

Lorena O'English

Election 2008 resources

Political information online, networked, and in the social world

While ten years ago most people got their political information from candidates or traditional media sources, such as television and newspapers, over the last decade Americans have increasingly been turning to the Internet as a major source for information. In just the last few years, options have gone beyond online providers that are linked to print media to new resources that have been born digital, especially with the rapid growth of Weblogs and the interactivity and user-generated content now available through social networking and Web 2.0 services, such as YouTube and MySpace.

This article highlights a number of sites that may be of use to librarians and library users who are looking to get information not just about candidates but also about the political process in our increasingly online, networked, and social world. Most of these resources include RSS feeds for some if not all of their content, and many include public forums or blog comments from members of the general public. The notion of a commenting culture is alive and well in the realm of online political information.

Background and general election information

- **Campaigns & Elections.** *Campaigns & Elections* is a trade magazine for political professionals that is published ten times each



year. Each issue includes feature articles, profiles, and news about the profession. The site includes some free resources, including a political blog directory. *Access:* <http://www.campaignsandelections.com>.

- **The Campaign Legal Center.** This nonprofit, nonpartisan center follows and initiates legal action on issues, including campaign finance, election law, political communication and ethics. The site includes a blog, weekly reports, and links to related articles, court cases, and legislation. *Access:* <http://www.camlc.org/>.



- **Federal Election Commission.** This site provides information about legal and regulatory rules relating to federal campaign finance issues. Its searchable Disclosure Database is the original source of all the campaign finance data provided by other groups. *Access:* <http://www.fec.gov/index.shtml>.

- **The University of Michigan Documents Center: Elections 2008.** This metasite is part of the University of Michigan Documents Center site. Topics include background information; presidential, congressional, and state candidates; campaign links; policy issues; resources on elections and voting; and links to scholarly sources

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for further research. Access: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/elec2008.html>.

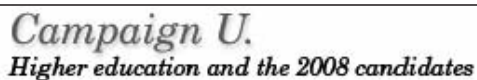


- **U.S. Census Bureau: Voting and Registration.** This government site provides voting and registration statistics from population surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, along with population estimates, historical time-series data, and research reports. Access: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html>.

- **Vote411.** This site is sponsored by the League of Women Voters Education Fund, and provides information at the state level for absentee voting, election dates, voter registration, voting machines, eligibility requirements, and more. Access: <http://vote411.org>.

Political news

- **Campaign U.** This freely accessible blog, published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, provides links to articles focusing on the 2008 elections as they affect students, colleges and universities, and higher education policy. The site also provides summaries of relevant scholarly publications. Access: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/election/>.



- **CQPolitics.** A free news site provided by *Congressional Quarterly (CQ)* with political news, political blogs (such as Taegan Goddard's Political Wire) and articles. The site includes a political toolkit with links to other Web sites that have a connection to *CQ*, as well as links to non-*CQ* "Web Picks." Visitors can also sign up for free newsletters. Access: <http://www.cqpolitics.com>.

- **Indecision 2008.** Research has shown that many people, especially younger voters, get much of their political news from television comedy and talk shows, such as the "Daily Show." Comedy Central's Indeci-

sion 2008 Web site provides video clips, interviews, a political news blog, and other campaign coverage and resources. Access: <http://www.indecision2008.com>.

- **Politico and Campus Politico.** This extensive political news site from Capital News Company covers the presidential campaign and other political events and issues. The site includes video clips and an open forum for commentary. Campus Politico focuses on college-age voters, and includes links to social networking sites and downloadable widgets that provide updated blog postings from Politico writers. Access: <http://www.politico.com/campuspolitico/>.

- **PoliticsWest.** The 2008 Democratic National Convention will be held in Denver, and this site is an excellent starting point to keep up with related news. In addition, the site tracks political news and issues in the western United States through news articles and opinion pieces. PoliticsWest is a project of the *Denver Post*. Access: <http://www.politicswest.com/>.

Fact checking

- **FactCheck.** From the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center, FactCheck.org evaluates the accuracy of campaign claims. Visitors can ask FactCheck specific questions, and can subscribe to the site via RSS or e-mail. FactCheck's archive extends back to 2003, covering the 2004 and 2006 campaign cycles. Access: <http://www.factcheck.org/>.



- **Politifact.** A project of the *St. Petersburg Times* and *CQ (Congressional Quarterly)*, this site uses scorecards, factsheets, and articles to review claims made by candidates (the Truth-O-Meter) and attacks from opponents



(the Attack File). The site includes rulings on some claims, using a six-point scale that ranges from “True” to “Pants on Fire.” *Access:* <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/>.

