

# The internet and the 2008 election

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**46% of Americans have used the internet to get political news and share their thoughts about the campaign. Online video and social networking sites have taken off, especially among Obama supporters**

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# Summary of Findings

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## **Fully 46% of all Americans have used the internet to get news about the campaigns, share their views, and mobilize others.**

The 2008 election campaign has sparked unprecedented interest within the electorate. Throughout the spring, surveys by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press have found that roughly one-third of Americans have been following news about the primary campaign very closely—a level of interest often not usually reached until the peak of election season. Within this context, large numbers of Americans are not only going online to learn about the campaigns, but are also taking an active role in promoting online conversations about politics and spreading news and information about their candidate of choice or the race in general.

In total, 46% of all adults are using the internet, email, or phone text messaging for political purposes in this election. That is the percentage of those who are doing at least one of the three major activities we probed—getting news and information about the campaign, using email to discuss campaign-related matters, or using phone texting for the same purpose.

- 40% of all Americans (internet users and non-users alike) have gotten news and information about this year's campaign via the internet.
- 19% of Americans go online once a week or more to do something related to the campaign, and 6% go online to engage politically on a daily basis.
- 23% of Americans say they receive emails urging them to support a candidate or discuss the campaign once a week or more.
- 10% of Americans use email to contribute to the political debate with a similar frequency.

This is the first survey in which we have asked about the use of text messaging for political reasons. While text messaging has not yet equaled the internet or email as a widespread political tool, we find that nearly one in ten text messaging users (representing 4% of all adults) are sending or receiving text messages about the campaign or other political issues on a regular basis.

This Pew Internet & American Life Project report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates between April 8 and May 11, 2008, among a sample of 2,251 adults, aged 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is +/- 2%. For results based Internet users (n=1,553), the margin of sampling error is +/- 3% . .

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**More Americans have gone online to get political news and campaign information so far than during all of 2004.**

At this point in the 2004 election cycle, 31% of Americans had used the internet to get political news and information. The jump to 40% who say this now is significant and is even more striking because the population of online political users is bigger than the number of Americans who had used the internet for politics during the entire 2004 campaign. Moreover, the proportion of Americans getting political news and information on any given day in the spring of 2008 has more than doubled compared with a similar period in 2004. In May and June of 2004, about 8% of adults were using the internet on a typical day to stay in touch with political developments. In April and May of this year, 17% of adults are getting political news online on a typical day.

<b>The Growth of Political News Consumption</b>					
<i>% of all adults who look online for news or information about the campaign...</i>					
	<b>Spring 2000</b>	<b>Fall 2000</b>	<b>Spring 2004</b>	<b>Fall 2004</b>	<b>Spring 2008</b>
Total	16%	23%	31%	34%	40%
On a typical day	3%	8%	8%	10%	17%

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys. Most recent is the Spring 2008 Survey. N=2,251. Margin of error is ±2%.*

**Two new internet activities have stormed the political stage: 35% of Americans have watched online videos related to the campaign, and 10% have used social networking sites to engage in political activity.**

After the 2004 presidential race, the Pew Internet Project asked a broad, general question about whether respondents had watched any kind of video about the campaign or the election, and 13% of adults said they had. This year we asked more questions because video has become such a commonplace activity online. We found that 35% of adults had watched some form of political video online so far.

We have also added questions about the role of social networking sites in politics to our survey this year and found that 10% of all Americans have used sites such as Facebook or MySpace for some kind of political activity. That amounts to 14% of internet users and fully 40% of those who have created profiles on such sites.

For young adults in particular these sites are a key component of the online political experience: 66% of internet users under the age of 30 have a social networking profile, and half of young profile owners use social networking sites to get or share information about the candidates and the campaign.

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### **Nearly one in ten internet users has donated money to a candidate online at this point in the race.**

At this point in the campaign, 8% of internet users (representing 6% of all adults) have donated money to a candidate online. This is a notable increase from the 3% of internet users (representing 2% of all adults) who had donated money online the first time we asked this question in our fall 2006 survey.

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### **Young voters tilt toward Obama specifically and toward the Democrats generally, and that gives the Democrats some online advantages.**

Young voters in our survey tend to gravitate toward the Democratic Party and the Obama campaign at greater rates than their elders, and their comfort engaging with the political world online is clearly in evidence in our survey. Online Democrats outpace Republicans in their consumption of online video (51% vs. 42%). Furthermore, Democrats are significantly ahead among social networking site profile creators: 36% of online Democrats have such profiles, compared with 21% of Republicans and 28% of independents.

