



For Immediate Release: March 28, 2008

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Internet as Political Information Tool Popular, But Television Still Dominates, Annenberg Survey Finds

Despite the popularity of the Internet during this campaign season, television remains the top source among all age groups for obtaining information about the 2008 presidential campaign, according to data released today by the National Annenberg Election Survey of the University of Pennsylvania.

Most adults (89%) say they get information about the presidential race from broadcast or cable television. The numbers are similar regardless of age and education levels for broadcast and cable as a source of information.

Among all adults in the United States, more than two out of five (42%) say they have seen or heard presidential campaign information on the Internet in the week prior to being interviewed. The sources of that online information include Internet services, such as MSN.com, Yahoo.com and AOL.com, as well as online editions of newspapers, such as NYTimes.com, and broadcast outlets, such as CNN.com, FoxNews.com and MSNBC.com. (For additional information on sources, see Table 5.)

Data for this study were collected between January 11 and March 18, 2008 among 15,923 adults in the United States. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 0.8 percentage points for the sample overall. For subsamples within the study, the margins of sample error are larger, depending on the sample sizes of the groups being analyzed.

“In 2008, the Internet has become an integral part of the campaign,” said Ken Winneg, managing director of the National Annenberg Election Survey. “Prior to 2004, many of the activities associated with participation – such as discussing politics, persuading other people to support a candidate, watching political advertising and learning about the candidates – predominantly occurred offline. Now these activities can be done online.”

“Three in four adult Americans (76%) say they have Internet access either at home or work, so the opportunity and motive to utilize the web for political information and participation clearly exists,” said Winneg.

Young adults are three times more likely to turn to the Internet for their political information than adults 65 and older. Fifty-five percent of those 18 to 29 say they use the Internet for presidential campaign information, compared to 15 percent of those 65 and older.

Education levels also play a factor in Internet usage. People with at least a four-year college degree are 2.5 times more likely than those with a high school degree or less to have sought political information on the Internet (62% vs. 25%).

The survey also examined online political behaviors.

Ten percent of adults in the United States reported that they had discussed politics with people online in the past week. Among 18- to 29-year-olds, that number was 17 percent. Fourteen percent of adults overall had viewed online video about the presidential candidates or campaigns on sites such as YouTube in the week prior to when the respondent was asked the question; 26 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds had seen videos on such websites.

“Although television is still the predominant medium for getting political information, that lead may eventually weaken,” said Kate Kenski, a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and assistant professor of communication at the University of Arizona. “Considering that over half of young adults are using the Internet to obtain political information, the Internet should continue to capture a larger share of where people get their political information with each passing campaign cycle.”

For more information, see the Appendix below.

Appendix

Table 1. Media sources for information about the 2008 presidential campaign by demographic variables

	See information on broadcast or cable television		See or hear information on the Internet	
	%	N	%	N
Total	89.2%	15,731	41.9%	15,833
Men	90.4%	6,847	46.1%	6,879
Women	88.1%	8,884	38.1%	8,954
High school or less	86.8%	4,896	24.7%	4,969
Some college	91.0%	4,282	47.9%	4,292
College degree or more	90.9%	6,298	62.1%	6,306
18-29 years old	88.3%	1,244	54.9%	1,255
30-44 years old	88.7%	3,560	52.8%	3,563
45-64 years old	89.6%	6,798	40.1%	6,829
65 and older	90.0%	3,849	15.4%	3,897
Household income below \$35,000	86.4%	3,702	23.9%	3,738
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	90.9%	4,585	44.7%	4,607
\$75,000 and over	92.1%	5,349	59.1%	5,350
Whites	89.4%	13,089	42.4%	13,166
Blacks	91.9%	1,232	41.4%	1,236
Hispanics/Latinos	85.1%	1,076	29.7%	1,089
Northeast	88.9%	3,336	43.7%	3,344
Midwest	88.6%	3,845	40.2%	3,884
South	91.1%	5,219	40.2%	5,248
West	87.1%	3,331	44.3%	3,357
Urban	89.2%	4,632	44.5%	4,667
Suburban	90.0%	8,003	43.7%	8,056
Rural	86.9%	3,096	32.4%	3,110

