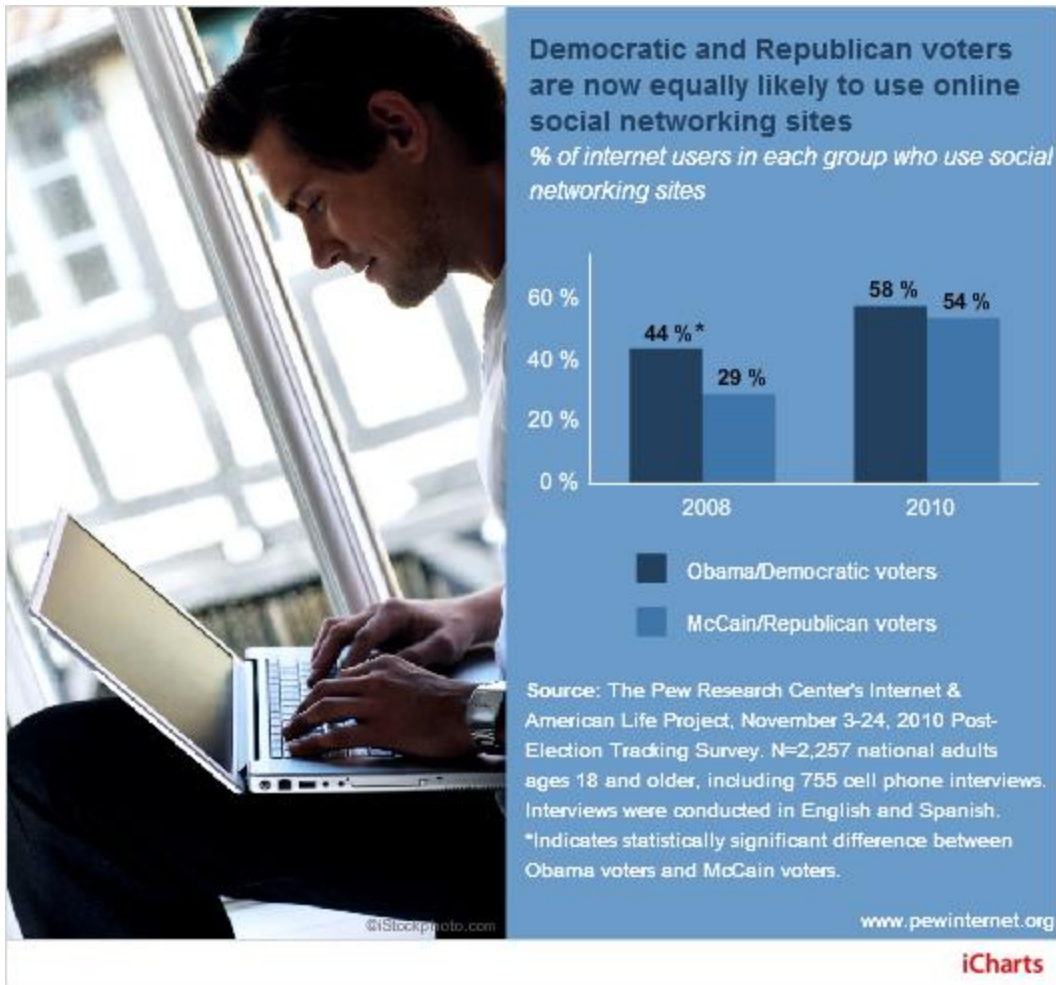## Political social networking activities by age group

% within each age group who…

	18-29	30-49	50+
Use a social networking site	74%	54%	24%
% of SNS users who used the sites to…			
Discover which candidates your friends voted for	23	17	12
Post political content	17	9	12
Get candidate or campaign info	16	11	18
Friend a candidate or cause	12	10	12
Join a political group/cause	12	9	10
Start a political group/cause	2	2	2

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=925 based on social networking site users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Voters of all political stripes were active using social networking sites in 2010

Overall, Democratic and Republican voters are equally likely to use social networking sites (among internet users, 58% of Democrats and 54% of Republicans do so). This is a notable change from the 2008 campaign, in which Obama voters were significantly more likely than McCain voters to use these sites, and reflects recent overall trends in social networking site adoption by older adults (who tend to lean Republican in their voting habits). Similarly, both supporters and detractors of the "Tea Party" movement each use these sites at roughly similar rates (54% of internet users who agree with the Tea Party movement and 60% of those who disagree with the group use these sites, a difference that is not statistically significant).