Supporters of Democrat Barack Obama are the most in evidence in several key online activities. Among Democrats, his supporters are more likely than Hillary Clinton's to be internet users. And even among the internet users in both camps, Obama partisans are more active online political users than Clinton's supporters or John McCain's.

- 74% of wired Obama supporters have gotten political news and information online, compared with 57% of online Clinton supporters.
- In a head-to-head matchup with internet users who support Republican McCain, Obama's backers are more likely to get political news and information online (65% vs. 56%).

Among online Democrats, Obama's supporters are more likely than Clinton's supporters to have made online campaign contributions (17% vs. 8%), to sign online petitions (24% vs. 11%), to have passed along political commentaries in blogs and other forms (23% vs. 13%), and to have watched campaign videos of any kind (64% vs. 43%). Obama's backers are also more likely than McCain's partisans to have engaged in range of online campaign activities.

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### **39% of online Americans have used the internet to gain access to primary political documents and observe campaign events.**

There is evidence of significant citizen desire to access campaign materials directly. Fully 39% of internet users (29% of all adults) have gone online to read or watch "unfiltered" campaign material, which includes candidate debates, speeches/announcements, position

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papers, and speech transcripts. Obama's supporters are the most likely to have embraced these online activities.

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### **Despite the increased salience of online sources in the political debate, wired Americans have mixed views about the overall impact of the internet on politics.**

Although a respectable share of online Americans say that the internet has helped them to be more involved in the campaign and feel more personally connected to their candidate of choice, even larger numbers feel that the internet is a megaphone for extreme viewpoints and a source of misinformation for many voters.

<b>Internet users' views about the general role of the internet in politics</b>		
<i>% of internet users who agree/disagree with the following statements</i>		
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
The internet is full of misinformation and propaganda that too many voters believe is accurate	60%	32%
The news and information you get online is just the same as you can get anywhere else	48	47
The internet lets those with the loudest voices and most extreme positions drown out average people's views	35	56
The internet helps me feel more personally connected to my candidate or campaign of choice	28	67
I would not be as involved in this campaign as much if it weren't for the internet	22	74

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=1,553 internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.*

Wired Republicans are more likely than Democrats to have negative views about the internet, while online Democrats and young voters are more likely to agree with positive assertions about the impact of the internet.

## Summary of Findings

<b>The Internet and the 2008 Election: Summary of Findings at a Glance</b>
Fully 46% of all Americans have used the internet, email, or phone texting to get news about the campaigns, share their views, and mobilize others.
More Americans have gone online to get political news and campaign information so far than during all of 2004.
Two new internet activities have stormed the political stage: 35% of Americans have watched online videos related to the campaign, and 10% have used social networking sites to engage in political activity.
Nearly one in ten internet users has donated money to a candidate online at this point in the race.
Young voters tilt toward Obama specifically and toward Democrats generally, and that gives the Democrats some online advantages.
39% of online Americans have used the internet to gain access to primary political documents and observe campaign events.
Despite the increased salience of online sources in the political arena, wired Americans have mixed views about the overall impact of the internet on politics.
Source: Smith, Aaron, and Lee Rainie. <i>The internet and the 2008 election</i> . Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 15, 2008.

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# Acknowledgments

About the Pew Internet & American Life Project: The Pew Internet Project is an initiative of the Pew Research Center, a nonprofit “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. Pew Internet explores the impact of the internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care, and civic/political life. The Project is nonpartisan and takes no position on policy issues. Support for the project is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Project’s web site: <http://www.pewinternet.org>

About Princeton Survey Research Associates International: PSRAI conducted the survey that is covered in this report. It is an independent research company specializing in social and policy work. The firm designs, conducts, and analyzes surveys worldwide. Its expertise also includes qualitative research and content analysis. With offices in Princeton, NJ, and Washington, DC, PSRA serves the needs of clients around the nation and the world. The firm can be reached at 911 Commons Way, Princeton, NJ 08540, by telephone at 609-924-9204, by fax at 609-924-7499, or by email at [ResearchDC@PSRA.com](mailto:ResearchDC@PSRA.com).

# Part 1.

## The election online so far

The 2008 presidential election race has produced its share of internet firsts. Three of the Democratic candidates—John Edwards, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama—essentially declared their candidacies online. Obama has broken fundraising records, mostly through online contributions. Citizen questions for key party debates were solicited and delivered via videos posted on YouTube—including one from a snowman. Politics has its own channel on YouTube, and individual candidates also have their own channels. Libertarian Republican Ron Paul established a special presence online that sustained him through the early caucus and primary season.