Table 2. Political information from Internet activities by demographic variables

Percent of respondents in the past week doing the following activities:										
	Discussed politics with people online		Visited website of presidential candidate		Viewed video on sites like YouTube about the presidential candidates or campaign		Read or posted a comment on a blog having to do with politics or campaign		Forwarded emails, audio or video about presidential candidates or campaigns	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Total	10.2%	7,955	12.6%	7,950	14.1%	7,950	7.8%	7,949	12.5%	7,949
Men	10.9%	3,426	13.9%	3,423	16.9%	3,424	8.5%	3,420	12.5%	3,422
Women	9.7%	4,529	11.4%	4,527	11.5%	4,526	7.2%	4,529	12.5%	4,527
High school or less	5.9%	2,505	7.5%	2,505	8.9%	2,504	5.0%	2,504	6.7%	2,504
Some college	11.6%	2,184	13.6%	2,180	17.0%	2,183	8.9%	2,181	16.0%	2,181
College degree or more	15.3%	3,166	19.4%	3,165	19.0%	3,164	11.0%	3,165	17.7%	3,165
18-29 years old	17.1%	638	20.8%	637	26.4%	638	12.0%	635	13.4%	638
30-44 years old	10.6%	1,796	16.0%	1,794	17.9%	1,796	11.0%	1,797	13.2%	1,796
45-64 years old	8.7%	3,424	10.3%	3,423	10.0%	3,422	5.6%	3,424	12.9%	3,423
65 and older	5.9%	1,965	3.8%	1,963	4.5%	1,963	3.2%	1,961	9.7%	1,963
Household income below \$35,000	6.8%	1,893	7.2%	1,891	9.1%	1,891	4.9%	1,890	5.8%	1,893
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	11.2%	2,336	13.3%	2,333	14.7%	2,334	8.5%	2,333	12.3%	2,334
\$75,000 and over	13.4%	2,649	17.3%	2,648	18.7%	2,648	10.2%	2,649	20.3%	2,648
Whites	10.1%	6,589	11.9%	6,583	12.9%	6,584	7.1%	6,582	13.3%	6,582
Blacks	11.4%	666	16.8%	666	18.9%	666	12.0%	666	11.4%	666
Hispanics/Latinos	7.2%	540	11.0%	540	11.8%	540	10.1%	540	8.2%	540
Northeast	10.4%	1,666	13.9%	1,666	17.0%	1,666	10.5%	1,664	11.9%	1,666
Midwest	9.4%	1,996	10.7%	1,994	11.4%	1,994	5.8%	1,995	11.6%	1,995
South	10.3%	2,632	12.7%	2,630	13.3%	2,630	7.7%	2,630	12.7%	2,629
West	10.8%	1,661	13.1%	1,660	15.3%	1,660	7.4%	1,660	14.0%	1,659
Urban	11.8%	2,342	14.2%	2,341	17.4%	2,342	9.5%	2,342	12.4%	2,342
Suburban	9.9%	4,007	13.1%	4,005	13.9%	4,005	7.6%	4,004	13.4%	4,003
Rural	8.5%	1,606	8.5%	1,604	9.4%	1,603	5.5%	1,603	10.3%	1,604

Table 3. Media sources for information about the 2008 presidential campaign by party identification, ideology, and attention to campaign

	See information on broadcast or cable television		See or hear information on the Internet	
	%	N	%	N
Republican	90.3%	4,540	44.2%	4,578
Democrat	90.7%	5,547	40.3%	5,587
Independent	89.1%	4,406	43.2%	4,408
Conservative	89.3%	6,031	39.3%	6,080
Moderate	90.5%	4,953	40.8%	4,964
Liberal	89.9%	4,182	50.1%	4,200
Closely following the 2008 presidential campaign				
Very closely	94.7%	6,167	51.8%	6,174
Somewhat closely	91.3%	7,049	42.4%	7,095
Not too closely	81.5%	1,735	28.0%	1,757
Not closely at all	58.4%	700	15.6%	722

Table 4. Political information from Internet activities by party identification, ideology, and attention to campaign