Democratic and Republican voters are now equally likely to use online social networking sites

% of internet users in each group who use social networking sites

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. *Indicates statistically significant difference between Obama voters and McCain voters.

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In addition to using social networking sites at similar rates, voters from both sides of the political aisle are equally likely (and more likely than non-voters) to use these sites for the purpose of engaging with the political process. Among social networking site users, 40% of Republican voters and 38% of Democratic voters used these sites to get involved politically, compared with 29% of non-voters.

The social networking activity with the biggest gap between voters (of any party) and non-voters relates to posting political content on online social networks. Among social network site users, 18% of Republican voters and 16% of Democratic voters did this, compared with 9% of those who did not vote in the 2010 elections.

Political social networking activities by 2010 vote

% within each group who…

2010 Congressional Vote	Republican	Democrat	Did not vote
Use a social networking site	43%	44%	49%
% of SNS users who used the sites to…			
Discover which candidates your friends voted for	19	21	14
Post political content	18	16	9
Get candidate or campaign info	19	15	13
Friend a candidate or cause	17	12	8
Join a political group/cause	13	11	7
Start a political group/cause	3	3	1

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=925 based on social networking site users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Similar splits in the use of social networking for political reasons between the politically active and the less engaged can be seen when we compare those who feel strongly one way or another about the Tea Party movement to those who either have no opinion of the movement or have not heard of it at all. Social networking site users with views (either positive or negative) about the Tea Party movement are significantly more likely than other social network users to have used these sites to take part in a range of political activities. Tea Party supporters were especially likely to friend a candidate or political group on a social networking site during the 2010 election—22% of such users did this, significantly higher than users with negative views about the tea parties, as well as those with no firm opinions either way.

Political social networking activities by Tea Party affiliation

% within each group who…

Opinion of Tea Party:	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Have not heard of
Use a social networking site	44%	48%	47%	41%
% of SNS users who used the sites to…				
Discover which candidates your friends voted for	23	24	15	11
Post political content	19	16	10	8
Get candidate or campaign info	23	16	9	10
Friend a candidate or cause	22	13	8	4
Join a political group/cause	18	15	8	1
Start a political group/cause	2	2	2	2

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=925 based on social networking site users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.
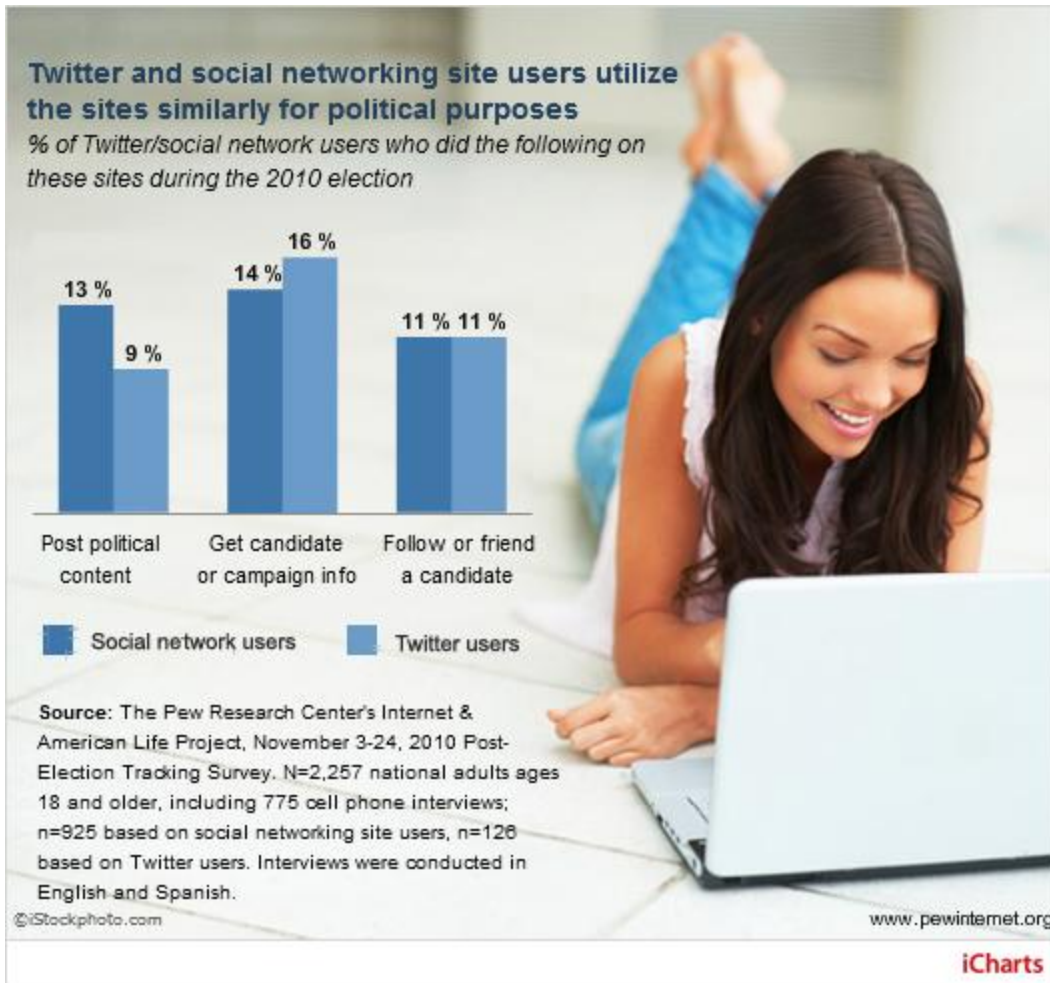
2% of online adults used Twitter for political purposes in 2010