The presidential candidates are now recruiting supporters through profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, and their supporters themselves are creating candidate communities on those sites. Indeed, Obama has integrated social networking online and offline as a core element of his outreach and mobilization.

In addition, a series of major news stories have been broken or given powerful urgency through online activity, including:

- Obama’s comments at a San Francisco fundraiser, when he said small-town voters have become “bitter” over job losses and that they “cling to guns or religion or antipathy,”<sup>1</sup> were first recorded as an MP3 and then published by a blogger Mayhill Fowler.<sup>1</sup> The event became a central narrative of the campaign heading into the Pennsylvania primary.
- Stories about the sermons by Obama’s preacher Jeremiah Wright were stirring as early as February 2007,<sup>2</sup> and then grew to blockbuster proportions when a story and tapes of him saying, “God damn America,” were posted by ABC News on March 13, 2008.<sup>3</sup> The story grew in power as Obama reacted to it; the sermons/reactions consumed the blogosphere and were viewed millions of times on YouTube. The ensuing furor led Obama to repudiate Wright and eventually to part ways with his church. As of June 10, Obama’s speech on racial issues in the wake of the controversy, which was posted by several people, had been viewed more than 6.5 million times on YouTube.
- Sermons by preacher John Hagee, a backer of Republican John McCain, came to prominence when liberal blogger Bruce Wilson posted an audio tape of Hagee

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mayhill-fowler/obama-exclusive-audio-on\\_b\\_96333.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mayhill-fowler/obama-exclusive-audio-on_b_96333.html)

<sup>2</sup> See [http://thenma.org/blogs/index.php/rush/2008/01/23/obama\\_vision\\_my\\_race\\_right\\_or\\_wrong](http://thenma.org/blogs/index.php/rush/2008/01/23/obama_vision_my_race_right_or_wrong)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/Story?id=4443788&page=1>

## Part 1. The election online so far

arguing that Hitler was a “divine agent sent by God to chase Europe’s Jews towards Palestine.”<sup>4</sup> That prompted McCain to break with Hagee.

- Clinton was challenged when she claimed that when she was First Lady she came under sniper fire during a trip to Bosnia in 1996, and that turned out not to be the case. The potency of the story grew when CBS tapes of the trip were posted on YouTube.
- The relationship between bloggers and candidates became more noteworthy. Unprecedented numbers of bloggers are being credentialed to cover the party conventions. Edwards first hired bloggers Amanda Marcotte and Melissa McEwan to promote his candidacy, but then let left the race when their previous controversial comments were unearthed and challenged by conservative bloggers.<sup>5</sup> McEwan referred to conservative Christians as “Christofascists,” and Marcotte said the Catholic Church’s prohibition on the use of birth control forced women to be “more tithing Catholics.”

Moreover, the punch-counterpunch rhythms of the campaign are now usually played out online in emails and videos rather than in faxed press releases and 30-second ads.

Added up, all this means that the bloggers, the growing activity on social networking sites, and the number of viewers of politically relevant YouTube videos have become a key part of at least some campaign events this election cycle. In addition, the technology-assisted developments are unfolding at the same time that younger, tech-embracing voters are playing a particularly prominent role at the ballot box, especially in the Democratic race. From the very first contests, voters between ages 18 and 30 have voted in greater numbers throughout the nation than in previous races.<sup>6</sup> And there is mounting evidence that they are blending their interest in Democratic matters with their enthusiasm for using the internet and cell phones.<sup>7</sup> In this season, just the 12th year of presidential politics online, there is no disputing the fact that the internet has moved from the periphery to the center of national politics.

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### **Some 40% of all adults have used the internet to get political news and information about the campaign so far, up from 31% at the same point in the 2004 presidential race.**

In a new survey, we find that the dramatic rise of the internet in politics continues and expands. There is a larger population of people going online to get political news and information at this point of the 2008 contest than at any time in the 2004 election. Some 40% of all adults have gone online to get political news and information at this stage of

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<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2008/5/15/141520/281>

<sup>5</sup> Broder, John M. “Candidate gets lesson in the perils of the Web.” New York Times, February 9, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See the analysis of the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/730/young-voters>

<sup>7</sup> See the analysis of the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/813/gen-dems> and <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=384>

## Part 1. The election online so far

the 2008 race, compared with 31% of adults who got political news and information at a similar point in the 2004 campaign. In keeping with the high level of overall interest about the 2008 campaign, we also find that wired Americans are going online for news about the race with a greater degree of regularity than in the past. Among internet users, 23% went online to look for news about the campaign on a typical day, compared with 13% at the same point in the 2004 race and just 7% in the spring of 2000.

