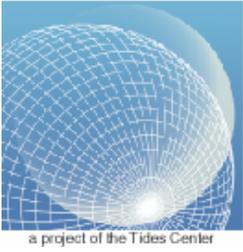


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UNTUNED KEYBOARDS
*ONLINE CAMPAIGNERS, CITIZENS,
AND PORTALS IN THE 2002 ELECTIONS*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Campaigners have always tried to reach voters in order to win elections. Citizens have always tried to read campaigns in order to vote their interests. The Internet seems to offer a great two-way conduit for campaigners and citizens, with plenty of room for third parties to provide context and commentary as well. Some are making good on the vision of a lively online political discourse pegged to elections. But at the milestone of the 2002 midterm elections, the evidence shows that political cyberspace was populated mostly by tentative campaigners and wandering citizens. The major portals of Web traffic played a late, mild, yet remarkably sophisticated role in the proceedings.

This report examines the phenomenon of online politics from three contemporaneous perspectives. It presents data compiled in October and November 2002 through a survey of American adults, a questionnaire answered by managers and communications directors for campaigns in closely contested races, and a content analysis of campaign information as it appeared on three major Internet portal home pages: AOL, MSN, and Yahoo. The report also draws on a content analysis of 102 candidate Web sites, and IPDI's monitoring of the 2002 online campaigns on a daily basis for new and newsworthy developments. This report also includes an appendix with in-depth empirical analysis of how going online for political information in 2002 impacted voting behavior as well as a typology of online political information seekers.

No one should expect campaigners, citizens, and portals to communicate harmoniously about elections. Politics is too contentious for that, reflecting the turbulence of capitalism and divisions in society. Still, each of these groups of participants in online politics exhibited frustrations with what they aspired to do. They sat at their respective keyboards, and struck sour notes.

Candidates in closely contested races:

- Succeeded in using the Internet to conduct political research and communicate with the press, but declined to place online advertisements and failed to coordinate online activities with the national parties.
- Missed an opportunity to build public confidence about the role of money in their campaigns by leaving it to others to package their financial disclosure data.
- Larded their Web pages with news releases and endorsement lists, but didn't include much from and about ordinary citizens. The online citizenry returned the favor by forwarding campaign email less often than jokes about the campaigns.

Online citizens, that is, Internet users who got political news and information online:

- Swelled from 33 million to 46 million Americans between the summer of 2000 and November, 2002 –a remarkable 39% increase at a time of declining growth in the overall Internet population and plummeting finances in the dot-com world.

- Prized research as highly as campaigners, but did not find the information they were looking for (generally, details that reinforced their voting inclinations) as often as online searchers for health and government information.
- Enjoy participating in online polls and swapping e-mail jokes about the campaigns and elections.

The big Internet portals (AOL, MSN, Yahoo!):

- Have the capacity to serve as gatekeepers of political information, facilitators of political research, and matchmakers for people with similar political interests and views –and played those roles in descending order.
- Developed extensive sets of directories and tools for campaign and election activity, but did not promote them very much.

The report concludes with a list of concrete steps that campaigners, citizens, and portals could take in 2004. These include:

- Exhibiting grass-roots support in the course of cultivating more.
- Last-minute and real-time GOTV (Get Out The Vote) operations, openly coordinated among candidates, parties, and groups.
- Searchable databases that make a case by allowing individual Web users to see how a policy affects them.
- Humor and blogs (a form of online diary) to create buzz about a campaign.

The surveys also highlight two major developments in online politics: The first is the importance of email as a tool of political communication. Two-thirds of politically engaged Internet users during the 2002 election cycle (66% of them) sent or received email related to the campaign. Second, the surveys document the rise of interest group and non-partisan sites as sources of political information and mobilization. Almost three-quarters of the Internet users who went online for political news and information in 2002 (73% of them) were drawn to interest group Web sites as they gathered material to help them make voting decisions.

To the extent these forms of online communication proliferate, the Internet will mature as an instrument of democratic politics in America.

PART ONE: The Online Campaigners

Message in a Bottle

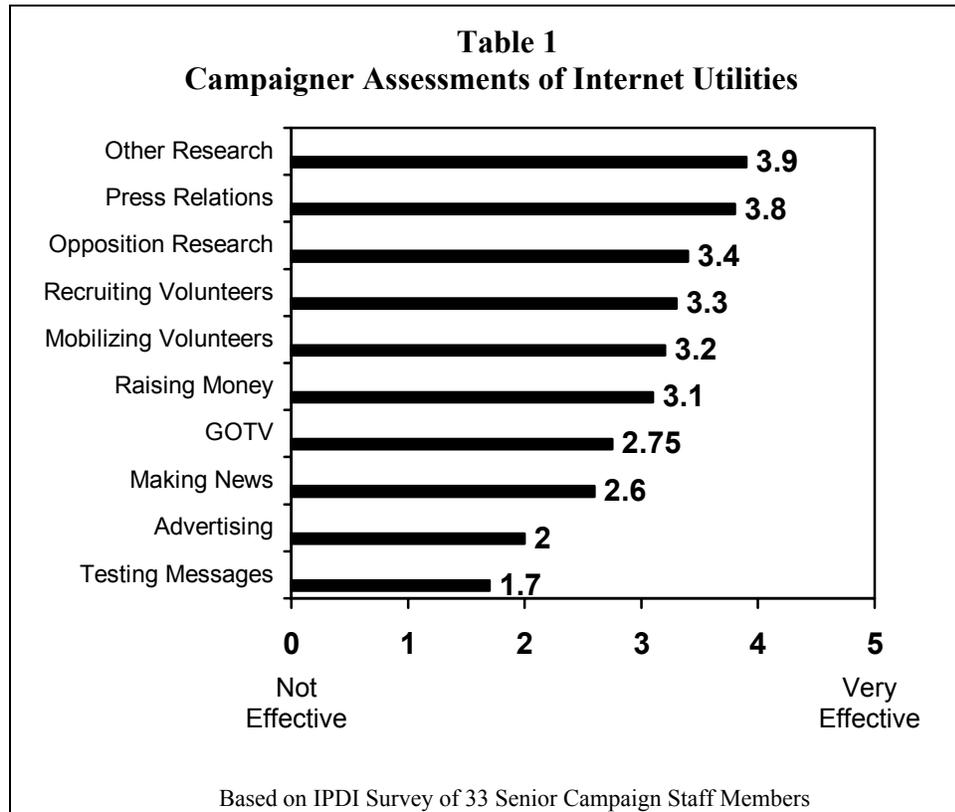
In the two weeks following the 2002 general election, the Institute for Politics, Democracy, & the Internet conducted interviews with campaign staff from 33 of the most hotly contested races for governor, U.S. Senator, and U.S. Representative. We wanted to learn about the Internet's utility as a campaign tool from campaign professionals with areas of responsibility beyond the Internet. Our respondents consisted primarily of campaign managers, communication directors, and their deputies. We also conducted seven supplemental interviews with campaign Web masters.

Our interview subjects worked under intense pressure in a shifting, often opaque, and always ambiguous information environment. It was their job to obtain and deploy campaign personnel, messages, and money with increasing speed and power until Election Day. "Momentum" is a common term in the campaign world for a good reason: in campaigns, as in physics, force equals mass (of supporters) times acceleration (of visible messages, which cost money). The brief history of online politics is highlighted by campaigns—Jesse Ventura, Moveon.org, John McCain, Roh Moo-Hyun (in South Korea)—which used the Internet to go into turbo drive. Could others repeat their success? Who tried, how well, to what result?

The 2002 hot races that we looked at lacked the charismatic personalities, first-time news appeal, and historical dimensions of the three online campaigns just mentioned. Nevertheless, our races took place on a bigger stage than their state and district jurisdictions suggest. Because control of the House and Senate hung in the balance, these tight contests attracted the attention and involvement of the White House, national political parties, PACs, political journalists, and active citizens everywhere. The Internet facilitated the nationalization of these races. It made it a snap (or click) to keep track of dozens of election contests across the country, and, if one was so inclined, to donate money to a handful of them at the right moments. We sought to learn who among our subjects took advantage of the citizens' new capability, and multiplied the force of their campaigns by infusing them with online national resources.

What Worked and What Didn't in Online Campaigning

The heart of our November 2002 survey was a series of ten questions about the effectiveness of the Internet in facilitating key campaign functions. We asked campaigners to rate Internet effectiveness by function on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not effective and 5 is very effective. The results appear in Table 1.



Our campaign professionals found the Internet most effective for conducting research and communicating with the press. These results were not a surprise. Most professionals in all walks of life now head to the Web for research, and rely on e-mail for day-to-day communications. Last year, an IPDI study of political journalists found, for example, that even Net novices rely on it for news releases and campaign finance information.¹

At the other end of the scale, the Internet functions that garnered the poorest ratings were advertising and message testing. We were somewhat surprised at the low aggregate rating, and low number of responses, regarding online advertising. Despite the concerted efforts of online media outlets and advertising agencies, online campaign advertising appears to be stuck in neutral. We can identify several factors inhibiting campaigners from placing ads on the Internet: a counter-reaction to the Net hype of the late 1990s; an absence of clear ad-buying procedures, prices, and success benchmarks;

¹ *The Virtual Trail: Political Journalism on the Internet*, www.ipdi.org, p. 14.

and the technical difficulties and ethical questions bound up in targeting voters for a given locality.² Still, online advertising is inexpensive to produce and place (in part because of the dot-com crash). We thought more campaigns would have experimented with it, and had more to say about it.