In addition to measuring political engagement on social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace, we also used our post-election survey to measure political engagement among the 8% of online adults who use Twitter.[2] Among Twitter users:

- 16% used Twitter to get information about the campaign or candidates
- 12% used Twitter to monitor the election results as they occurred
- 11% followed a candidate or other political group
- 9% posted links to political content on their account

Taken together, that means that 28% of Twitter users (representing 2% of the adult internet user population) used the site to engage with the 2010 election in one way or another. We did not ask the same set of political activity follow-up questions of Twitter and social networking site users—for example, questions about discovering who your friends voted for and joining or starting political causes were only asked of social networking site users. However, comparing similar activities side by side, social networking site users and Twitter users utilized these sites in similar ways during the campaign.

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[2] Due to the relatively small number of Twitter users in our sample (n=126) we are unable to provide detailed demographic comparisons for political activities on Twitter.
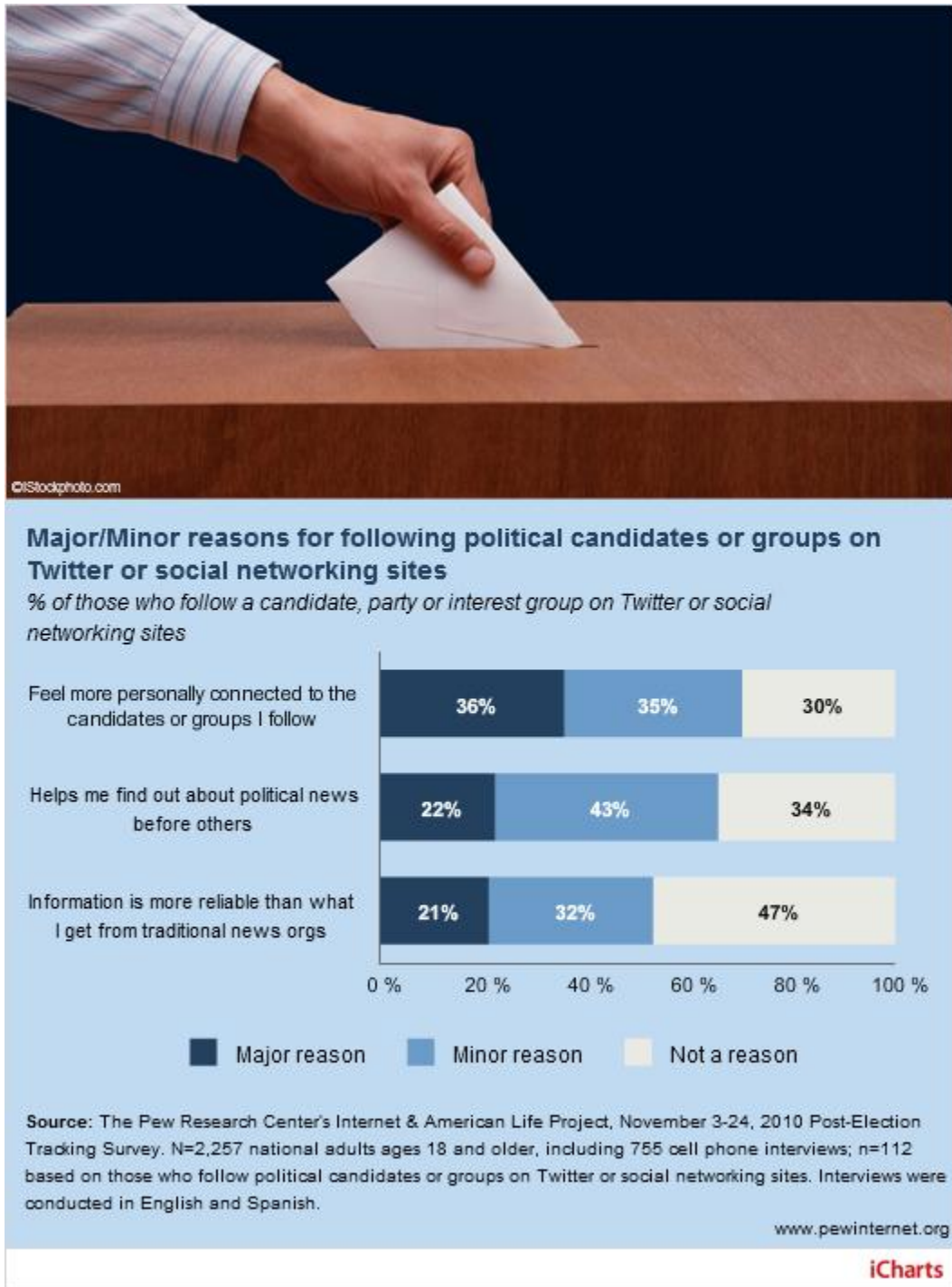
Twitter and social networking site users utilize the sites similarly for political purposes
% of Twitter/social network users who did the following on these sites during the 2010 election