<b>The Growth of Political News Consumption</b>					
<i>% who look online for news or information about the campaign...</i>					
	Spring 2000	Fall 2000	Spring 2004	Fall 2004	Spring 2008
<b>Among all adults (internet users and non-users)</b>					
Total	16%	23%	31%	34%	40%
On a typical day	3	8	8	10	17
<b>Among internet users</b>					
Total	34	43	49	58	55
On a typical day	7	16	13	18	23

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys. Most recent is the Spring 2008 Survey. N=2,251. Margin of error is ±2%.

Much of the growth in online news consumption since our spring 2004 survey has occurred among the young, those with college experience, and those who live in higher-income households.

Particularly notable is the rise in online political news consumption by African-Americans, 40% of whom (representing 67% of online African-Americans) now go online for news or information about the campaigns, up from just 19% at the same time period in the 2004 race.

It is also striking to note that there has not been much growth among those over the age of 50, those with less education, or those living in relatively less well-off households.

## Part 1. The election online so far

<b>Political News Consumers, 2004 vs. 2008</b>		
<i>% of all adults (internet users and non-users) who look online for news and information about politics or the campaigns</i>		
	Spring 2004	Spring 2008
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic	32%	40%
Black, non-Hispanic	19	40
Hispanic	31	43
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	36	50
30-49	37	51
50-64	31	36
65+	11	15
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	15	18
High school grad	18	24
Some college	39	49
College grad	51	65
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$30,000	18	22
\$30,000-\$49,999	34	41
\$50,000-\$74,999	44	51
\$75,000 or more	51	63

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys

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### **Americans are contributing regularly to the political conversation using the internet, email, and text messaging.**

In addition to capturing overall online news consumption, we also measure the intensity with which people engage in the online political debate by asking them how frequently they take part in the political process using the internet, email, and text messaging.

Internet users are going online with great regularity to learn more about the campaign and engage in political activities. One-quarter (27%) of internet users go online once a week or more to do something related to the campaign, and 8% do so once a day or more.

Email is also a key tool for facilitating the online conversation. Among those who use email, one-third (35%) receive emails related to the campaign at least once a week or more, and 14% of email users say that they receive politics- or campaign-related emails on a daily basis. While email is being used most frequently to receive news and

## Part 1. The election online so far

information, an additional 15% of email users are taking an active role by sending emails to their family or friends once a week or more, urging them to support a candidate or discuss the campaigns.

The third component of the online political discussion is text messaging, which we asked about in relation to politics for the first time in our spring survey. At the moment, text messaging is less of a factor in the political debate than the internet or email; 8% of those who use text messaging say that they send or receive text messages about the campaign or other political issues at least once a week.

<b>Online Political Engagement in the 2008 Race</b>	
<i>The percentage of all adults—internet users and non-users—in each group who use the internet, email, or text messaging to get news about politics or to exchange their views about the race</i>	
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	50%
Female	43
<b>Age</b>	
18-29	58
30-49	56
50-64	41
65+	20
<b>Annual Household Income</b>	
Less than \$30,000	28
\$30,000-\$49,999	47
\$50,000-\$74,999	56
\$75,000+	70
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White, non-Hispanic	47
Black, non-Hispanic	43
Hispanic (English-speaking)	50
<b>Education</b>	
Less than HS	19
HS grad	32
Some college	56
College grad	69

Source: Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=2,251. Margin of error is ±2%.

## Part 1. The election online so far

In total, this means that 63% of internet users—representing 46% of all adults—are going online or using email or text messaging to take part in the political conversation and get news or information about the campaigns.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This figure is obtained by counting the percentage of respondents who met one of the following four criteria: answered affirmatively to the question of whether they get news or information about this year's election campaigns on the internet or through email; send or receive email about the candidates or campaign once a week or more; send or receive text messages about the candidates or campaign once a week or more; or go online and do something related to the campaign once a week or more.

## Part 2.

### Beyond the sound bite

After a long trend toward less news coverage of candidates' words and policy positions, the online environment is offering engaged voters new chances to gather more comprehensive information about campaign events, candidates' speeches, and office-seekers' positions on issues. They are doing workarounds of "sound bite" culture by using the internet to view campaign events directly and to parse candidates' positions more fully.

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**Fully 35% of all adults have watched a politically related video so far. Some 16% of adults have read candidates' position papers online, and 9% have read the full text of a candidate's speech online.**

Internet users are seeking out and engaging in a wide range of activities related to the campaign. The biggest surge has come with the spread of online political videos, which were hardly a force in internet users' experience in 2004. Some 47% of online adults have watched at least one type of online political video (out of a list of five possible types of videos) in the past several months—this represents 35% of all adults.