Testing messages was not part of the close-race campaigners' repertoire, either. It takes some effort and know-how to test a message online before a targeted audience, if scientific and nuanced feedback is the goal. However, we know from our national survey that the online citizenry enjoys participating in polls (See Part Two). In 2001, the Mark Earley for Governor campaign in Virginia posted an endorsement video featuring Rudy Giuliani, and the positive response encouraged the Republicans to re-shoot the spot and purchase television time for it. The next, logical step, we think, will be for campaigns to post television ads, speeches, written appeals, and other messages, ask online supporters to evaluate them –and then ask them for contributions to pay for wider distribution of the ones they like.

No clear pattern emerged regarding the use of the Internet to recruit and mobilize campaign volunteers. The respondent from the campaign reporting the largest number of online volunteers (2000, for Janet Napolitano, a successful Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Arizona) gave weak ratings of 3 for recruitment and 2 for mobilization. A representative from another successful gubernatorial candidate, incumbent Democrat Gray Davis of California, reported only “several dozen” volunteers, yet rated mobilization effectiveness at 4. We expected more consistent answers, such as the one we received from Connie Morella's unsuccessful effort to retain a Republican Congressional seat in a highly wired Maryland district. Her staffer said they found 250-300 volunteers online, and awarded the highest possible ratings (5) for both recruitment and mobilization. Our open-ended questions also elicited comments about the Internet and volunteers which were all over the map. We believe the best way to summarize the situation is that while a majority of campaigns recognized how valuable the Internet can be with respect to volunteers, some campaigns did not know what to expect, or how to proceed.

Fundraising received a slightly lower effectiveness rating from our respondents than volunteer recruitment and mobilization. Again, the scattered pattern of ratings and comments points as much to an absence of accepted standards in expectations and procedures as to poor outcomes. Most online campaigners we have spoken with, both for this report and other IPDI research, have made back in contributions what they have spent on fundraising. Solid majorities of campaign Web sites in races for Congress in 2000 and 2002 posted information about how to make donations. Slender majorities provided the technical wherewithal to make contributions through the Internet.³ We do not know how many 2002 campaigns were as sophisticated with online fundraising as

² Advertisers of commercial products can find likely buyers with great precision through the Internet, thanks to demographic data and the tracking of online purchases and visits. But political targeting revolves around information in voter files (party registration, turnout for past elections), and voter files have yet to be matched well to e-mail addresses and tracked Web movements.

³ Source: netelection.org (for 2000) and politicalweb.info (for 2002).

they generally are in direct mail, telephone fundraising, and at events, which is to ask point-blank for a specific amount of money. (In fundraising jargon, this is known as “the ask.”) On the Internet, many such asks would have occurred via e-mail, which was beyond the scope of our study. It was not possible for us to discern whether more candidates even bothered to ask for money on the Web page where they posted their contribution forms; in 2000, as an earlier report of ours showed, a scant 3% of House candidates did so.

There were a few fundraising breakthroughs. The deputy campaign director for victorious Senate candidate Mark Pryor in Arkansas said the campaign Web site “paid for itself a hundred times over,” in the money raised and the way the press paid attention to it. Candidate Martha Fuller Clark, in a losing campaign for a Congressional seat in New Hampshire, raised 30% of her individual contributions online, roughly half a million dollars according to FEC data.

Very few campaigns –four, to be precise—said they received online assistance from their national parties. This stunned us. To the extent that any of the tight races were “nationalized,” this seems to have been accomplished largely through old media and modes of transportation, instead of through the Internet. In the future, we expect parties (and other politically interested organizations with nationwide memberships) to move beyond electronic funds transfers and bus caravans, and integrate the Internet into their efforts on behalf of candidates in close races.

To be sure, such outside online help will be circumscribed. Political organizations are understandably reluctant to share their lists of donors and volunteers. For one thing, the new campaign finance reform law may deter the development of online collaboration, until what is legal and what is criminal in the category of coordinated activities has been thoroughly clarified. For another, there is the problem of list dilution. As soon as a list of names is released to anyone, it can rocket around the Internet, and the originating organization may discover to its chagrin that its capacity to summon help has been considerably reduced. Still, parties, corporations, unions, and groups can protect themselves by sending messages on a candidate’s behalf which urge recipients to click over to the candidate’s site. We heard nothing to that effect from our respondents.

The lack of party assistance helps explain why using the Internet to get out the vote received a sub-medium rating from the campaigners. The 2002 campaigners we spoke with were evidently unimpressed by the success of the Gore campaign in 2000 with its late multi-state ad buy, the NAACP’s real-time coordination of its resources on Election Day, and the Bush campaign’s use of the Net during the Florida controversy. Perhaps they did not know enough about these operations. A few did, however. Illinois gubernatorial candidate Rod Blagojevich deployed a highly sophisticated multi-channel GOTV operation, utilizing the Web, email, and wireless text messaging, to win the Democratic primary in the spring of 2002.⁴ The Mike Huckabee campaign to retain the

⁴ Nicholas Thompson, “Machined Politics,” *Washington Monthly*, May 2002.

Arkansas governorship unleashed a late e-mail blitz which helped Huckabee win even as his co-Republican Tim Hutchinson was losing to the aforementioned Mark Pryor.⁵

The most discouraging results of our questionnaire dealt with the immediate future. Respondents split evenly on whether they would put more effort into their Web site next time around: 51% said they would (a socially respectable answer to questioners from an Online Politics Institute), while 45% would not. Most said they noticed a proliferation of campaign Web sites, and of sophistication in their use. Yet most respondents could not cite an online campaign that impressed them, a sign that they saw no external incentives to improve.

Finally, we learned more about online campaigning, and about email lists in particular, from our separate post-election interviews with seven campaign Web masters. They echoed the effectiveness ratings awarded by the campaign managers and directors, saying the Internet helped them conduct research and deal with the press. All seven respondents maintained lists of news media contacts; the media lists of statewide campaigns ranged between 150 and 500, while the House campaigns said their lists ranged between 30 and 45. The Webmasters were more sanguine than their organizational superiors about the Internet's utility in raising money and assembling and deploying volunteers. Although the Webmaster for Republican Congressman Mike Rodgers in Alabama said that online fundraising wasn't worth the effort, others appreciated the immediacy and systemization of the activity. The Webmasters found success alerting supporters of upcoming candidate visits in their area and, to a lesser extent, directing people to voter registration sites. Five kept lists of contributors, the same number that kept lists according to issue interest. Four maintained geographic lists, and three, demographic lists. Targeted e-mail communication is clearly an accepted practice among Web masters.

Four campaign Web masters said they sent multiple emails in one day, primarily related to breaking news events and mobilization efforts. The Webmasters agreed that big news events, new television ads, and the last days before an election led to spikes in traffic. The volume of incoming emails varied greatly, from 100 per day for Democrat Frank Lautenberg, who won a Senate seat in New Jersey, to 800 per day for Republican Rick Perry, who retained his office as Governor of Texas. Most Webmasters routed the incoming emails to the appropriate campaign departments, which decided on whether and how to respond. This aspect of online campaigning presents an organizational challenge to political managers: designing a system of email communication which involves every department without resulting in overload, turf wars, security and privacy breaches and such problematic public issuances as leaks, inconsistencies, and misinformation. The content management challenge, like the parallel challenge of list management, is not insuperable. But it needs to be addressed from the top early in a campaign, and that recognition seems a cycle or two away for the bulk of American electoral campaigners.

⁵ Dick Morris, "Political Emailing Comes of Age," *Jewish World Review*, January 10, 2003.

Best Practices and Other Practices: What Campaigners Did on their Web Sites

Since 1999, the Institute has promoted a set of best practices for online campaigning. These best practices were developed in consultation with political professionals, scholars, and Internet experts, as part of the original mission of the Institute's precursor organization, the Democracy Online Project. We have argued that, because the Internet is user-driven to a great degree, and because it is also a very public medium, campaigns should adhere to high standards of political discourse in order to win votes and support online.⁶ Emphasizing transparency and interactivity is not only the right strategy from the standpoint of free democratic politics, but the smart strategy, as our seven Best Practices make clear:

- **Making campaign Web sites accessible to everyone** opens up volunteering and donating possibilities, not only to Americans with disabilities, but also to those who rely on phone modems.
- **Documenting candidate positions and track records** not only sets the record straight, it builds trust among online seekers of reliable information, and establishes a line of credibility credit for use if and when scandals, rumors, and other charges surface.
- **Exhibiting and extending community ties (candidate memberships, endorsements, and testimonials from unaffiliated citizens)** not only encourage the online citizenry to conclude that the candidate is indeed a man or woman of the people, but also embeds the Web site in a denser set of communication links, easing the capacity of the campaign to get its word out quickly and believably, and to attract more visitors to the site.
- **Developing, posting, and living by a privacy policy** not only protect online visitors against indecent use of personal data, but also protect the campaign against retaliation.
- **Explaining rules of financial disclosure and showing that the campaign complies** not only assures the public, but also puts patterns of contribution and expenditure in a favorable light.
- **Stating the case for the campaign through contrasts (instead of one-sided attacks and boasts)** not only elevates the discourse, but also attracts more Net users accustomed to comparison shopping and research.