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 775 cell phone interviews; n=925 based on social networking site users, n=126 based on Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.
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Why do voters follow candidates on social networking sites or Twitter?

One in ten social networking site users (11%) and a similar proportion of Twitter users (11%) followed or "friended" a candidate for office or other political group involved in the 2010 election—that works out to 7% of all internet users. In our post-election survey, we asked these "political friends and followers" a series of follow-up questions that probed more deeply on their reasons for following politicians and political groups on Twitter and social networking sites. Specifically, we presented three statements and asked whether they represented a "major reason," a "minor reason," or "not a reason" why they choose to follow political candidates or groups.

The main reason our survey respondents gave for following political groups on social networking sites or Twitter is that doing so helps them feel more personally connected to the candidates or groups they follow—36% said that this was a "major" reason they followed these groups or candidates, and an additional 35% said it was a "minor" reason. They responded less strongly to the statement that following these candidates helps them find out about political news before other people do—one in five (22%) said this is a "major" reason why they follow or friend political candidates or groups, with 43% saying it is a "minor" reason. Relatively few of our respondents say that they follow political groups

through social media because the information is more reliable than what they can get from traditional news organizations—while 21% said that this was a "major" reason they do this, fully half (47%) said it was not a reason at all.

Major/Minor reasons for following political candidates or groups on Twitter or social networking sites

% of those who follow a candidate, party or interest group on Twitter or social networking sites

	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason
Feel more personally connected to the candidates or groups I follow	36%	35%	30%
Helps me find out about political news before others	22%	43%	34%
Information is more reliable than what I get from traditional news orgs	21%	32%	47%

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=112 based on those who follow political candidates or groups on Twitter or social networking sites. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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Generally speaking, followers of candidates or campaigns find the information posted on these sites relevant and useful. Two-thirds (67%) of those who follow politicians or other political groups on social

networking sites or Twitter say that the information posted by those they follow is interesting and relevant, compared with 32% who feel that mostly uninteresting and irrelevant. Additionally, a total of two-thirds of these individuals say that they pay attention to most (26%) or some (40%) of the material posted by the politicians or groups they follow—24% say that they pay attention to only a little of it, and a one in ten (9%) say that they don't pay attention to any of this material.

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of 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 from November 3-24, 2010, among a sample of 2,257 adults, age 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,628), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.8 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.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

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 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. 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 number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, half of the time interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult male currently at home. If no male was at home at the time of the call, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult female. For the other half of the contacts interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult female currently at home. If no female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male at home. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced by form to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2009 National Health Interview Survey.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 1:Sample Disposition

Landline	Cell	
29342	14599	Total Numbers Dialed
1391	310	Non-residential
1454	38	Computer/Fax
15	0	Cell phone
13307	5782	Other not working
1648	175	Additional projected not working
11527	8294	Working numbers
39.3%	56.8%	Working Rate
549	58	No Answer / Busy
2578	2370	Voice Mail
90	14	Other Non-Contact
8310	5852	Contacted numbers
72.1%	70.6%	Contact Rate
482	751	Callback
6213	3817	Refusal
1615	1284	Cooperating numbers
19.4%	21.9%	Cooperation Rate
75	44	Language Barrier
0	462	Child's cell phone
1540	778	Eligible numbers
95.4%	60.6%	Eligibility Rate
38	23	Break-off
1502	755	Completes
97.5%	97.0%	Completion Rate
13.7%	15.0%	Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- **Contact rate** – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- **Cooperation rate** – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- **Completion rate** – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 13.7 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 15.0 percent.

