

**Study of Presidential Campaign Websites 2008**

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## **Introduction**

Since the mid 1990's presidential campaign websites have been an important component of campaigning for the presidency (Selnow 1998). Initially, websites were simplistic devices that resembled a campaign brochure or billboard (Davis 1999). However, by the 2000 campaign, candidates were developing websites with graphic images, photos, and interactive features that allowed the public to make campaign contributions and become volunteers (Bimber and Davis 2003).

Today, almost all candidates running for president have official websites that are used to solicit voters, communicate issue positions, recruit volunteers, raise money, and project candidate images. Campaigning online is now as much a part of the presidential campaign process as television advertising and presidential debates.

The features found on campaign websites provide a good way to understand the functions of the online campaign in a presidential election and the strategies employed to attract voters. Websites provide a means for candidates to tell voters about themselves, identify their issue positions, stress accomplishments, contrast themselves with their opponents, and highlight endorsements. Websites also afford an opportunity for citizens to become cyber-activists by donating money, and sending email messages to the candidates.

Each new presidential election affords an opportunity to test which web features are becoming permanent aspects of presidential campaigns and which ones are only around for one or two elections. For example, web features aimed at raising funds and recruiting volunteers appear on almost all candidate websites and are becoming a major staple of

presidential campaigns, while guestbooks, and town hall meetings are no longer prominent.

In addition, new technologies enable candidates to operate differently than in traditional mass media. The Web provides a means for candidates to disseminate a wide variety of information without regard for space limitations found in television, radio, and newspapers. It also allows for two-way communications between the candidates and the public. Through the use of devices such as, RSS feeds<sup>1</sup>, text messaging, and podcasting candidates can extend the campaign beyond the website to portable devices, such as, iPods and cell phones, and enables the public to automatically be updated with campaign information sent directly to their cell phones and computers (Bimber and Davis 2003).

Using campaign websites, candidates have the potential to dramatically alter the way campaigns are conducted in this country. They can improve the flow of information to the citizenry and between the candidates and the public. They can also dramatically increase the quality of information available to the voting public. However, the extent to which candidates and the public are taking advantage of these new technologies has not yet been adequately studied.

This study investigates the use of the Web by candidates running for president in 2008. It examines the content of websites of the two major party candidates running for president. It seeks to answer the following questions: What specific content is found on campaign websites? What campaign functions are served by these websites? What issues are emphasized on campaign websites? To what extent do candidates make use of

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<sup>1</sup> RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a format for sharing and distributing Web content. It is frequently used to publish updated digital content, such as blogs, news feeds or podcasts

the Web's unique features and advanced technologies on their websites? Do campaign websites differ by party, or first or second tier status?

### **Literature Review**

Over the past ten years, the way political candidates have used the Web for campaigning has evolved significantly. From the “brochureware”<sup>2</sup> websites to the interactivity of blogs, the Web has evolved into an essential aspect of campaign strategy for most candidates running for high visibility office. The growing popularity of the Web is evidenced by the fact that in 2006, 97% of Senatorial candidates used websites, compared to only 55% in 2002 (The Bivings Group 2006).

Despite optimistic predictions about the role of the Web in election campaigns, this new technology has done little to revolutionize American politics. It has not equalized the political playing field, led to a significant increase in voter participation, or provided greater exposure for third party candidates (Bimber and Davis 2003). For example, the Web is not increasing public interest in politics or voter turnout. “Surveys showed that the audience of any particular campaign web site is likely to be overwhelmingly composed of knowledgeable, interested, partisan supporters of the candidate” (Bimber and Davis 2003:123). At best, it can be said that cyber-politics is able to activate those who are already interested in politics, and motivated to participate in election campaigns. It is also useful for supporters to network with campaign staff and each other.

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<sup>2</sup> In the lexicon of web design a pejorative term that refers to a website or page that replicates the features of a printed brochure and translates them directly to the Web. It is often used to describe a website that is static and uninteresting.

The Web was first used in 1992 by the Clinton-Gore campaign. Their website included the full text of their speeches, political ads, position papers, and biographies. While it represented a large quantity of information, it was not an interactive website.