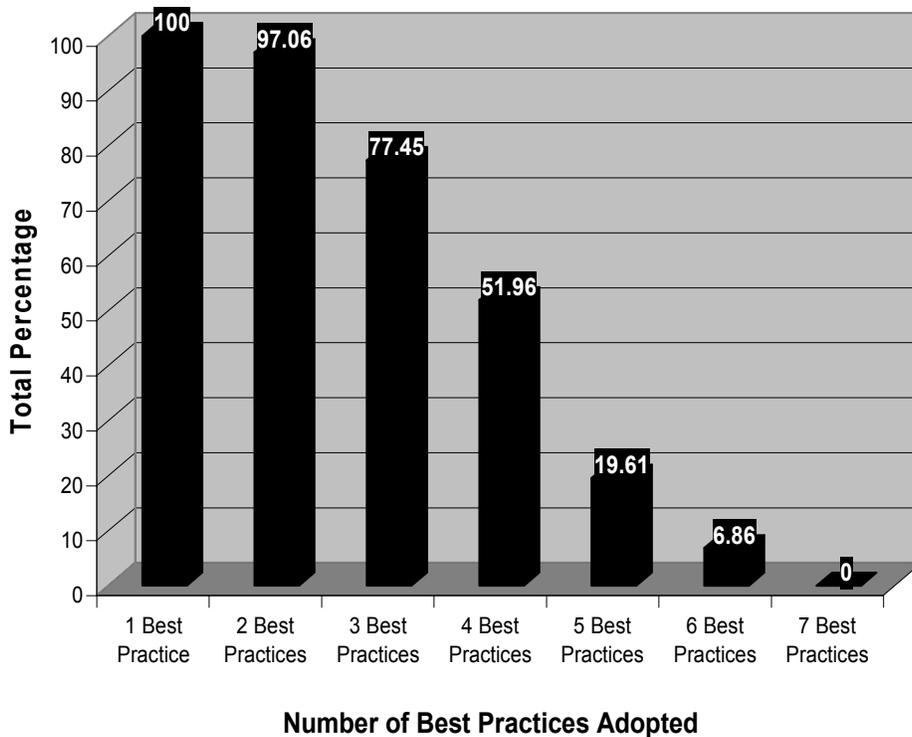
⁶ The full case for best practices, and other practical advice, may be found in *Online Campaigning 2002: A Primer*, www.ipdi.org.

- **Providing interactive and interpersonal opportunities** not only boosts political participation, but solidifies campaign support. People will open emails from those who have opened email from them.

We translated these principles into Internet features that campaigns either did or did not adopt, and then checked the best practice compliance pattern of 102 candidates in 46 of the most competitive races in general elections for the House, Senate, and Governor. (This is the same pool from which the 35 respondents to the questionnaire came.) As Table 2 shows, all the candidates adhered to a feature of at least one best practice, 97% met at least two of them, and 77% conformed to three. Table 3 describes the compliance rates feature by Web site feature.

Table 2

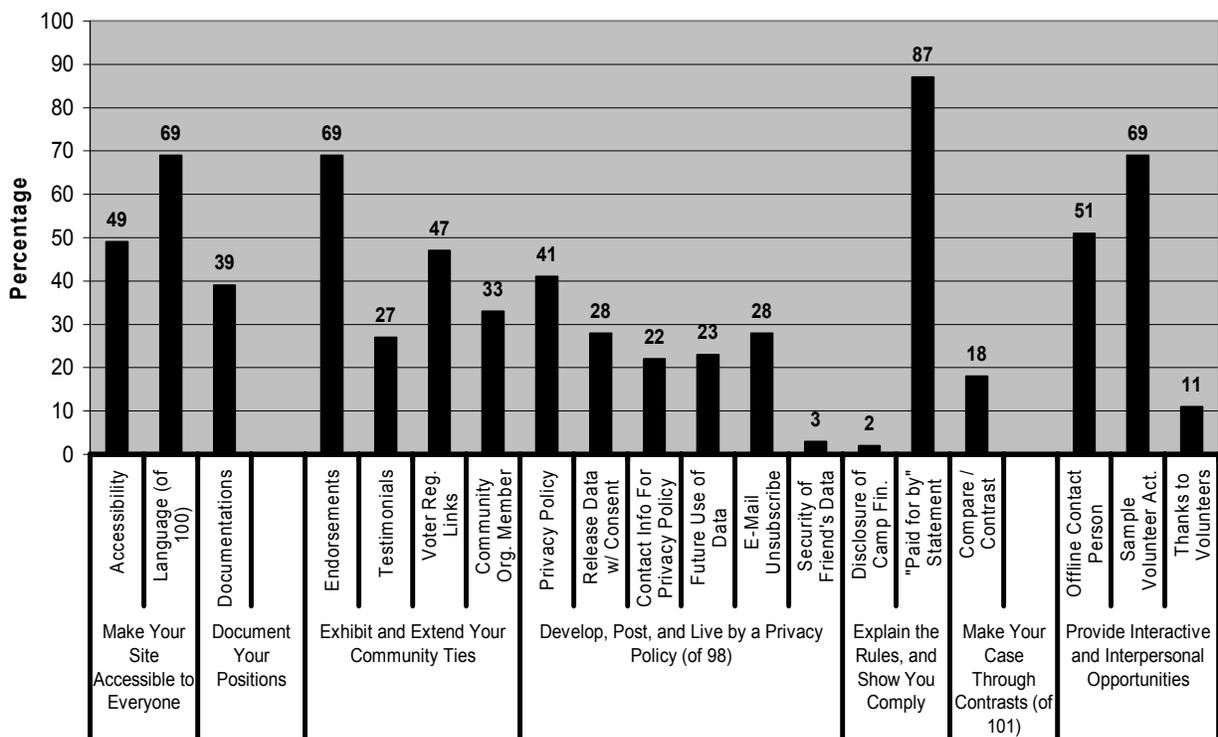
**IPDI Best Practice Adoption Rate
in
102 Most Competitive Races in the 2002 Elections**



Based on IPDI survey of 102 candidates' websites in 46 of the most competitive House, Senate, and Gubernatorial races in 2002

Table 3

**IPDI Best Practice Compliance Assessment
in
102 Competitive Races in the 2002 Elections**



Based on IPDI sample of 102 Candidates' websites in 46 of the most competitive, House, Senate, and Gubernatorial races in 2002

The disclosure best practice (“Explain the Rules, and Show You Comply”) subsumed the online campaigning features with the greatest and least compliance. On the one hand, 87% included a disclaimer identifying the campaign on their emails. This is an encouraging sign that email will not be construed as a category of campaign communication exempt from disclaimer provisions. On the other hand, only 2% posted online the financial disclosure data that they are required to file by law with the Federal Election Commission, or a link to such data elsewhere on the Web. This attests to the reluctance of campaigns to publicize their contributors, for fear of other campaigns “poaching” the list (an activity punishable by law at the federal level and in many states) and of embarrassing their contributors with publicity. The 2% figure helps create the informational vacuum ably filled by such Web sites as opensecrets.org, which is the most popular Web site by far among political reporters covering campaigns.⁷ Perhaps if more campaigns presented financial disclosure information on their own sites, in their

⁷ *The Virtual Trail*, www.ipdi.org.

own terms, they might be able to build more public confidence about the role of money in politics.

Implementing a privacy policy is a complicated operation. IPDI decided to include seven compliance features under the privacy rubric in order to assess the range of privacy policies in force at 2002 campaigns. The poor-to-medium compliance rate is a sign that campaigns are not yet convinced of the importance of assuring Web site visitors that any data they provide will be closely and carefully guarded. This is disturbing, from a civic vantage point; it is also counter-productive, from a strategic vantage point. Research conducted by the Institute in collaboration with the GWU Survey Research Center and the MSN Network reveals a sizable and serious segment of the online citizenry hesitates before giving money or personal information to campaigns for just this reason.⁸

When the close-race campaigns whose Web sites we examined made reference to the world around them, exhibiting their network of support through links and related content, they emphasized established names and organizations over everyday citizens. Whereas 69% of the sites sported endorsements, only 27% included citizen testimonials. Volunteers were not ignored: 69% of the sites supplied an example of the type of activity online volunteers could perform, and 51% provided contact information so that a Web visitor could interact, online or offline, with someone on the campaign. However, only 11% of the closely contested campaigns thought enough of online volunteers to thank one or more of them publicly on the site. This dearth of public appreciation by campaigns for their volunteers helps explain a finding from the nationwide survey: while 29% of the online citizenry reported receiving an email supporting or opposing a candidate for office, only 17% said they sent such an email. It takes very little technically to forward an email to friends. But the forwarder must be motivated to do so. Campaigns should pay closer attention to cultivating a sense of inclusion among their email recipients.

A mere 18% of the sites examined provided compare and contrast information for citizens interested in rationalizing their voting choice. However, 39% provided some documentation for claims they made about the issues. We consider the ramifications of this mediocre compliance rate on these discourse-related best practices in the next section of the report, where we show that citizens are looking for such information.