<b>Political Media Consumption Online</b>		
<i>% who have in the past several months...</i>		
	<b>All adults</b>	<b>Internet users</b>
Watched campaign commercials online	22%	29%
Watched video online of candidate speeches or announcements	20	27
Watched video online of interviews with the candidates	19	26
Watched video online that did not come from a campaign or a news organization	18	25
Watched video online of the candidate debates	17	23
Read a candidate's position paper on an issue online	16	22
Read the full text of a candidate's speech online	9	12

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=2,251 for all adults, N=1,553 for internet users. Margin of error is ±2% for all adults and ±3% for internet users.*

Some of the video they are watching relates to material that was offered in news reports. At the same time, a large portion of it involves material that was not edited into news coverage. For instance, 27% of internet users have gone online to watch candidates' speeches or announcements, and one-quarter have watched campaign-related videos that did not come from a news organization or the campaigns themselves.

## Part 2. Beyond the sound bite

Additionally, about one in five internet users (18%) has gone online to read a candidate's position paper on a particular issue, and 12% have read the full text of a candidate's speech online. The full-population figures for each activity are 16% for position papers and 9% for speech texts.

Taken together, these activities represent a movement away from political news and information that is filtered by traditional "gatekeepers" such as campaigns and the mainstream news media and toward an environment in which citizens make decisions about politics based on their own interpretations of primary campaign materials. Fully 39% of internet users (29% of all adults) have gone online to read or watch "unfiltered" campaign material, which includes candidates' debates, speeches/announcements, position papers, and speech transcripts. That means a portion of voters are using the internet to learn more directly about campaign events that might have been comprehensively covered by traditional news media.

### Web 2.0 features have a wider audience.

Although watching political videos and reading campaign documents are the most common online political activities, a second key aspect of the 2008 elections is the extent to which people are contributing to the political conversation. This includes signing up to receive campaign information, posting their own political commentary, forwarding things they find online to their friends and family members, or donating their time and money to one of the campaigns.

One in ten adults has forwarded or posted commentary or writing they found online, and similar numbers have signed an online petition or signed up to receive email from one of the candidates or campaigns. In total, 30% of internet users and 22% of all adults have done at least one of the nine activities listed below at this point in the 2008 election cycle.

<b>Political Content Sharing and Creation</b>		
<i>% who have in the past several months...</i>		
	<b>All adults</b>	<b>Internet users</b>
Forwarded or posted someone else's political commentary or writing	11%	14%
Signed an online petition	10	13
Signed up to receive email from the candidates or campaigns	9	12
Forwarded or posted someone else's political audio or video recordings	6	9
Contributed money online to a candidate	6	8
Posted your own political commentary or writing to an online news group, website or blog	5	6
Created tags for news, information, or photos about politics or the election	2	3
Signed up online for any volunteer activities related to the campaign	2	3
Created or posted your own political video or audio recordings	<1	<1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=2,251 for all adults, N=1,553 for internet users. Margin of error is  $\pm 2\%$  for all adults and  $\pm 3\%$  for internet users.

## Part 2. Beyond the sound bite

Additionally, the number of potential voters going online to watch video clips about the candidates or campaigns has skyrocketed—from 13% of all adults in 2004 and 2006 to 35% today.<sup>9</sup>

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### Online activism with social media has jumped since the 2006 midterm elections.

Our 2008 spring tracking survey represents the second time we have asked respondents whether they are sharing or creating online political content, and there have been notable increases in these activities since the peak of the 2006 midterm elections. Most notably, the percentage of all adults who have forwarded or posted someone else's political commentary or writing has doubled, from 5% (7% of internet users) in fall 2006 to 11% (14% of internet users) in spring 2008.

<b>Growth in Political Content Sharing and Creation since Fall 2006</b>		
<i>% of all adults who have...</i>		
	<b>Fall 2006</b>	<b>Spring 2008</b>
Forward or post someone else's political commentary or writing	5%	11%
Sign up to receive email from the candidates or campaigns	3	9
Forward or post someone else's political audio or video recordings	3	6
Posted your own political commentary or writing to an online newsgroup, website or blog	3	5
Contributed money online to a candidate	2	6

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project surveys.

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### Young adults dominate political video consumption and content creation.

Even among those who are wired and politically engaged, young voters stand out compared with their elders based on their consumption of online political video and creation of unique political commentary and writing.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the wording of our online video question changed over this time period. In our previous politics surveys, online video users responded affirmatively that they had "Watched video clips about the candidates or the election that are available online"; in our spring 2008 survey, online video users include respondents who had watched one or more of five individual types of campaign video.