Most websites in the 1990s were set up to help candidates win by transmitting information that the candidates could control. This was not much different than print or broadcast media (Stomer-Galley 2000). It led Davis to predict that the Web would not be a revolutionary tool capable of altering the political power structures and expanding political participation. Instead, in 1999 he argued that in the future the Web would be dominated by the same political elites who currently hold power. In 2002, this prediction seemed to becoming true. The candidates with the highest quality web sites were incumbents from the two major parties (Latimer 2005; Davis 1999).

In 1996 the Web became a more interactive medium. Lamar Alexander was the first presidential candidate to make his website interactive by engaging in on-line discussion sessions with voters (Davis 1999). However, this did not start a trend of websites designed for interactive communications with the public. In a study of 100 candidate websites in 1996, Davis found that only three candidates had bulletin boards and only two had electronic town hall meetings. This led him to conclude that the primary function of candidate websites was to disseminate information about campaigns and not to engage in two-way communication with the public.

Davis also reported that interaction with the public was not especially useful for the candidates. Email contact with visitors to their websites produced mostly messages from non-constituents, while requests for volunteers and donations went mostly

unanswered. The novelty of the technology and the lack of confidence in the security of the Internet may have contributed to these disappointing results (Davis 1999).

In 1996 incumbents of the two major parties had the political advantages in the use of the Web. Incumbents had government websites in place before their campaigns began. They could also maintain two websites during the campaign, an official government site and a campaign site. Challengers were at a disadvantage because they had to design and finance their own campaign sites. The only advantage for challengers was that they could be more political on their websites. Incumbents could not be partisan on official government websites.

Even though the low cost of campaign websites is said to create an even playing field, candidates of third parties, who lacked money and resources, are still disadvantaged in any election campaign. Since the media focus more attention on well know candidates, this reinforces voter interest in the Republican and Democratic candidates. Also, the candidates with more money are able to afford professional who can design better websites (Davis 1999).

By the 2000 presidential election campaign, candidate websites were still being described as “brochures in the sky.”<sup>3</sup> These websites were still largely created by volunteers and rarely updated (Ireland and Tajitso 2001). According to Bimber and Davis (2003), candidates used their websites to present their qualifications for office mainly by demonstrating their experiences in politics. They also tried to identify with the voters by presenting their personal histories with pictures of their families. The

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<sup>3</sup> See note 2 on brochureware. This is a similar description suggesting that website design was not very creative or interesting.

candidates also attempted to establish empathy with voters by posting issue positions on their websites.

Most candidates structured their websites with their supporters in mind, rather than the uncommitted voters and journalists who were frequent website visitors (Bimber and Davis 2003). Candidates used their websites to encourage supporters to donate, become volunteers, and display signs and posters that could be downloaded off the websites. They also encouraged supporters to endorse the candidate in an email to the media, and friend who might still be undecided. Candidates also utilized their websites to reinforce their political messages to supporters by spinning events in updated news message sent through a listserv (Davis 2005).

Although campaign websites were not designed primarily for undecided voters and journalists, these two groups were able to make good use of the presidential campaign websites in 2000. The undecided public visited the issues sections of the sites and also read candidates' biographies. Journalists were able to acquire press information and photos off the campaign sites. This helped them in promoting candidate websites through traditional media.

Interactivity also expanded only slightly during the 2000 election campaign. Instant messaging and chat rooms were made available on Al Gore's website so that his supporters could network, but the effort did little to get more people politically engaged (Davis 2005). Also, in 2000 the candidates in the presidential election campaign promoted voter registration and voting by posting and emailing reminders to vote. This proved highly successful according to a survey reported by Bimber and Davis (2003). In 2000, 84% of those who visited candidate websites said they voted.