⁸ *Privacy, Security, & Trust on the Political Web*, www.ipdi.org.

PART TWO: The Online Citizenry

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

This section of the report is based on a tracking survey of 2745 U.S. adults conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) for the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the Institute between October 20 and November 24, 2002. The section also draws on a continuous body of research conducted by PSRA for the Project, and analyzed by Project staff.

Of the month-long survey population, 1707 (62%) were Internet users. Of the Internet subpopulation, 741 (43%) said they got political news and information online. The margin of error for the full sample and the Internet subpopulation is plus or minus 2 percentage points. The margin of error for the sub-subpopulation of political news and information viewers—henceforth referred to as “the online citizenry”—is plus or minus 4 percentage points. Bracketed notes at the end of sentences in this section, such as [POL 02], designate survey questions; the basic or “topline” responses to every question in the tracking survey may be viewed along with the questions at www.pewinternet.org and www.ipdi.org.

A Growing Constituency for Online Politics

The online citizenry constitutes the segment of Internet users who pay attention to politics. Its ranks swelled considerably in the 2002 election cycle, as Table 4 illustrates.

	Summer 00	Nov-02	Percent Increase
Online Public Population	33 Million	46 Million	39.40%
US Net Population	102 Million	116 Million	13.70%
US Adult Population	184 Million	191 Million	3.80%

Sources: US Census Bureau,
October – November, 2002 Tracking Survey

A 39% increase is remarkable. What can account for it? Campaigners were probably not the primary force drawing 13 million more people into the online citizenry between the summer of 2000 and November 2002. As we learned in Part One from the IPDI questionnaire, campaigners had a hard time using the Internet just to reach supporters, let alone uncommitted political observers and non-political users. The survey data confirm the campaigners' sense of their own spotty effectiveness in connecting with the electorate. A mere 22% of Internet users (roughly half of the online citizenry) paid

attention to election 2002 information.⁹ [POL03] Most of these election information consumers did so less than once a week. [POL 04] Only 12% of Net users (a little more than a quarter of the online citizenry) visited partisan Web sites such as those run by the political parties, a candidate, or a campaign. [POL09c]

Nor can a technological innovation explain the 2000-2002 expansion of the online citizenry's population. While the popularization of Google, the second-generation search engine, may have eased Internet users' ways toward getting news and political information, Google did not provide them with the impetus to head in that direction. No public service announcements or paid advertisements lured the viewers of Google's home page into civic and political Web sites. Nor can the online citizenry's growth be attributed to a surge in general Internet usage. As the table shows, there was no big spurt in people coming online; indeed, overall Net population growth slowed after 2000. Finally, the data suggest that the growth of the online citizenry did not depend on the financial health and social cachet of the high-tech industry, in as much as those were plummeting at the same time the online appetite for politics was rising.

A more likely explanation attributes the expansion of the online citizenry to three factors: the maturation of users, the spread of broadband, and big news stories. In the fall of 2000, 36% of online Americans had been on the Net for three or more years; by November 2002, that figure had nearly doubled, to 70%. Experienced Internet users do a wider range of activities while they are online.¹⁰ The growth of broadband is a compatible development. Broadband enables people to look for political information faster, in richer media forms, and without tying up a telephone line. Project research has determined that, even when controlling for online experience and a number of demographic factors, having a home broadband connection has an independent and strongly positive impact on the number of activities conducted online, the frequency of logging on, and the amount of time spent online daily.¹¹

Big news stories, in which crucial details could break at any moment of the day over a period of weeks, also powered the expansion of the online citizenry. As people headed to news and public information sites in hopes of learning who won the Florida electoral votes and who was responsible for the 9/11 attacks, they discovered in the process the convenience, depth, and breadth of online political communication. The popularity of these factors may be seen in Table 5:

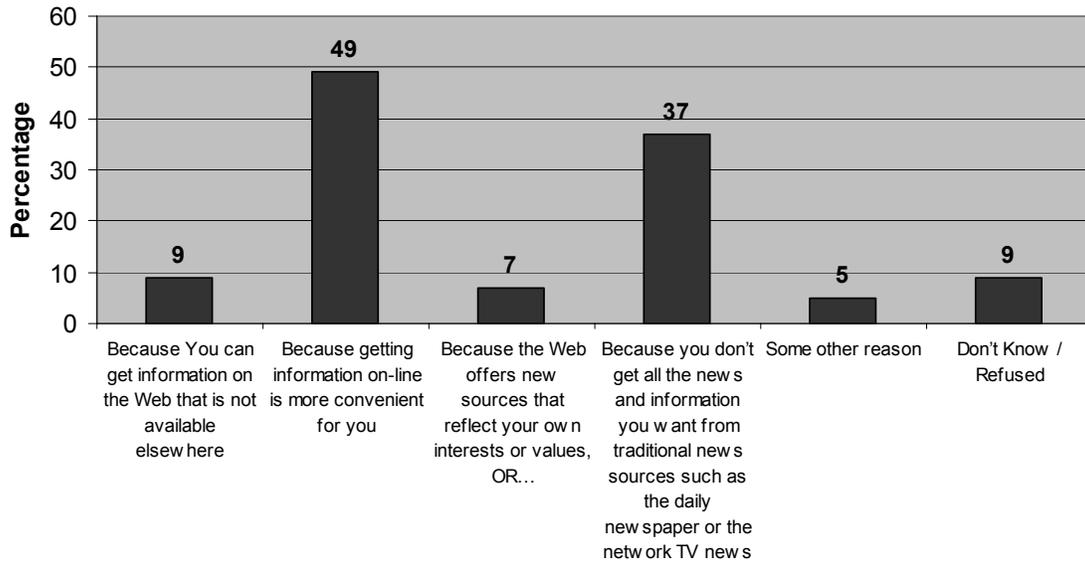
⁹ The characteristics and behavior of the online electorate will be analyzed in a subsequent report.

¹⁰ *Getting Serious Online*, www.pewinternet.org.

¹¹ *The Broadband Difference*, www.pewinternet.org.

Table 5

**Why do you go on-line to get news and information about elections?
(Multiple Response)**



In sum, the enhanced capacity and facility of users to check in on breaking news and “drill down” for details is probably responsible for the sharp growth in the population of the online citizenry. There remains considerable room for further expansion: as of November 2002, 70 million online game players, e-mailers, music down-loaders, office workers, students, and other American adults had yet to look for political news and information. The U.S. confrontation with Iraq has probably lured some of that 70 million into the online citizenry since November 2002, and war would draw in more of them.

The important lesson here for political activists, and electoral office-seekers in particular, is this: Campaigners who can make news, shed light on the news, and empower people to act in response to the news, have a greater incentive with each passing day to try and connect with the Internet population. Online citizens are looking for just those qualities, and perhaps more, as they search the Web and comb through their email. In 2002, most of them did not find such information at campaign sites.

Dissatisfied Searchers

Online citizens are, on the whole, a dissatisfied bunch. Comparative survey data compiled for the Project reveals that people who have used the Internet to get political news and information were less likely to find what they were looking for than those who have sought health information and information from government agency Web sites. Political information seekers had fewer bookmarks of favorite sites than health and government information seekers. They relied more on portals (the subject of Part Three of this report), and browsed more Web sites. They said they learned something new less

often. And they said they found information which helped them make a decision less often. In short, the average experience of the online citizen is not as rewarding as that of the constituencies for health and government information.

Table 6

The experiences of different information seekers

The responses of those who use the Internet to get various kinds of information when asked about their most recent search for that kind of information.

	<i>Those who seek health information*</i>	<i>Those who use government Web sites**</i>	<i>Those who seek political information***</i>
Found the information I sought – did what I wanted to do	78%	80%	55%
Ran out of time and stopped	14%	9%	31%
Couldn't find the information and gave up	6%	9%	5%

Source: *Pew Internet & American Life Project Health Survey, June 19-August 6, 2001. N=500. Margin of error is ±5%.

**Pew Internet & American Life Project Government Web Site Users Survey. September 5-27, 2001. N=815. Margin of error is ±4%.

***Pew Internet & American Life Project Campaign 2002 Survey, October 30-November 24, 2002. N=1,105. Margin of error is ±3%.