<b>Young Internet Users Are Prolific Online Video Watchers and Content Creators</b>				
<i>The percent of internet users in each age cohort who have in the past few months...</i>				
	<b>18-29 (n=212)</b>	<b>30-49 (n=565)</b>	<b>50-64 (n=470)</b>	<b>65+ (n=259)</b>
Watched campaign commercials online	37%	28%	26%	24%
Watched candidate speeches or announcements online	35	29	20	19
Watched interviews with candidates online	35	27	20	21
Watched online video that did not come from a campaign or news organization	35	25	20	14
Watch video online of the candidate debates	33	23	17	16
Posted your own political commentary or writing	12	5	3	2

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=1,553 internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

**Social networking sites are not just for friending candidates.**

One in three internet users has a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace, and 40% of these (representing 10% of all adults) have used these sites to engage in political activity of some kind. In keeping with the conversational nature of the online political debate, the most common of these activities is the simple act of discovering the personal interests or political affiliations of one’s own friends—29% of social networking users have done this, compared with one in ten who has signed up as a friend of one or more of the candidates or started/joined a political group.

<b>Social Networking and Politics</b>	
<i>% of social networking users who have...</i>	
Discovered your friends’ political interests or affiliations	29%
Gotten any campaign or candidate information	22
Signed up as a friend of any candidates	10
Started or joined a political group	9

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=409 social networking site users. Margin of error is ±5%.

Younger adults are more likely than their elders to have a profile on a social networking site (66% of wired 18- to 29-year-olds have at least one social networking profile, compared with 18% of those age 30 and older). Younger adults are also more likely to use these sites to get news and information about the campaigns and interface with the political process. Fully 32% of all 18- to 29-year-olds (and 49% of those with a social networking profile) have used a social networking site for political reasons.

## Part 2. Beyond the sound bite

<b>Using Social Networking Sites for Political News and Info</b>		
<i>% of social networking users who have...</i>		
	<b>SNS users age 18-29 (n=152)</b>	<b>SNS users age 30+ (n=250)</b>
Discovered your friends' political interests or affiliations	37%	22%
Gotten any candidate or campaign information on the sites	28	17
Signed up as a friend of any candidates	16	4
Started or joined a political group	15	4
Have done any of these using a social networking site	49	32

Source: *Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey*. N=409 social networking site users. Margin of error is  $\pm 5\%$ .

## Part 3.

### Partisan story

Younger online political users tilt in favor of the Democrats in general and Obama in particular, and that has a bearing on the partisan breakdown of online activity. Simply put, Democrats and Obama backers are more in evidence on the internet than backers of other candidates or parties. Among Democrats, Obama's supporters are more likely than Clinton's supporters to be internet users—82% vs. 71%. And even among the internet users in both camps, Obama's supporters are more actively engaged online than Clinton's supporters—three-quarters of online Obama's supporters (74%) have gotten political news and information online, compared with 57% of online Clinton's supporters.

In a head-to-head matchup against Republican John McCain in the fall, Obama also has some online advantages. Obama and McCain supporters are equally likely to use the internet, but some 65% of online Obama's supporters in a fall contest say they get political news and information on the internet, compared with 56% of online McCain's supporters.

At the level of party partisanship, there are few differences on basic measures such as using the internet or going online to look for political news and information:

- 78% of Republicans, 74% of Democrats, and 76% of independents go online.
- Among internet users, 55% of Republicans, 61% of Democrats, and 56% of independents look online for news about politics or the 2008 campaigns.
- Overall, 49% of Republicans, 50% of Democrats, and 48% of independents use the internet, email, or text messaging to learn about the campaign and engage in the political process.

Yet despite these outward similarities, wired Democrats are outpacing online Republicans in their usage of the internet for political reasons—from social networking to watching online video to contributing money online to signing up for campaign-related email. In large part, these differences result from the relative youth of those who self-identify as Democrats. Young Democrats and Republicans utilize tools such as online video at similar rates, but this youthful, tech-savvy cohort of voters makes up a larger proportion of all Democrats.

The relatively small sample of wired Democrats in our survey prevents a robust age-based analysis of Obama and Clinton supporters, although a similar phenomenon is likely in evidence within the Democratic primary race.

**Obama supporters outnumber Clinton supporters in their use of online video for political purposes.**

At this stage in the election, Democrats and independents are making greater use of online video sites as sources of political information. Half (51%) of wired Democrats and independents have watched at least one type of political campaign video, compared with 42% of wired Republicans.

