

Data Memo

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RE: Politics online
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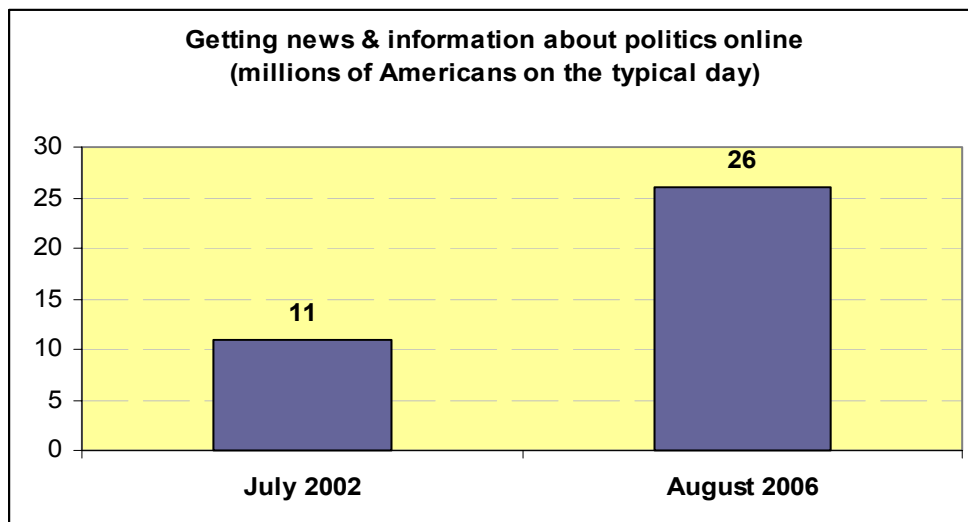
26 million Americans were logging onto for news or information about the campaign on a typical day in August, the highest such figure recorded by the Pew Internet Project

On a typical day in August, 26 million Americans were using the internet for news or information about politics and the upcoming mid-term elections. That corresponds to 19% of adult internet users, or 13% of all Americans over the age of 18.

This is a high-point in the number of internet users turning to cyberspace on the average day for political news or information, exceeding the 21 million figure registered in a Pew Internet Project survey during the November 2004 general election campaign.¹

Comparing August 2006 figures to a similar point in the 2002 mid-term election cycle is particularly revealing. In July 2002, approximately 11 million Americans, or 13% of online users, said they got some news or information about politics and the campaign from the internet on the average day. The August 2006 number is nearly two-and-a-half times larger than the mid-summer 2002 figure.

Comparing use of the internet for political news during mid-term elections, 2002 and 2006



¹ In November 2004, 18% of online users said they logged on for political news on the typical day. Because more Americans were internet users in August 2006 than in November 2004 (by a 68% to 59% margin), this translates into a greater number of people doing using the internet for news and information about politics on the average day.

The rising use of the internet to get political information is notable for two reasons. First, the telephone survey that captured the finding was conducted in August, usually a month of relative quiet in the political world. Second, mid-term elections campaigns tend to draw much less public interest than those that take place in presidential election years.

Any number of reasons could be behind the increase in people turning to the internet for news about politics and the mid-term election campaign. More attractive internet content about politics – from established news organizations, campaigns, independent media, and interested citizens – may have drawn more users to the Web for this information.

Changing internet adoption patterns since 2002 also have something to do with the growth in the number of people turning to the internet for political news. More people are online today than in 2002. In July 2002, 59% of Americans identified themselves as internet users, a figure that rose to 68% in August 2006. The means of access changed as well. Just 12% of adult Americans had high-speed internet connections at home in July 2002, less than a third of the figure in our August 2006 survey, when 41% of U.S. adults said they had broadband internet connections at home. Having a home broadband connection tends to draw users to the internet for their information needs. Absent the increase in home broadband penetration that occurred between 2002 and 2006, we estimate that use of the internet for news and information about politics would be approximately 30% lower than our August 2006 figures show.²

Different levels of interest in the campaign in 2006 compared to 2002 are probably not much of a factor behind the increase. In June 2006, 38% of registered voters said they were more enthusiastic than usual about voting this year, slightly lower than the 41% of registered voters who said this in June 2002.³

Demographically, those who said they got political news online on the typical day in August 2006 are more likely than the average internet user to be male (62% versus 48% for all online users), college graduates (55% versus 36% for all online users), and home broadband users (77% versus 61% for all online users). “Typical day” political surfers are only slightly younger than average internet users.

These results come from a nationally-representative telephone survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project from August 1 – August 31 of 3,001 adults. The portion of the survey that covered political activity online was administered to 1,021 internet users. The margin of error on the internet sample is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

The Pew Internet Project is a non-partisan, non-profit research center that examines the social impact of the internet. It is part of the Pew Research Center and is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

² This number is derived from a logistic regression model that predicts the likelihood an internet user gets political news and information online on a typical day, given a variety of demographic characteristics and type of connection speed. Comparing the model’s predictions using 2006 and 2002 broadband penetration rates shows that 30% of the likelihood in 2006 of using the internet for political news and information is attributable to the higher 2006 home high-speed penetration rate.

³ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Democrats More Eager to Vote, But Unhappy with Party*. June 27, 2006. Available online at: <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=279>.

Questions and data

August 2006 Daily Tracking Survey Final Topline 9/7/06

Data for August 1 – 31, 2006

Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the Pew Internet & American Life Project

Sample: *n* = 3,001 adults 18 and older

Interviewing dates: 8.1.06 – 8.31.06

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on the full sample [n=3,001]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,994]

WEB1 Please tell me if you ever use the internet to do any of the following things. Do you ever use the internet to.../Did you happen to do this **yesterday**, or not?⁴

Asked of internet users. N=1,021

	TOTAL HAVE EVER DONE THIS	----- DID YESTERDAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
Look online for news or information about politics or the upcoming campaigns ⁵				
Current	53	19	46	*
November 2004	58	18	42	*
May/June 2004	49	13	51	*
February 2004	46	13	54	*
Nov 2002	40	13	60	*
Oct 2002	45	11	55	*
Sept 2002	42	9	57	*
June 26-July 26, 2002	43	9	57	0
Fall 2000	43	16	57	*
July-August 2000	30	8	70	*
May-June 2000	34	7	66	*
April 2000	34	7	66	*
March 2000	35	10	65	*

⁴ Prior to January 2005, question wording was "Please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever...?/Did you happen to do this yesterday, or not?"

⁵ Prior to August 2006, item wording was "Look for news or information about politics and the campaign"

Methodology

The 2006 data reported in this memo come from a survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between August 1, 2006 and August 31, 2006. For results based adult internet users (n=1,021), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. The November 2004 data is based on a survey of 2,200 Americans; the July 2002 data is based on a survey of 2,501 Americans.

The sample for the surveys is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. 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. The response rate for the August 2006 survey was 28%.