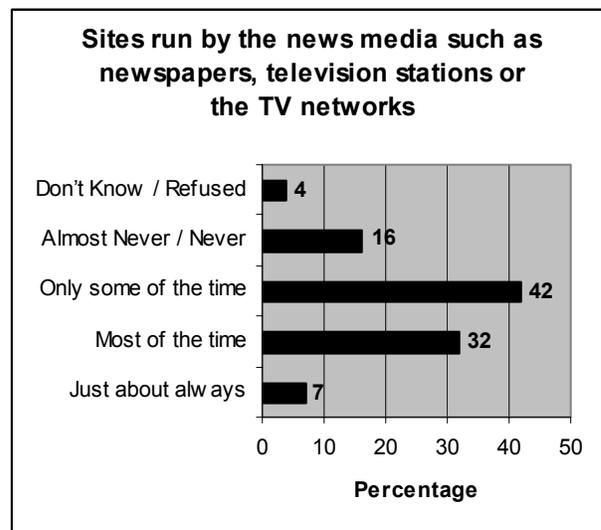
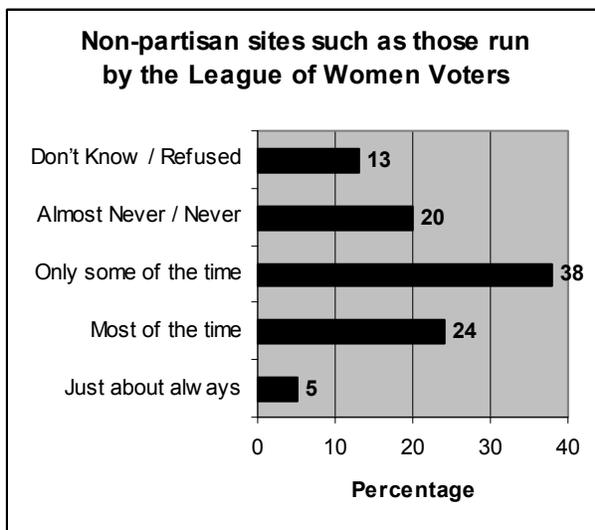
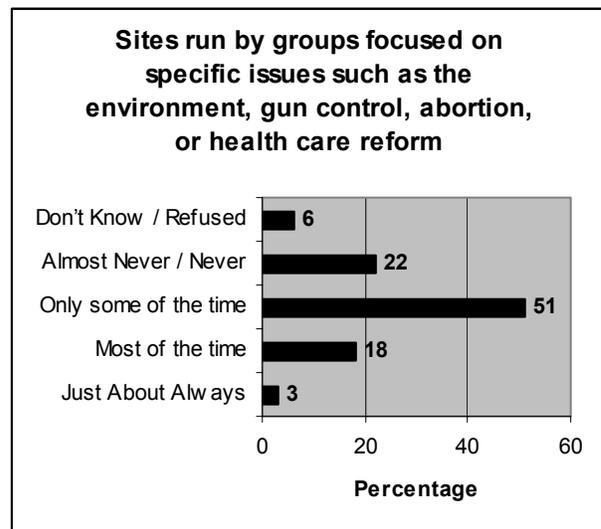
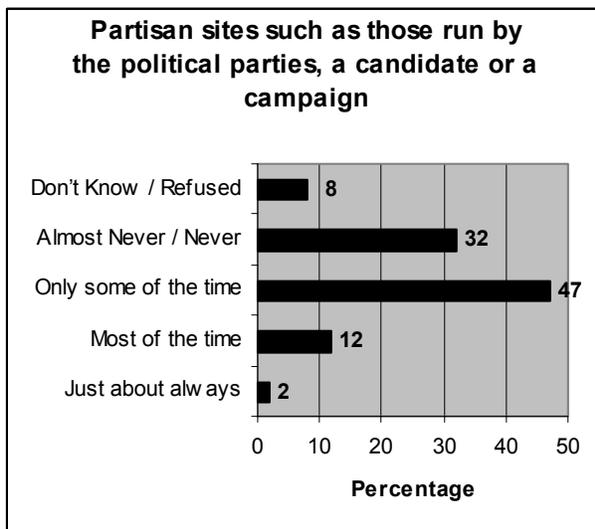
Some of this dissatisfaction derives from qualities inherent in political information. Politics is often about controversial matters for which no clear answers exist, and the two-party winner-take-all electoral system tends to polarize the fuzzy answers with which we all must make do. A Web searcher looking for a tax form does not have to choose among Democratic, Republican, and news media versions of the form, as does a Web searcher looking to learn about tax reform. A Web searcher in need of relief for a strange rash may be bewildered by the variety of potential diagnoses and remedies offered online, but at least the rash-bearer will not be subjected to one source of advice attacking another, as will a Web searcher attempting to bone up on the nation's health care system.

A majority of survey respondents said that, as they searched, they tended to encounter viewpoints different from their own. [POL25b] That is a good thing from a civic standpoint, because public debate becomes brittle when people just have their own views reinforced. Nevertheless, being exposed to contrary facts and opinions can be a discomfiting experience for an individual, generating what psychologists term cognitive dissonance. Another source of anxiety for the online citizenry may stem from the fact that while most Net searchers tend to be task-oriented, political Web sites frequently turn the tables on their audience. In politics, unlike health care and government, (and business and education, for that matter), it is the sources, not the users, who come loaded with tasks: "Call so and so and tell him thus and such." "Vote for me."

And then there is the credibility of political information, the matter of how much the online citizenry trusts that what it sees is accurate and not misleading. As Table 7 illustrates, Internet users place much less stock in the veracity and integrity of what

partisan and issue group sites provide than in what non-partisan and news media sites provide.¹² That is a bleaker situation than it may appear, because the information supplied by the latter is largely derived from the former. For example, DNet, the online database of campaign information produced by the non-partisan League of Women Voters, consists mainly of a matrix of candidate issue positions submitted by the campaigns themselves; DNet solicits the information and arranges it for ready comparison. Campaign reporting in the news media consists mainly of excerpts (sound bites) from candidate, issue group, and party press releases and news conferences, often embedded in cynical speculations about the strategy and money behind them.¹³ What is “trusted” in non-partisan and news media versions of political information is thus more a matter of format than content.

Table 7 Which sites do you trust for accurate information?



¹² A 1999 Democracy Online Project survey found similar low levels of trust. It is archived at www.ipdi.org.

Wherever the online citizenry alights in cyberspace, it is likely to see political figures issuing self-interested promises to fix society's problems, accompanied by attacks and allusions by opponents and journalists which cast doubt on the likelihood that the promises will be kept and the problems solved. These discouraging depictions may account for the low percentages of Internet users who visit non-partisan (14%) and partisan (12%) Web sites. [POL09c-d] A final indicator of citizen dissatisfaction: political news and information searchers act more out of a sense of duty to be well-informed (71%) than because they enjoy following campaign news (24%). [POL02]

This is not a pretty picture. An online supplier of political information, like a struggling stand-up comedian, plays in a tough room: the audience is sparse, suspicious, impatient, and inured to the contentiousness and raggedness of the show. All the same, there is a chance for one or more of the performers to succeed. The survey points up several ways they can polish their act. Campaigners, civic groups, and the news media can provide some of the features the online citizenry says it wants to see at little cost and low risk.

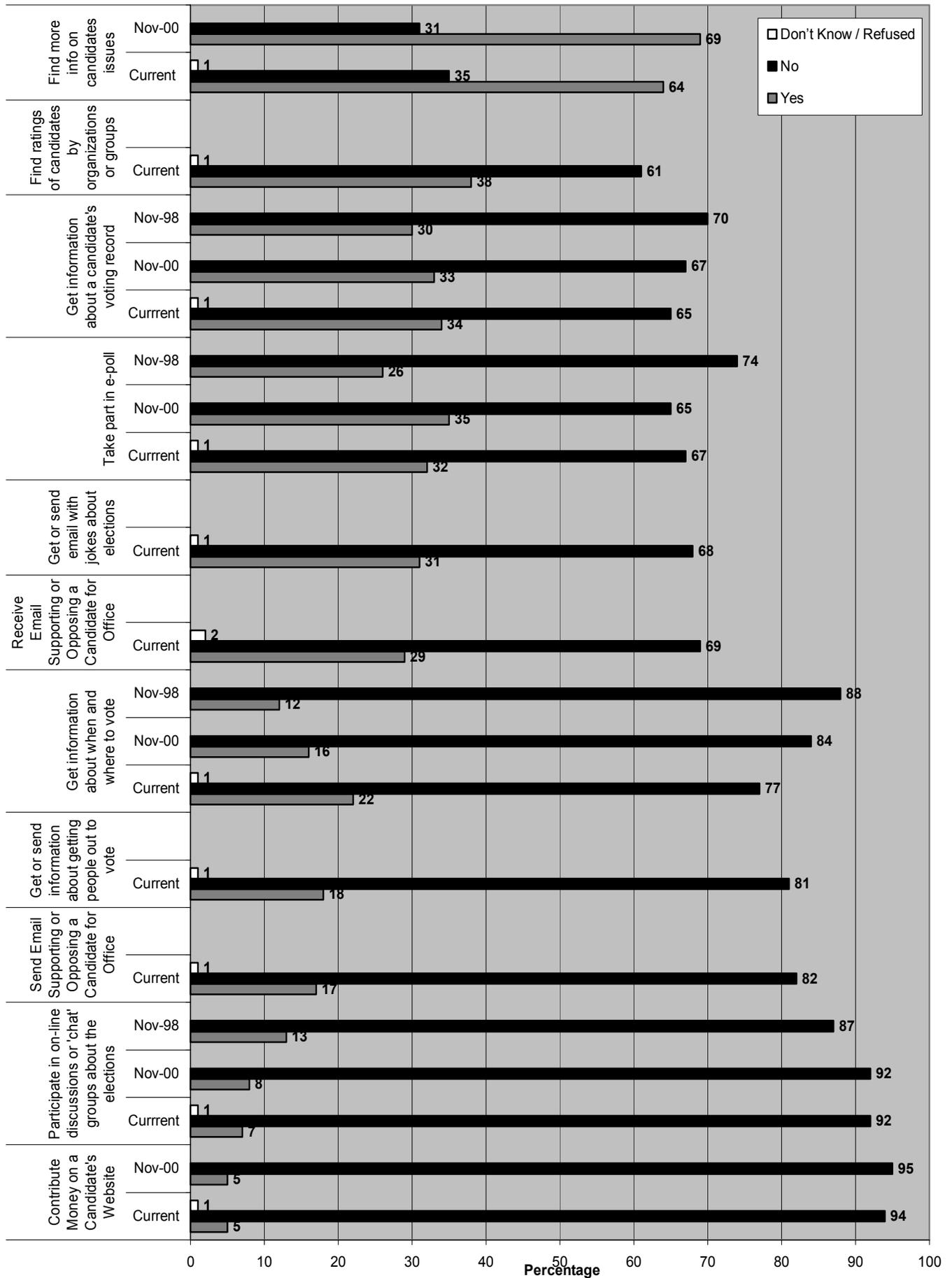
What Online Citizens Like to See and Do

The Internet offers a variety of activities to the online citizenry. The survey asked whether respondents ever engaged in eleven of them, and the results appear on the following page.