Among Democrats, Obama supporters outpace Clinton supporters in their use of online video sites for political material. Among Democrats who go online, Obama’s supporters are more likely than Clinton’s supporters to watch campaign speeches and commercials, candidate interviews, debates and video from outside the campaigns or news organizations. Because Obama’s supporters are more likely to go online to look for political information in the first place, these differences are even greater when comparing all Clinton and Obama supporters.

<b>Obama and Online Video</b>		
<i>% of online Democrats who have gone online in the past several months to...</i>		
	<b>Obama supporters (n=284)</b>	<b>Clinton supporters (n=232)</b>
Watched campaign speeches or announcements	45%	26%
Watched campaign commercials	41	31
Watched interviews with candidates	41	26
Watched video of the candidate debates	36	23
Watched video that did not come from a campaign or news organization	34	23
Have done any of these	64	43

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=516 online Democrats. Margin of error is ±5%. All differences between Clinton and Obama supporters are statistically significant.*

When paired in a head-to-head matchup with McCain, Obama still maintains clear advantages with respect to online video. Compared with those who would support McCain in a head-to-head matchup in the fall, wired Obama supporters are more likely to go online to watch campaign commercials (36% vs. 26%), candidate debates (29% vs. 21%), interviews (32% vs. 25%), and speeches or announcements (35% vs. 25%).

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**Led by Obama supporters, Democrats are increasingly using the web to bypass existing gatekeepers and seek out their own political “primary sources.”**

More often than Republicans, Democrats are bypassing the traditional media and the campaigns themselves to seek out raw campaign material such as speeches, position papers, and video of debates online. Fully 45% of online Democrats have done at least one of these activities thus far in the campaign cycle, compared with 34% of Republicans. Among Democrats, Obama’s supporters are leading this charge—57% of wired Obama supporters have sought out this type of information online, compared with 38% of online Clinton fans.

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**Obama supporters also lead the field in their use of “Politics 2.0” online tools.**

Relative to both Clinton and McCain supporters, Obama supporters use the internet in greater numbers to donate money and influence the online debate. Among Democratic online political users, Obama’s supporters are more likely than Clinton’s to forward political commentary to their friends and family, sign online petitions, and contribute money to their candidate online:

<b>Obama and Participatory Politics</b>		
<i>% of online Democrats who have in the past several months...</i>		
	<b>Obama supporters</b>	<b>Clinton supporters</b>
Signed an online petition	24%	11%
Forwarded someone else’s political commentary or writing	23	13
Contributed money to a candidate online	17	8

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=516 internet users. Margin of error is ±5%.*

In a head-to-head matchup with Republican McCain, Democrat Obama has similar advantages: among those who go online, his supporters are more likely to sign an online petition (18% have done so, compared with 11% of McCain supporters), sign up to receive emails from the candidates or campaigns (17% vs. 8%), contribute money online (13% vs. 5%), to post their own political commentary or writing (8% vs. 4%), and volunteer online for activities related to the campaign (5% vs. 2%). While Clinton’s online advantages are not as clear cut, her supporters are more likely than McCain’s supporters to sign up for candidate emails (16% vs. 10%) and to sign up online for campaign-related volunteer work (5% vs. 1%).

**Democratic supporters of both Clinton and Obama outpace Republicans in their adoption of social networking.**

More than one-third of online Democrats (36%) have a profile on a social networking site, significantly greater than the comparable figures for both Republicans (21%) and independents (28%). Interestingly, despite the pronounced age differences between Obama and Clinton partisans, the percentage of internet users in each group who have a social networking profile are within the margin of error for this survey (38% of online Obama supporters and 31% of online Clinton supporters have a social networking profile). While the sample size of social networking Democrats is too small for a robust comparison of Clinton and Obama supporters on this issue, Obama’s supporters are clearly more politically active social networking users than McCain’s supporters when the two candidates are compared head to head.

<b>Obama vs. McCain among Politically Active, Social Networking Internet Users</b>		
<i>Social networking usage by preferred candidate in a head-to-head fall matchup (among users of social networking sites)</i>		
	<b>Obama supporters (n=181)</b>	<b>McCain supporters (n=117)</b>
Have discovered friends' political interests or affiliations	34%	24%
Have gotten campaign or candidate information	27*	16
Have started or joined a political group	14*	6
Have signed up as a friend of any of the candidates	12	7

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=298 social networking site users. Margin of error is ±6%. Asterisk (\*) denotes statistically significant differences between Obama and McCain supporters.*

## Part 4.

### The impact of the internet

Overall, people have mixed views about the internet's influence on politics. Although many are using the internet in unprecedented numbers to learn about the election and to interact with candidates, campaigns, and other potential voters, their perceptions of the internet's influence on politics has some negative tones. A decent share of online adults say that the internet has helped them be more involved in the campaign and feel more personally connected to their candidate of choice, yet even larger numbers feel that the internet is a megaphone for extreme viewpoints and a source of misinformation for many voters.