By the 2000 election it seemed clear to researchers and web consultants that a number of changes were needed in Web content. First, candidates' websites had to promote the whole campaign, from fundraising to mailings to presenting audio, video, and text media. Second, these websites had to be timely and responsive to the voters. Not only did the information need to be kept current to encourage voters to return more than once or twice, but also staff had to respond to emails within 48 hours. Third, websites needed to make volunteering easier by creating several places on the websites to sign-up. Fourth, candidates needed to do a better job of respecting potential voters when they visited their websites. They could not constantly ask for money and spam them with email messages. The campaigns also needed to ask permission of the visitors before sending newsletters and updates. Fifth, campaign websites needed to provide visitors with sample letters that they could send to friends and editors. Sixth, candidates had to stop relying on volunteers to design and manage their websites. Instead, they needed to hire full-time experts to take care of these website functions (Ireland and Tajitso 2001).

By the 2004 election, candidate websites became more interactive. They emphasized recruiting volunteers, and asking supporters to send endorsement letters to newspaper editors and talk radio hosts. Presidential campaign websites also enabled constituents to arrange house parties, formulate lists of volunteers to canvass neighborhoods, and create virtual precincts.

For the first time in a presidential campaign, both Bush and Kerry included video clips on their websites. These contained attack ads and issue ads that never aired on television (Postelnicu, Martin, and Landreville 2006). Also, this was the first presidential election campaign in which the Web became a significant source of campaign contributions.



While George W. Bush only raised \$14 million from online donations, John Kerry managed to raise six times more--\$82 million (Davis 2005).

In the 2006 mid-term elections, the Bivings Group examined how websites were used in the U.S. senatorial campaigns. They found that the majority of senatorial candidate websites included news, biographies, contact information, volunteer forms, and opportunities to donate. Interestingly, only 23% of the websites had blogs, and 55% of website included audio and video clips. The authors reason that Senatorial candidates either do not have the time to blog, or they perceive it as politically risky and an unproven campaign tool (The Bivings Group 2006).

With Web campaigns on the American political scene for 15 years, there are certainly advantages and disadvantages that have developed for both the candidates and the voters. For the candidates, the websites are a significantly cheaper media with a largely expanding audience. Websites can serve as “one stop shopping” for information on a candidate. Websites can also distribute text and photos like a newspaper, and audio and video files like television. While a web campaign can provide a longer, more complete message to voters, it also allows the candidate to personalize and adapt their messages to their audience (Benoit and Benoit 2005).

The Web can also be used to promote candidate images and make connections to the voters by selling promotional materials (e.g., t-shirts, bumper stickers, and screensavers) and by posting family pictures and biographies that gave the voters the sense that they were being introduced to the daily lives of the candidates. These features of campaign websites were used in 2004 by both Bush and Kerry (Postelnicu et al 2006). Among other campaigns, Foot and Schneider (2006) found that more competitive campaigns with

higher per capita campaign expenditures were more likely to include features that not only informed but also involved and mobilized voters.

Despite these significant advantages, there are several disadvantages to Web campaigning. Although there are impressive numbers of people who have access to the Web, most choose not visit campaign websites. These are mostly people who are uninterested in politics (Davis 2005). A survey of Internet users by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 40% sought-out political information online during the presidential election campaign. While this was a substantial improvement in the numbers from the previous presidential campaign, it still meant that 60% did not use the Web for political information (2004).<sup>4</sup>

Another disadvantage of the Web for candidates is the problem of the digital divide. There are still many people who do not have access to the Web and many more who have slow Internet connections or older computers and may not be able to view video clips, animation or other multimedia presentation. These visitors to campaign websites may become frustrated with the technology (Benoit and Benoit 2005).

Finally, maintaining a website and providing daily updates can be costly (Benoit and Benoit 2005). In fact, Ireland and Tajitso (2001) recommended that at least 5% of a candidate's campaign budget be allocated for web design and maintenance.

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<sup>4</sup> Much has been made about the online audience. They tend to be affluent, educated, young, and highly interested in politics. They are a growing segment of the public and are depicted as an important component of American politics. They are said to constitute about 75 million citizens who get news online, discuss candidates in email, and participate in the political process by donating money and time through campaign websites (see, e.g., Pew Internet and American Life Project 2004; Bimber and Davis 2003).