¹³ On the negativity bias of campaign reporting, see Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Knopf 2002), Chapter Three.

Table 8

What Online Citizens Like to See and Do



Online citizens prized the research function of the Internet as highly as campaign managers. Searching for more information about candidate issue positions (cited by 64%) was the most popular response by far. The second and third most popular answers also fall under the category of research: online citizens hunted for candidate ratings and endorsements by organizations and groups (38%), and for candidate voting records (34%). Getting information about when and where to vote ranked seventh (22%), but this type of research has grown steadily since 1998.

The survey discloses some things about how systematic citizens are as they look for political news and information online. Prompted to recall the last time they searched, 33% of the online citizenry said they made a beeline to a specific site for a specific reason, while 56% did not have a specific site in mind. [POL 19] To a question about the number of sites searched, two to three sites received the highest response, 45%, while 18% said one site, 17% four to five, and 12% six or more. [POL22] Asked how they decided what Web site to visit first after using a search engine, a sizable majority (63%) said it read the explanation of each Web site and chose the one that best fit what was being sought. In contrast, only 10% clicked on a site whose name or sponsor was recognized, and 24% started at the top of the list. [POL21]¹⁴

After research, participating in online polls proved to be the most popular activity (32%). Selecting a favorite from an array of statements about issues, candidates, and other political news developments was thus the top mode of online political engagement, well ahead of sending email (17%), taking part in discussions and chat groups (7%), and contributing money (5%). It is unclear how seriously people regard these polls, whether they think they are expressing an opinion that the Web site's operators and other political elites will heed, or having fun seeing how their choices square with those of previous participants. If it is the former, they are being fooled. But, again, there is a lesson here for online campaigners: the online citizenry enjoys interactive polls.

Getting or sending email jokes about the campaigns and elections ranked fifth among the activities asked about, at 31%. This is a big drop from 2000, when 54% of respondents participating in a Democracy Online Project survey answered in the affirmative to a similar question. Of course, the 2002 election took place in a more somber time. Yet humor remains an effective rhetorical tactic for online campaigning.¹⁵ It assuages the fuzziness, contentiousness, and anxiety of politics. It suits the activity of breaking from work, which many Net users are engaged in when they turn to look at political news and information.

¹⁴ Only 135 people responded to this question, so the results are more suggestive than statistically significant.

¹⁵ For an example from the 2002 campaign, see the account of the DNC Web video cartoon "Social Insecurity" in Michael Cornfield, "Let's Roll," *Campaigns & Elections*, December 2002/January 2003, p. 76.

These findings suggest several practices for campaigners to adopt in order to increase their appeal to the online citizenry:

- Campaign Web sites should present information in database formats, which are more conducive to research, and less evocative of news media reports and advertisements, than the prevailing news release and brochure forms.
- Campaigns should pay attention to search engine listings and the descriptive language in them.
- It's hard to be genuinely funny, but when a campaign develops or even discovers humorous material which suits its goals, it should pass it along to supporters via email, and suggest they pass it further along, to friends, colleagues, and family.
- Campaigns should offer blogs, public diaries which salt observations on the passing parade of life with links and photos. Blogs are increasingly popular on the Internet; Blogger, a free do-it-yourself blog software service recently purchased by Google, counts one million regular users. Blogs speak to the universal human interest in how someone else is fielding the challenges of daily living, and in particular, what someone else has found worthy of a look in the vast catacombs of cyberspace. Blogs, in short, are friendly guides to online research and humor. A campaign with a successful blog will be a campaign with a loyal following.

The Online Citizenry and the 2002 Elections

As the online citizenry inhales and exhales political information during an election campaign, are minds being changed or just reinforced? This is perhaps the biggest question about the Internet for campaigners, who want to do each to different groups at different times with different messages. Reinforcement is easier, less challenging, and less useful to campaigns, grass roots mobilization being valuable mainly at the beginning (for seed money) and end (for voter turnout). Persuasion is much harder, so much so that an efficient campaign will try to minimize it, and concentrate on wringing every last bit of existing support out of an electorate, instead of exhausting its resources on quests to create new support. Nevertheless, candidates and causes who enter a campaign with less than 50% of the likely electorate's support (and political mediators seeking to enlarge their market share) must engage in persuasion to some degree.

Only 13% of those who used the Internet during the 2002 election said that the last time they went online for political/campaign/election news and information, they were looking for information to help them decide how to vote. In contrast, 24% sought information to reinforce an existing preference (that is, information about a candidate or issue already supported or opposed), and 43% selected the option "to generally learn more about what's going on in the campaign." [POL 18]

We posed the persuasion question in two other ways. Internet users who voted in 2002, a different sub-subpopulation than the online citizenry, were asked “How important has the Internet been in terms of providing you with information to help you decide how to vote in the November election.” [POL 12] The results for 2002 appear below along with results from Democracy Online Project polls conducted in November 1998 and 2000. For the majority of respondents, the Internet was not that important.

Table 9
How important has the Internet been in terms of providing you with information to help you decide how to vote in the November election?
(Asked of all Net users who voted.*)

	2002	2000*	1998
Very	8	14	11
Somewhat	25	25	25
Not Very	27	19	30
Not at All	39	37	34

* In 2000, the universe was all Net users who followed the election online, and 5% volunteered that they did not vote.

We also asked the online citizenry whether “any of the information you have received online about the 2002 mid-term elections made you decide to vote for or against a particular candidate.” Phrased this way, with an emphasis on particular candidates instead of general experience, a larger minority (25%) said it was influenced. However, the percentage dropped markedly from 2000 (43%) and 1998 (34%).

This data needs further investigation. Still, it fits the pattern suggested by the popularity of the Internet as a research medium and, for that matter, by the preponderance of political science studies of voter behavior: on the whole, the opinions that the online citizenry possesses when it logs on tend to be reinforced, not altered, by the information it encounters, and the activities it engages in.

PART THREE: The Portals

One Way or Another

Campaigners are disappointed with the effectiveness of the Internet. Citizens are frustrated in their searches for political information. Could the portals assuage these concerns, and advance the state of online political communication?

Subscribers and other users of the big Internet portals constitute a huge portion of the online population. According to an August 2002 news release by IDC Research, “84% of U.S. online households rely on AOL, MSN, and Yahoo! for critical Internet services.”¹⁶ There are many other important portals, to be sure, including those operated by news media organizations. The dominant portals may change as the nation migrates to broadband connections. Still, public reliance on portals to access the Internet seems established. Habit combines with inertia: 57 percent of all Internet users don’t know how to change their homepages from the default homepages these companies set for them.¹⁷

Portals are entry points to a variety of online information, tools, and activities. Providing news and political information is just one of their functions, and a minor one at that. The portals connect and supply Internet users with Web search engines, stock quote trackers, email applications, calendar software, shopping opportunities, phone directories and mapping services. The editors of these portals make decisions about how and where each of these elements will be displayed. As such, they affect the capacity and motivation of campaigners and citizens to connect before elections.

The portals can play several roles in mediating campaign communication. First, like the mass media, they can serve as *gatekeepers*, regulating the amount, type, and orientation of information seen by their users. Since the Internet is user-driven, portal gatekeeping is a matter of acquiescence, not a technological necessity; the user passing through a portal can obtain more information and more viewpoints much more easily and thoroughly than the reader of news magazines, the viewer of television news, and the recipients of direct mail. When curiosity strikes a mass media consumer, she must physically go elsewhere to scratch the itch. The Internet user can click around without moving any muscles other than those in her fingers and head. However, as we saw in Part Two, while the number, frequency, and sophistication of online political searches have increased in the last two years, venturing beyond the gate toward campaign information and interaction is still a minority activity in the United States. The main home pages of AOL, MSN, and Yahoo! are as far as many Net users get in being exposed to politics. This is a lesson campaigners need to learn more thoroughly than they have as they prepare their advertising buys.

Second, like directory publishers and libraries, portals can serve as *facilitators*, bringing Net users to online locations where the type of information and interaction they seek exists. The national survey revealed that 80% of the subset of the online citizenry

¹⁶ www.idc.com/getdoc.jhtml?containerId=pr2002_07_15_104311 .