Candidate information

- **Map the Candidates.** The online magazine *Slate* uses a Google Maps mashup to trace the geography of the 2008 presidential campaign, tracking candidate travel and linking to videos and local coverage of campaign stops. *Access:* <http://www.slate.com/id/2175817/>.

- **Project Vote Smart.** One of the first political information sites on the Web, Project Vote Smart provides an extensive amount



of information about elected officials, including voting records (congressional and legislative), special interest

group performance evaluations, campaign finance data, and issue positions from the Political Courage Test (formerly known as the National Political Awareness Test). The site also provides general political information, including voter registration information, information on statewide ballot measures, and links to other resources. *Access:* <http://www.vote-smart.org>.

Technology and user-generated content

- **TechPresident.** This group blog, a project of the Personal Democracy Forum, focuses on how the Web is being used by presidential campaigns, and how the read-write, interactive nature of the Web allows the public to create content that becomes part of the campaign conversation. Partnering with the *New York Times* and MSNBC, the site sponsors 10Questions (www.10questions.com), where readers can propose questions to be asked of presidential candidates. The



tech **President**

top ten vote-getters are submitted to the candidates, and participating campaigns then provide a video response. The site also tracks candidate support on social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace. *Access:* <http://techpresident.com/>.

- **“The 51st State: The State of Online.”**

This article by Laura Gordon-Murnane appeared in the November/December issue of *Searcher* and has been made publically available. The article provides a listing of the technological and social features that are available on presidential campaign Web sites as of late summer 2007, and analyses how candidates, media, and voters are using these tools. *Access:* http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/nov07/Gordon-Murnane_51stState.pdf.

- **Wiki the Vote.** Wiki the Vote is an open, publicly edited encyclopedia of the 2008 elections. Registration is required for editing, and there are specific policies for editing that are overseen by a managing editor. The site includes candidate profiles, links to political Weblogs, and general election coverage. Wiki the Vote is a project of Congresspedia, which is sponsored by the Sunlight Foundation and the Center for Media and Democracy. *Access:* http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Wiki_the_Vote.



- **YouTube: You Choose '08.** In a departure from the traditional, formally televised presidential debates of the past, candidates are now responding to questions raised by citizens through videos posted on YouTube. This site includes videos of questions, candidate responses, and user-generated responses to the same questions asked of the candidates. The site also links to videos produced by individual campaigns. *Access:* <http://youtube.com/youchoose>.



Survey research and political polling

- **American National Election Studies (ANES).** ANES has been collecting data



about U.S. elections since 1948, creating a vast series of data and research reports about political participation and electoral behavior that are available through the site. *Access:* <http://www.electionstudies.org/>.

- **Pew Research Center.** While this is not a campaign site per se, many of the surveys and reports that the Pew Research Center publishes are relevant for anyone interested in campaigns and issues. Along with its popular Internet & American Life Project, the center conducts a number of projects providing resources on topics such as state news, social and demographic trends, Hispanic Americans, religion and public life, and global public opinion. *Access:* <http://www.pewresearch.org>.

- **Pollster.** Political polling permeates the political season, yet rarely is provided with any context beyond the basic horserace results. Pollster tracks, aggregates, and analyzes political polls (including presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial races). The

site provides links to other polling and survey research groups and resources, and has a very helpful FAQ page that explains how political polling is done. *Access:* <http://www.pollster.com>.

Money in politics

- **CampaignMoney.** This site allows visitors to find campaign finance data, including searching for contributions by zip code, individual name or address, and political action committees, as well as post opinions about candidates. Special reports include contributions made by celebrities, industries, companies, and more. *Access:* <http://www.campaignmoney.com/>.



- **Follow the Money.** A number of organizations provide data about federal-level campaign finance contributions, but the National Institute on Money in State Politics provides information on the state level by contributor and industry. The site also includes data on ballot measures and political parties, along with news releases and research reports focusing on campaign contributions and public policy. *Access:* <http://www.followthemoney.org/index.phtm>.

- **Open Secrets.** The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) supplies campaign finance information to other political information services, but its own Web site, Open Secrets, covers more territory. In addition to data about campaign contribution donors and recipients, lobbying, and advocacy group spending, the site includes databases covering financial disclosure, the revolving door between industry and government agencies, and congressional travel. CRP's online newsletter "Capital Eye" provides articles about the role of money in politics. *Access:* <http://opensecrets.org>.



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