Web campaigns also have advantages for the voters. Web campaigns can increase the quantity and quality of information for voters—audio and video clips, position papers, biographies. For supporters there are ways to volunteer, and donate. All of these features are only a click away. Web access is convenient, accessible, and increasingly available for most people (Benoit and Benoit 2005).

The challenge that remains for candidates using campaign websites is to get beyond the “brochure” style websites. It is important for candidates to take advantage of the unique features of the Web. Among these, interactivity is important for effective web campaigning. Candidate websites need to provide opportunities for visitors to volunteer, donate money, register to vote, discuss the issues, and to reach out to others via email in virtual discussions or blogs (Ireland and Tajitso 2001; Benoit and Benoit 2005). Providing for citizen interactivity is beginning to reap benefits for candidates who use it. According to Trammell et al. (2006), candidates who offer interactivity on their websites enhanced the users’ perception of candidate sensitivity, responsiveness, and trustworthiness.

### **Methodology**

Content analysis is the method used to analyze the websites of the 36 candidates running for president in 2008. Of the 36 websites, 15 were Democrats and 21 were Republicans. Candidates were selected from the 2008 Politics1 Guide to Presidential Candidates (Politics1.com 2008). This is a nonpartisan, public service website that specializes in election campaign information.

The coding categories for this study were based on prior coding scheme used by both Wilkerson (2002) and the Biving Group (2006). The web features consisted of 27

content categories and 59 issue categories.<sup>5</sup> Data collection was conducted in December of 2007.

Data collected from the 36 websites were entered into SPSS for analysis.<sup>6</sup> Descriptive statistics were generated and analyzed to develop an overall picture of the kind of website tools and issues that were used by candidates in the 2008 election. An independent sample t-test was run to examine the relationship between the two independent variables: party affiliation (Democrat or Republican) and candidate status (1<sup>st</sup> tier or 2<sup>nd</sup> tier)<sup>7</sup> and the dependent variables, the subject matter found in the website (web features, web functions, and issues).

## **Results**

### *Website Features*

Table 1 presents the distribution of web features displayed on all 36 presidential candidate websites analyzed in this study. The data shows that campaign websites contained a wide range of features. Most candidates used their websites to provide a biographical sketch of the candidate (92%), solicit campaign contributions (81%) and volunteers to the campaign (65%). The websites were also used as a way to encourage citizens to sign-up for email messages from the candidate (100%) and to contact the

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<sup>5</sup> The coding categories used in this study used a framework adopted from studies conducted by Wilkerson and Biving Group. Their categories were modified to fit the content discovered on the websites in this study.

<sup>6</sup> Both authors collected the data. Each coded half the campaign websites. A code sheet that included demographic information, content, and issues on each website constituted the data base. All website data was analyzed.

<sup>7</sup> Candidates who appeared in at least one nationally televised debate were listed in the 1st tier and all the others were labeled as 2nd tier. There were 18 candidates in each category.

campaign (76%). The website was also a place where candidates provided press releases (74%), stands on issues (57%), campaign blogs (54%), and merchandise for sale (46%).

In addition, many presidential candidates supplied voters with audio-visual materials. Pictures of the candidate on the campaign trail were presented in photo galleries (41%), and campaign ads and video clips of candidate appearances were found in video files (41%), while a few candidates also provided audio files (14%). The website was also a place to tell voters about campaign endorsements (32%), events schedules (35%), and try to convince supporters to endorse the candidate to a friend (39%).

Fewer candidates used their websites to provide links to other sites (19%), and convince citizens to endorse them to the media (11%). Although more than half (54%) had a blog, only a few candidates were involved in podcasting (8%).<sup>8</sup> Most blogs consisted of journaling on the part of the candidate or staff members describing the campaign. These campaign blogs were not characteristic of the typical blogs posted on the Internet. They did not contain links or a mechanism that allowed readers to leave comments or interact with the author. Also, there was little or no personal information on candidate blogs that enabled the reader to know something of the personality of the author (PC Magazine 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> These findings compare favorably to a study of Senate candidates in 2006 (Biving Group 2006). Using a three-tiered pattern of websites, they found that most candidates used tier 1 tools: biographies, contact information, donations, and volunteer information. Few candidates used tier 3 tools: blogs, podcasts and RSS feeds. The findings reported in the Senate study differ from those reported here in that they found fewer bloggers and candidates using audio and video files.