Percent of respondents in the past week doing the following activities										
	Discussed politics with people online		Visited website of presidential candidate		Viewed video on sites like YouTube about the presidential candidates or campaign		Read or posted a comment on a blog having to do with politics or campaign		Forwarded emails, audio or video about presidential candidates or campaigns	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Republican	9.9%	2,283	12.6%	2,280	12.3%	2,280	6.2%	2,280	16.2%	2,281
Democrat	10.6%	2,818	14.1%	2,818	16.0%	2,817	8.8%	2,819	10.5%	2,816
Independent	10.6%	2,212	11.4%	2,210	14.8%	2,212	8.1%	2,209	11.6%	2,211
Conservative	9.2%	3,065	11.4%	3,061	12.5%	3,062	6.6%	3,063	14.6%	3,061
Moderate	8.5%	2,491	10.7%	2,489	12.8%	2,489	6.2%	2,488	10.2%	2,490
Liberal	14.8%	2,111	17.6%	2,112	19.1%	2,111	12.3%	2,109	13.2%	2,110
Closely following the 2008 presidential campaign										
Very closely	17.7%	3,069	21.8%	3,067	20.4%	3,068	12.7%	3,068	19.5%	3,068
Somewhat closely	8.0%	3,550	10.5%	3,549	13.7%	3,548	6.7%	3,548	11.2%	3,546
Not too closely	3.9%	896	3.2%	894	5.5%	894	2.1%	894	4.8%	895
Not closely at all	2.3%	398	0.8%	398	3.5%	398	2.9%	397	3.9%	398

Table 5: Source where people get MOST campaign information online

<i>In the past week, where did you get MOST of your information about the 2008 presidential campaign ONLINE?</i>	% giving source
MSN.com	12.2
AOL.com	8.1
CNN.com	10.1
Fox News.com	2.5
Google.com	3.8
Home Page	5.2
MSNBC.com	5.4
NYTimes.com	2.0
Yahoo.com	20.0
DrudgeReport.com	1.7
YouTube	1.4
Emails	1.2
Various sites with less than 1% (mix of blogs, political sites, and newspapers)	2.4
Other (mix of blogs, political sites, newspapers)	15.2
DK	8.8
TOTAL	100%
N	6,556

NOTE: Based on the 41.9% of respondents who say they went online for political information in the week prior to being interviewed.

The analysis for this release was conducted by Ken Winneg, managing director of the National Annenberg Election Survey, and Kate Kenski, Ph.D., a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Arizona.

About the Survey

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. It is the largest academic election survey being conducted during the 2008 campaign. It ultimately will include between 45,000 and 50,000 rolling cross-section telephone interviews (one interview per respondent) and almost 100,000 web interviews (including up to five interviews with the same person) as the campaign evolves. The first web wave began in October 2007; the final interviews will be completed following the general election, November 4, 2008.

National Annenberg Election Surveys also were conducted in 2000 and 2004.

The 2008 survey, as with past NAES polls, will examine a wide range of political attitudes about candidates, issues and the traits Americans want in a president. It will also place a particular emphasis on the effects of media exposure through campaign commercials and news from radio, television, newspapers and the internet. Additionally, the survey measures the effects of other kinds of political communication, from conversations at home and on the job to various efforts by campaigns to influence potential voters.

Methodology

Data for this analysis comes from the NAES rolling cross-sectional telephone survey. The field period ran from January 11 through March 18, 2008. The total number of respondents interviewed during this period was 15,923.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education. The sample sizes reported in the tables, however, are the unweighted number of cases.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

Questions

Thinking now about the past week how many days did you see information on broadcast or cable television about the 2008 presidential campaign? This includes seeing programs on television, on the internet, your cellphone, iPod, or PDA .

On another subject, do you have access to the Internet at home, at work or someplace else?

[Asked only of those with Internet access]

How many days in the past week did you see or hear information about the 2008 presidential campaign on the Internet, this may include accessing the Internet through your cell phone, iPod, or PDA ?

[Asked only of those with Internet access who had seen or heard information about 2008 presidential campaign on the Internet]

In the past week, where did you get most of your information about the 2008 presidential campaign online?

[Asked of random one half of sample who had Internet access]

I'm going to read you a list of some things people can do online. For each one, please tell me if that is something you have done in the past week. (READ ITEMS)

In the past week...

Did you discuss politics online with people over email, in chat rooms, using message boards, forums or instant messaging services?

Have you visited a website of a presidential campaign or political party?

Have you viewed video on sites like YouTube about the presidential candidates or campaign?

Have you read or posted a comment on a blog having to do with politics or a campaign?

Have you forwarded any emails, audio or video about presidential candidates or campaigns to friends, families, co-workers or other people you know?

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