Q20   Thinking about what you may have done on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace related to the November elections, did you happen to... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]?[3]

Based on SNS users

		YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a.	Get any campaign or candidate information on social networking sites[4]				
	Current [N=925]	14	85	*	0
	November 2008 [N=440]	23	77	1	0
	May 2008 [N=409]	22	78	*	--
	Pew January 2008[5][6] [N=253]	33	68	0	--
b.	Discover on a social networking site which candidates your friends voted for this year[7]				
	Current	18	82	1	0
	November 2008	41	58	*	0

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[3] For November 2008 and May 2008, question wording was: "Thinking about what you have done on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, have you… [INSERT ITEM; ROTATE]?"

[4] For November 2008 and May 2008, item wording was: "Gotten any campaign or candidate information on the sites"

[5] Dec 2007/Jan 2008 trends based on the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press "Political Communications" survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, conducted Dec. 19, 2007 – Jan. 2, 2008 [N=1,430].

[6] For Pew Research Center's January 2008 trend, item was not asked as part of a series. Question wording was: "Have you gotten any campaign or candidate information on social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace, or not?"

[7] For November 2008, item wording was: "Discovered on the sites which Presidential candidate your friends voted for this year"

c.	Sign up on a social networking site as a "friend" of a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group[8]				
	Current	11	89	*	0
	November 2008	12	88	*	0
	May 2008	10	90	*	--
	Pew January 2008	12	88	0	--
d.	Post content related to politics or the campaign on a social networking site				
	Current	13	87	*	0
e.	JOIN a political group, or group supporting a cause on a social networking site				
	Current	10	90	*	*
f.	START a political group, or group supporting a political cause on a social networking site				
	Current	2	98	0	0

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[8] For November 2008 and May 2008, item wording was: "Signed up as a "friend" of any candidates on a social networking site". For Pew Research Center's January 2008 trend, item was not asked as part of a series; question wording was: "Have you signed up as a 'friend' of any candidates on a social networking site, or not?"

Q21	Thinking about what you may have done on Twitter related to the November elections, did you happen to... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE], or not?

Based on Twitter users [N=126]

		YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a.	Get any campaign or candidate information on Twitter	16	84	0	0
b.	Follow a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group on Twitter	11	89	0	0
c.	Include links to political content in your tweets	9	91	0	0
d.	Use Twitter to follow the election results as they were happening	12	88	*	0

Q22	People follow candidates or other political organizations on Twitter or social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook for a number of reasons. Please tell me if each of the following is a MAJOR reason why you follow political candidates or organizations on Twitter or social networking sites, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all for you. [INSERT; RANDOMIZE]... is this a MAJOR reason why you follow political candidates or organizations on Twitter or social networking sites, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all for you?

Based on those who follow a candidate, party or interest group on SNS or Twitter [N=112]

		MAJOR REASON	MINOR REASON	NOT A REASON	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a.	It helps me find out about political news before other people do.	22	43	34	*	0
b.	I feel more personally connected to the political candidates or groups that I follow.	36	35	30	0	0
c.	The information I get on these sites is more reliable than the information I get from traditional news organizations.	21	32	47	0	0

Q22d	Thinking about the information that is posted to Twitter or social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook by the political candidates or groups you follow, would you say that most of it is interesting and relevant to you, or is most of it irrelevant and uninteresting?

Based on those who follow a candidate, party or interest group on SNS or Twitter [N=112]

	CURRENT	
%	67	Mostly interesting and relevant
	32	Mostly uninteresting and irrelevant
	2	Don't know
	0	Refused

Q22e Thinking about the information posted on Twitter and social networking sites by the political candidates or groups you follow, would you say you pay attention to most of it, some of it, only a little of it, or none of it?

Based on those who follow a candidate, party or interest group on SNS or Twitter [N=112]

	CURRENT	
%	26	Most of it
	40	Some of it
	24	Only a little of it
	9	None of it
	0	Don't know
	1	Refused