Only a few new features were found on websites in 2008. These included text messaging (5%)<sup>9</sup>, and social networking (51%)<sup>10</sup>. Two additional features which first appeared in the 2006 campaign were somewhat more prominent in 2008. These were RSS feeds (19%) and en espanol (16%). Whether these new features become permanent elements of campaign websites or disappear, only time will tell.

In the past, candidates have made use of a variety of features that are no longer being utilized on campaign websites. These include pop-up messages which were used to solicit donations, volunteers, and welcome visitors to the website; interactive tools such as, town hall meetings, surveys, guestbooks, bulletin boards, and chat rooms; information about staff, a children's page designed to encourage and entertain young visitors; and devices such as, counters and search engines (Gaziano and Liesen 2007).

### *Website Functions*

As noted in Table 2 the wide range of web features can be categorized into five campaign functions. These include: 1) providing information about the candidate, 2) mobilizing volunteers, 3) communicating with the public, 4) educating the public about the election, and 5) soliciting financial contributions.

For most presidential candidates in 2008, the main function of their websites is to communicate with potential voters. Visitors to the websites are encouraged to

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<sup>9</sup> Term used for text based communications that send short (160 or fewer characters) messages from one cell phone to another.

<sup>10</sup> Social networking establishes Web based communities (called personal networks) that help people make contacts with like-minded people. An individual joins a group and invites his or her friends, who do the same. Thus a large network is created. Examples include MySpace and Facebook.

communicate with the candidate and to engage with other people who also support the candidate. This can be done by joining websites such as MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook where candidate supporters try to create a cyber community that helps to reinforce support for the candidate.

The public is also encouraged to send emails with a question, comment, or suggestion for the candidate and to sign-up for email newsletters that provide up-dates on the activities of the campaign. Using modern technology, candidates attempt to get their message to voters by non-traditional means. They use blogs, podcasts, RSS feeds, and text messaging in order to continue campaigning away from the website.

Table 2 indicates that in 2008 soliciting campaign contributions is also an important function of campaign websites. In addition to asking for money, many candidates also encouraged supporters to buy merchandise online. Candidates offered items, such as, T-shirts, sweatshirts, campaign buttons, bumper stickers, mugs, and pennants.

The data in Table 2 also points to the importance of mobilization as a website function. Websites are used to encourage supporters to volunteer in the campaign in a variety of ways. They are recruited to work as traditional campaign volunteers through an online sign-up form that puts them in contact with the campaign staff. Supporters are also asked to download and exhibit campaign display media, such as, yard signs, posters, and bumper stickers. It is also possible for volunteers to participate in the campaign online by writing email messages to friends, and the media, asking for their support.

The Web has spawned a new type of volunteer, labeled e-volunteer or cyber-volunteer. These are people who participate in the campaign in an online capacity. Through the use of email and credit card purchasing they are able to play a part in the

campaign by contacting others, donating money, and buying campaign merchandise. It is now very easy for supporters of a candidate to participate in the campaign in this way.

Donating money is as simple as purchasing merchandise online and the letter writing task has been made easier by adopting practices used offline. Following the example of interest groups, candidates make available sample letters and postcards that can be copied and made to look as if they originated with the sender. This practice which has been used for many years by interest groups such as, the National Rifle Association to mobilize grassroots support is now a popular device of the campaign website to mobilize grassroots support (see, e.g., Klotz 2005).

Presidential campaign websites devote less attention to providing information about the candidates. Almost all candidates supplied biographies, and the majority included stands on issues, and press releases. Some also provided opponent information, achievements, photo galleries, endorsements, and audio and video clips in an attempt to project favorable candidate images, but it seems as if the image building function of a campaign is conducted through other mass media.