¹⁷ October 2002 Tracking Survey, www.pewinternet.org .

that searched for election information began their journeys either at a general portal site (46%) or at a search engine such as Google (33%). [POL20] The portals possess considerable editorial discretion in facilitating online politics. They can, to whatever extent they choose, set up and promote campaign access routes, search tools, directories, databases, and help content. Again, campaigners have not taken great advantage of the advertising opportunities on the pages where portals place facilitation tools.

Third, like social directors and the personals sections of newspapers and magazines, the portals can become political *matchmakers*. This matchmaking can facilitate meetings between citizens and campaigns, or among citizens. For instance, a portal (or any online entrepreneur) can interview Net users --either through correspondence, or by having Web page visitors fill out an online form-- and then, through computer algorithms, provide the political “in search of” with the wherewithal to find other users with whom they are likely to be compatible. Numerous experiments in online campaign matchmaking occurred in 2000, the most famous being the “vote trading” Web sites which popped up in October to enable Gore and Nader supporters to advance mutual goals. Portals can also construct, or enable individuals to construct on their site, chat rooms, moderated discussions, and other hospitable settings in which users can roam in search of partners and, on a group-level, like-minded people. Matchmaking is the most active of the three roles cited here. Portals could delight foundations, scholars, and activists concerned about low levels of civic engagement by acceding to the metaphor and playing at matchmaking.

In the three weeks prior to the election, IPDI checked the three major portals every day for election-related content. The research team looked for the words "election," "candidate," "vote," or "campaign," and noted the highest (that is, the most widely trafficked) site level on which such content appeared. After noting the level, the team checked for ten types of content: humor, news, links to candidate sites, links to partisan and group sites, political data, online discussions, voting and registration information, political advertisements, opportunities to donate, and opportunities to volunteer.

We found that portal sites gave very little attention to politics on their homepages until the last week before the election. MSN provided no political features on its homepage until the last day of October. AOL had no homepage links to its elections coverage until October 27. In the remaining nine days of the campaign season, AOL linked to election content off the homepage on seven days. Only one political advertisement was noted; it ran on Yahoo! November 1, 2000, and was sponsored by an environmental group.

In their politics sections, both AOL and Yahoo! provided an extensive array of election-related content and tools. The two portals offered political news and analysis stories from sources such as the Associated Press, no different than traditional media. (MSN linked to MSNBC and Slate, the Microsoft online political journal.) In addition to traditional news stories, the portal political sections also included tools for connecting politically attentive users to campaigns and to each other: direct links to candidate Web

sites, online political discussion groups, logistical voting information and links to partisan organizations. None of the portals featured interactive matchmaking tools for would-be campaign volunteers and donors.

The portals are, even at this early stage of Internet development, a new breed of political mediator. The connective features they offer go beyond the traditional dynamic between campaigns, the news media and the public, and the antiquated dynamic in which the political party/machine served as mediator. Some newspapers print campaign contact information in voter guides, but they don't appeal to their readers on news pages to "Write Your Elected Officials" as the online candidate guides did. Government and partisan sites provide action-oriented information, but they don't have the traffic that portals and news media sites attract.

In short, there is evidence that the big portals played all three roles in 2002: gatekeeper, facilitator, and matchmaker, in descending order. Portal editors might justify their choices to wait until the final weeks of the election to promote political information by saying that they are simply giving their audience the information they want most. (The sniper attacks in the Washington D.C. area was a big news story in this time period.) Online media have the ability to see almost instantly which elements of their sites are most popular. Some even track the choices their audience members make during each visit to the site. This increased knowledge about their audience gives portal editors the ability to respond more quickly and accurately to user preferences.

Our research begs a question that should be put to portal editors: are you giving people what they want in the short run, rather than providing them with what they might want in the long-run or what you and your organizational superiors think a democratic society needs them to see? Journalists and media organizations have long grappled with this dilemma in the course of deciding what constitutes "news," but it is unclear whether portals, or portal divisions, regard themselves as news media, and thus, whether they intend to adopt this social responsibility. We hasten to add that we pose this question aloud without any preconception about the proper role(s) of portal editors in online political communication. Our purpose is to raise this as a topic for further inquiry and public discussion. As the online citizenry grows, and online campaigning matures, portal editors may inherit as much potential power to influence the process as the news media currently possess.

PART FOUR: Looking Ahead to 2004

The Sound Of Music

Viewed in terms of its technical parameters and architecture, the Internet marks a radical break from the mass media which have dominated modern communication. It can carry many voices, not just the famous and well-financed ones; it has plenty of room for substantive presentations, and allows ample time and access for deliberative discussions; it enables people to move effortlessly from talk into action. If media were musical instruments, the Internet would be an orchestra synthesizer (and, of course, in some situations, it does that literally). Yet the story we have told about how the Internet was used in the 2002 elections is one of people noodling off-key versions of the same old songs: campaigners loading self-promotional material onto their Web sites, citizens giving this material cursory and (via the news media) sideways glances, and portals relegating the entire subject matter to the digital equivalent of the back pages and dead-of-night hours.

Earlier in this report, we asserted that campaigners, civic groups, and the news media could provide some of the features the online citizenry says it wants to see at little cost and low risk. A summary of these features can serve as a barometer of progress for 2004. To the extent we see more of the following, online election politics will improve, sometimes for particular types of participants, and sometimes for the political system as a whole:

Signs of grass-roots support. Campaigns that show off the names, faces, and numbers of citizens who back them will discover that these optimistic displays of politicking can be infectious. (On the Internet, “viral” is a good, not a bad, adjective to append to the noun “campaigning.”)

Rate-this-message interactive features. Candidates will get valuable feedback; citizens will feel included portals will garner more traffic and retain it longer.

Last-minute and real-time GOTV, openly coordinated among candidates, parties, and groups. The “ground war” aspect of campaigning, in which staffers and volunteers fan out to knock on doors and provide rides to the polls, has returned to political vogue. Wireless communication is in vogue, too. As campaigns learn to put the two together, voter turnout rates might well skyrocket in closely contested elections.

The IPDI Best Practices. See Part One to review these seven benchmarks.

Searchable databases. From financial disclosure to voting records to sponsored bills that became law, the more substance that candidates and incumbents make available in researchable forms, the more portal links and citizen traffic they will attract.

Humor and blogs. These forms for political rhetoric are conducive to email circulation.

Matchmaking services. A dot-com start-up called MeetUp.com has already had an impact on the 2004 race for the Democratic presidential nomination; with thousands of online citizens relying on it to arrange small-group meetings on behalf of candidates.

As online politicking matures, there will surely be tensions between what campaigners deem effective and what citizens regard as proper. Journalists, regulators, academics, foundations, the push and pull of electoral competition, and the big portals will have to fill the gaps between performance and ideals with respect to financial accountability (both contributions and expenditures) and the quality of campaign dialogue. On one aspect of campaigning, however, the Internet brings the interests of campaigners and citizens into greater convergence: the role of volunteers. The decentralized and multi-pronged architecture of the Internet reminds us that campaigns need networks of people as much, if not more, than they need mass media visibility, and that democracies need maximum participation in campaigns to assure the legitimacy and vitality of the results. It is the campaign volunteer, clicking through and clicking forward, who is most likely to make online politics sing.

APPENDIX

Analysis of voting behavior, Internet use, and online political information gathering for the 2002 mid-term election

This appendix takes two separate empirical looks at the Internet's role in the 2002 mid-term elections. The first examines voting behavior in the 2002 elections with an eye to seeing what factors were associated with casting a ballot. One factor found to be a significant predictor of voting is using the Internet specifically to get information about the 2002 election. This makes the second empirical undertaking of particular interest – describing those who went online for political information in 2002, their attitudes about how this activity impacted their voting decision, and their political news surfing habits.

Regression Analysis

In conjunction with the Institute for Politics Democracy & the Internet, the Pew Internet & American Life Project conducted a survey of Americans in October and November of 2002 that explored people's attitudes and behavior with respect to the 2002 mid-term election. Overall, 2,745 Americans (1,707 of whom were Internet users) were surveyed. The regression analysis to be reported here attempts to explain why respondents in the survey chose to vote, with particular attention paid to whether the Internet influenced people's decision to cast a vote. The cross-sectional nature of the data makes strong causal inferences difficult; it may be that variables not included in the model affected how people vote. Nonetheless, the regressions reported here allow us to examine the relative strength and significance of the variables included. The variables of interest are as follows:

Voter is constructed to take into account likely voters—a share of the 861 respondents interviewed before Election Day—and actual voters—the 1,884 interviewed after Election Day. The data classifies 51.8% of respondents as voters. This is an overstatement of voters, since we know actual turnout was lower. However, all surveys of voters overstate actual voting. Nonetheless, the “voter” variable constructed in this way has performed well when comparing pre-election surveys focusing on candidate choice and actual voting results.

Internet User variable consists of the 61% of respondents who are Internet users.

POL01 is the 49% of all respondents who say they follow government and public affairs “most of the time”.

POL03 is the 22% of Internet users (or 13% of all respondents) who went online to get news or information about the 2002 mid-term elections.

Candidate research: This variable is constructed from the POL08 questions that captures respondents (19% of all and 31% of Internet users) who did some detailed investigations about the election, namely those who participated in online chats on the election, got information about a candidate's voting record, looked for information about

a candidate's position on issues, or found out about endorsements or ratings of candidates.