<b>Internet Users' Views about the General Role of the Internet in Politics</b>		
<i>% of internet users who agree/disagree with these statements...</i>		
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
The internet is full of misinformation and propaganda that too many voters believe is accurate	60%	32%
The news and information you get online is just the same as you can get anywhere else	48	47
The internet lets those with the loudest voices and most extreme positions drown out average people's views	35	56
The internet helps me feel more personally connected to my candidate or campaign of choice	28	67
I would not be as involved in this campaign as much if it weren't for the internet	22	74

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=1,553 internet users. Margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ .

These questions were asked of all internet users, and it is striking to see that the subset of those who are politically engaged online are more likely to have both positive and negative views than internet users who are not politically engaged. Some 64% of those who are politically engaged through the internet, email, and text messaging think the internet is full of misinformation that their fellow citizens are gullible enough to believe, compared with 54% among those who are not politically engaged online.

At the same time, 37% of those who politically engaged online say the internet helps them feel more personally connected with the candidates or the campaign, compared with 13% of those who are politically disengaged. And 30% of those go online for political purposes say they would not be as involved in this election if it weren't for the internet, compared with just 9% of the politically disengaged who say that.

## Part 4. The impact of the internet

Among the young, though, opinions are disproportionately positive, compared with their elders.

<b>Younger Internet Users See the Good Side of the Internet</b>				
<i>The percent of internet users in each age group who agree with these statements...</i>				
	<b>18-29</b>	<b>30-49</b>	<b>50-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
The internet helps me feel more personally connected to my candidate or campaign of choice	38%	29%	21%	18%
I would not be as involved in this campaign as much if it weren't for the internet	32	22	16	14

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring 2008 Survey. N=1,553 internet users. Margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ .

Internet users age 65 and older, by contrast, are the most likely age cohort to believe that extreme views drown out others online.

Another notable difference in attitudes about the role of the internet in politics is that between those who have social networking profiles and those who don't. Fully 42% of those who have created social networking profiles say the internet has helped them feel more personally connected to their candidate or the campaign, compared with 23% of non-profile-creators. And 30% of profile creators agree with the statement, "I would not be as involved in this campaign as much if it weren't for the internet." That compares to 19% of non-profile-creators.

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### **Democrats are more positive about the role of the internet.**

There are some partisan differences in responses to these questions about the role of the internet in politics. More online Republicans (66%) than online Democrats (58%) are likely to agree that the internet is full of misinformation that voters believe is accurate.

In contrast, online Democrats are more likely to say the internet helps them feel connected to their candidates and the campaign. Some 35% of wired Democrats agree with that, compared with 24% of Republicans and 28% of independents.

In contrast to online Republicans, both independents and Democrats who use the internet are more likely to agree with the statement, "I would not be as involved in this campaign as much if it weren't for the internet." One-quarter of online independents (26%) and Democrats (23%) subscribe to that view, versus 16% of Republicans.

## Part 5.

### 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 between April 8 to May 11, 2008, among a sample of 2,251 adults, age 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based internet users (n=1,553), 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.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of landline telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States (no cell phones were included in this sample). The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each household received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

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

These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

**Table 1: Sample Disposition**

22,996	Total Numbers Dialed
1,396	Business / Government
1,250	Computer/Fax
8	Cell phone
8,577	Other Not-Working
1,595	Additional projected NW
10,171	Working numbers
44.2%	Working Rate
474	No Answer
58	Busy
821	Answering Machine
100	Other Non-Contact
8,718	Contacted numbers
85.7%	Contact Rate
209	Callback
5,610	Refusal 1 - Refusal before eligibility status known
2,899	Cooperating numbers
33.3%	Cooperation Rate
356	Language Barrier
2,543	Eligible numbers
87.7%	Eligibility Rate
292	Incomplete
2,251	Complete
88.5%	Completion Rate
25.2%	Response Rate

PSRAI calculates a response rate as the product of three individual rates: the contact rate, the cooperation rate, and the completion rate. Of the residential numbers in the sample, 86 percent were contacted by an interviewer and 33 percent agreed to participate in the survey. Eighty-eight percent were found eligible for the interview. Furthermore, 89 percent of eligible respondents completed the interview. Therefore, the final response rate is 25 percent.