Less emphasis on candidate websites is given to performing an educational function. This role is performed primarily by offering non-partisan facts about registration and voting designed to help citizens cast a ballot. This information usually included location of polling places, contact numbers, registration information, and how to engage in early voting.

Also listed in the educational category are links and events schedules. Some candidates make suggestions about other websites that should be visited. Usually these are links to party organization websites and television, radio, and newspaper outlets. The



events schedule consisted of a calendar of times, dates and places where the candidate is scheduled to appear often with an opportunity for the viewer to RSVP the event via email.

A few candidates offered their website in Spanish in an attempt to appeal to the Latino vote. By clicking on an en espanol button the website can be transformed completely into Spanish. Much of the same information that is provided on the English website is made available to those who prefer reading and viewing video clips in Spanish. This educational feature which was first offered in the 2006 campaign seems to be featured on only the most highly visible candidate websites.

#### *Party Differences and Web Features*

Table 3 compares the use of web features by party affiliation. Overall, the data suggests that Democrats and Republicans used their campaign websites in similar ways. Only three items reached statistical significance, issues,  $t(34) = -2.333, p < .05$ , achievements,  $t(34) = -2.380, p < .05$  and the contact us features,  $t(34) = -2.953, p < .05$ .

Democrats were significantly more likely to present issue positions on their websites than Republicans. This may reflect the fact that 2008 is not a favorable year for Republicans. It may have caused them to feel more vulnerable and defensive, resulting in ignoring any discussion of the issues. Democrats were also more likely to include achievements, and the contact us features on their websites than Republicans. It is hard to understand why these differences occurred between the parties. Currently, there is not enough empirical data collected on the use of campaign website to explain these differences.

#### *First and Second Tier Candidates and the use of web features*

An examination of the differences between 1<sup>st</sup> tier and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier candidates and the use of web features is presented in Table 4. An independent sample t-test was used to compare the two groups. Table 4 shows that significant differences were found on eight variables: press releases,  $t(34) = -2.581, p < .05$ , video files,  $t(34) = -6.237, p < .001$ , selling merchandise on Web,  $t(34) = 5.169, p < .001$ , volunteer sign-ups,  $t(34) = -3.111, p < .01$ , tell a friend,  $t(34) = 3.554, p < .01$ , en espanol,  $t(34) = -2.915, p < .05$ , social networking,  $t(34) = -4.513, p < .01$ , and RSS feed,  $t(34) = -2.185, p < .05$ .

Not surprisingly, it is only the 1<sup>st</sup> tier candidates that display the more expensive features, such as video clips and campaign merchandise, as well as the more advanced technology items, such as, RSS feeds and en espanol. Some of these differences between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier candidates are probably accounted for by the popularity of the 1<sup>st</sup> tier candidates. The less well known candidates would probably not be able to generate much support from social networking or encouraging supporters to tell their friends to support the candidate. It may also be the result of having less traditional campaign organizational resources, such as, tech support in setting up a website or lack of experience in using the Web to reach potential voters.

#### *Party and Tier Differences on Web Functions*

Further analysis of web functions was done by examining mean score differences between Democrats and Republicans. Table 5 shows t-values for Democrats and Republicans on the four political functions. The data indicate that no significant party differences were found. In other words, Democrats and Republicans were very similar in the way they used their websites.

As Table 6 shows, the opposite result occurred when 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier candidates were compared. They differed on all four functions. The 1<sup>st</sup> tier candidates attempted to make maximum use of their websites to display candidate information, mobilize voters, communicate with citizens, and solicit contributions. In contrast, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier candidates were much less likely to do any of these things. They seem to focus mainly on use of the website to achieve name recognition, a logical first step in a candidate's relationship with potential voters.