Frequent voter is the 43% of respondents who say they “always” vote.

Model and Specification

The logistic regression whose results are reported below models people's choice to vote as a function of a series of demographic and behavioral traits. Attitudinal questions, such as the Internet's importance in providing election information in 2002 (i.e., the 33% of Internet users saying it was somewhat or very important) and whether the information influenced a voting decision (i.e., the 25% of users saying “yes”) were avoided. The variable POL03 allows us to examine if searching for election information online has a positive effect on a person's propensity to vote. The regression framework allows us to isolate the effect of POL03 on the odds of a person voting independent of factors that might be also thought to influence whether someone votes (e.g., how closely one follows public affairs, past voting behavior, race, education, age, etc.). The models in the table below perform well from the perspective of prior expectations and predictive power. The concordance rate of 82% says that the models correctly predicted who is actually coded as being a voter 82% of the time, or 32% better than simply flipping a coin.

Results and Discussion

Not surprisingly, the strongest predictor of voting is past voting behavior; in other words, find a person who says they always vote (or those who voted in the 2000 presidential election; results not reported here) and you will win bets on who is a voter more often than if you put money on other variables in the model. But, for a number of other variables, you will win bets. Other positive predictors of voting in 2002 are: age (although the impact is small), having a college degree, following politics and public affairs, being a Republican, watching TV news, reading the newspaper daily, being married, thinking the country is heading in the right direction, and being employed. Characteristics that make people less likely to vote are being a student, a parent, a Hispanic, or an African American (weakly). Factors that were not significant were being an Internet user, gender, and race (whether being white, African American, or Latino; the last was used as the racial variable in the models below).

Since the dependent variable “voter” is constructed as described above, and people were interviewed before and after Election Day, a dummy variable for when a respondent was interviewed is included. It is positive and significant when coded to “1” for having been interviewed after Election Day. Since the “voter” variable overstates turnout, including the dummy for when a person was interviewed (and assuming the pre-Election Day measures for likely voters is accurate) controls for whether people to tell interviewers they voted when in fact they did not. We find that they do tell pollsters that they have voted when they have not. Including the dummy variable did not change the size, direction, or significance of variables of interest.

Notably, going online for news and information about the 2002 election is a positive predictor of whether one cast a vote—even after controlling for frequency of voting in the

past, one's interest in public affairs, reading the newspaper yesterday, and watching TV news yesterday. This finding is robust across various specifications. The influence of going online for 2002 mid-term election information is roughly the same as being interested in public affairs, watching TV news, and reading the newspaper on a daily basis.

Other variables of interest have to do with the kinds of political information online for mid-term 2002 election information. The variable "candidate research" is also a positive predictor of voting (in specifications in which POL03 is excluded). The ability, in a self-guided way, to chat with others online, seek out candidates' voting records, or find out candidates' positions, helps drive some people to the polls. As noted, simply being an Internet user is not a predictor of voting.¹⁸ This kind of self-initiated information seeking contrasts clearly with political information online that can be pushed at people. Whether the information is at a partisan site, like that of a candidate or a political party, a non-partisan site such as the League of Women voters, or issue-specific information (e.g., gun control or health care reform), going to sites with such information was not associated with higher rates of voting. In other words, the Internet drew people to the voting booth because it allowed users to conduct self-guided research and information gathering. Information provided by party or candidate Web sites did not drive people to the polls in the mid-term 2002 election.

In the table below, "odds ratios" are reported rather than parameter estimates from the logistic regressions. An odds ratio above 1 for a variable means a user having that behavioral characteristic associated with that variable has a greater chance of having bought something online. Thus the odds ratio of 1.33 in the table means that a person who watches TV news on a daily basis is 33% more likely to have bought something online. The odds ratio on the variable "student" (coded for 1 if the respondent is a student) is .72 means that being a student lowers the odds of making an online purchase by 28%.

¹⁸ When POL03 and "candidate research" are excluded from the model, it remains the case that being an Internet user is not a predictor of voting.

Table 1: Predictors of Voting

<i>Past voting, party preference, and news gathering</i>	Odds Ratios				
Frequent Voter	15.04**	15.12**	15.03**	15.17**	15.13**
Watch TV new yesterday	1.31**	1.28*	1.30*	1.31*	1.31*
Read newspaper yesterday	1.69**	1.70**	1.72**	1.74**	1.73**
Follows public affairs closely (POL01)	1.38**	1.36**	1.44**	1.46**	1.46**
Satisfied with direction of country	1.25*	1.27*	1.26*	1.25*	1.26**
Republican	1.32**	1.33*	1.34*	1.35**	1.35**
Internet Variables					
<i>Internet user</i>	1.18	1.10	1.23	1.26 ^α	1.25 ^α
<i>Went online to get mid-term election information (POL03)</i>	1.74**				
<i>Candidate research online</i>		1.90**			
<i>Visited partisan site</i>			1.45		
<i>Issue-specific site</i>				1.01	
<i>Visited non-partisan site</i>					1.11
Demographic					
Sex (male=1)	.881	.891	.888	.891	.893
Age (continuous)	1.03**	1.03**	1.03**	1.03**	1.03**
Parent	.891	.891	.884	.879	.881
Student	.905	.887	.940	.950	.946
College Graduate	1.87**	1.84**	1.93**	1.95**	1.93
Hispanic	.833	.844	.820	.819	.820
Married	1.48**	1.50**	1.50**	1.49**	1.49**
Employment Status (employed=1)	1.39**	1.38**	1.39**	1.39**	1.39**
Interviewed after election day	1.70**	1.70**	1.72**	1.70**	1.71**
Percent Concordant	82%	82%			
* Statistically significant at 5% confidence level ** Statistically significant at 1% confidence level ^α Statistically significant at 10% confidence level. N=2,745					

Typology of Political Surfers

Instead of focusing on all Internet users and their voting behavior, this section casts the spotlight on Internet users who go online for news about politics. The prior section showed that the act of going online for political information in 2002 was associated with higher rates of voting. Here, we ask whether online political surfers are a monolithic group, or whether there are some variations within the group. We use the statistical technique called cluster analysis to examine variations within the set of Internet users who go online for political information.¹⁹ As the table below shows, users grouped into three categories, with age and rates of voting being the primary differentiating factors. Each group, separated by about a half a generation in years, shows distinct habits and attitudes when it comes to gathering political information online.

1. *The Young and Interactively Curious*: This is a group of young people who are generally interested in public affairs and, for their age, likely to vote. Although their 44% voting rate is lower than the averages for the entire sample (51%) and for Internet users (53%), it is more than twice as high as all respondents under age 27. These seem to be

the most issue-driven political surfers, as they are, relative to the other two groups, most likely to go to issue specific sites, and less likely to go to partisan or even non-partisan sites. They do candidate research online at a high rate, although lower relative to other political news surfers. And, notably, they were most influenced by the Internet in 2002; they were most likely to say that the Internet was a very important factor in a voting decision, that it made a difference on a vote for a specific candidate, and that they learned something new from online political searching. They also shopped around online a lot, with 40% having gone to four or more political Web sites. For these young Internet users, it is important to note that they are *already* interested in politics, as shown by their high rate of voting. The Internet appears to be an

	1. Young surfers	2. 40-ish crowd	3. Gray Grazers
% Who voters	44%	79%	88%
Mean age	26	42	60
Republican	37	42	45
Democrat	30	30	24
Independent	27	25	25
Visited issue-specific site	67	56	56
Visited partisan site	22	25	25
Visited non-partisan site	23	32	32
Did candidate research online*	55	59	62
Was successful in finding what they wanted online	61	61	59
Learned something new	79	64	63
Net "very" important in decision on how to vote	24	15	17
Net made difference on vote for specific candidate	35	24	17
% who visited 4 or more Web sites for political information	40	27	34
% of political news surfers in group	39	44	17
* Defined as those who participated in online chats on the election, got information about a candidate's voting record, looked for information about a candidate's position on issues, or found out about endorsements or ratings of candidates			

¹⁹ To have enough people in each group to be comfortable making statistical statements, the cluster analysis was performed on respondents who said they have "ever" gone online for political news (43% of Internet users), which is a larger number of people who said they went online specifically for 2002 mid-term election information (22% of Internet users).

important, and perhaps principle, medium by which they pursue their interest.

2. *The Focused Researchers*: With a few gray hairs and with more (relative to the other groups) having the responsibility of kids and jobs, the “forty-something” group of political surfers betrays a certain “critical path” approach to their search patterns. They get what they want online efficiently. They are least likely to go to multiple Web sites, but are very successful in finding the information they need online. And this information can have an impact for this group. Although only 15% said the Net, in broad terms, played a very important role in their 2002 voting decisions, 25% say online political information made a difference for specific race.

3. *The Gray Grazers*: This group, the oldest and most heavily Republican of the three, is willing to explore the online environment, as about one-third have gone to four or more Web sites. They are least likely to be influenced by something they learned about the election races online, but still, about one in seven said the Internet made a difference in how they cast a vote. This group is using the Internet to supplement their political news gathering habits. Of the three groups, they are most likely, on a typical day, to read the newspaper or watch TV news, suggesting that they are still reliant on the “old” media for news about politics and elections.