### *Issues on Websites*

Table 7 lists the issues identified on the websites for all the candidates surveyed. Of the 59 issues listed, the one issue that stands out as dominant is the War in Iraq (75%). This issue of the War was followed by four domestic issues: education (61%), taxes (57%), health care (57%), and immigration (54%). More than a third of all presidential candidates identified seven more issues: gun control (38%), abortion (35%), Social Security (33%), national security (33%), global warming (30%), same sex marriage (30%), and the War on Terror (30%). These issues were followed by traditional values (27%), the budget deficit (22%), the economy (22%), and government ethics (22%). There was much less discussion of the environment (17%), veterans benefits (14%), the minimum wage (14%), gay rights (11%), NAFTA (11%), and the Patriot Act (11%). The rest of the issues were mentioned by only a few candidates.<sup>11</sup>

These findings are in marked contrast to some of those reported in the 2006 elections. Website data analysis suggested that only about one-fourth of the candidates emphasized

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<sup>11</sup> A study of campaign advertising in the 2000 presidential election reported that most of the same domestic issues found on campaign websites were the subject of campaign ads (Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004).

foreign policy issues. These included the War in Iraq, terrorism, and defense. In addition, few candidates spoke about controversial issues such as gay marriage, stem cell research, gun control, and immigration (Gaziano and Liesen 2007).

Some issues were entirely ignored by candidates running for president in 2008. Despite the controversial nature of the Bush Administration's War on Terror candidates did not choose to talk about issues such as domestic spying, the GITMO prison, or war profiteering.

On the domestic front many issues were also avoided: the national debt, hates crimes, racism, sex discrimination, interest group influence, and government gridlock. Other issues of general importance did not make the list for most candidates. These included: the trade deficit, unemployment, Homeland Security, welfare, child care, capital punishment, affirmative action, stem cell research, nuclear weapons, the War in Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, the UN, NATO, tort reform, and government corruption.

### *Party affiliation and Issues*

Table 8 presents the differences between Democrats and Republicans on the issues identified by the presidential candidates in 2008. Data from the content analysis revealed that party differences occurred on only 8 of the 59 issues found on candidates' websites. Independent sample t-tests show that Democrats and Republicans differed significantly on global warming,  $t(34) = 5.158, p < .001$ , minimum wage,  $t(34) = 3.149, p < .01$ , child abuse,  $t(34) = 2.689, p < .01$ , prescription drugs,  $t(34) = 2.227, p < .05$ , immigration,  $t(34) = 2.380, p < .05$ , taxes,  $t(34) = 2.766, p < .01$ , gun control,  $t(34) = 2.021, p < .05$ , and War in Iraq,  $t(34) = 2.234, p < .05$ .

Not surprisingly, Democrats prefer to talk about the domestic issues that have been identified with their party and help distinguish them from Republicans. These include, global warming, minimum wage, child abuse and prescription drug benefits. Similarly, Republicans choose the issues that seem to have benefited them in the past. These include: taxes, gun control, and immigration. As expected, Democratic candidates were more likely to raise the issue of the War in Iraq on their websites than Republicans. Polls show that Republicans have held an advantage over Democrats on national security matters since the 1960's, but lost that advantage in 2006 over the War in Iraq (Sandalow 2007).

On all the 51 other issues the scores varied only slightly and none were statistically significant. This suggests that there was a tendency for both Democrats and Republicans to use their websites to address the same issues. Also, candidates of both parties discussed issues in general rather than specific terms, using language similar to that found in party platforms (Democratic National Convention 2004). For example, most candidates preferred to talk about defense and education rather than a time-table for Iraq or specific provisions of the No Child Left Behind law. The centrist nature of the two parties and the desire to avoid issues associated with the ideological extremes in the U.S. appeared to discourage almost all candidates from discussing the vast majority of issues.

#### *1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Candidates and Issues*

Issues were also examined by whether candidates were in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> tier. Table 9 presents the issues identified by the candidates on both tiers. The statistical analysis shows that independent sample t-tests reached statistical significance on only one issue

education,  $t(34) = 2.986, p < .01$ . The issue of education was more likely to be raised by candidates in the 1<sup>st</sup> tier than those in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier.

The fact that only one issue reached statistical significance was surprising. It was generally thought that 2<sup>nd</sup> tier candidates would be entering the race with little or nothing to lose and would therefore be more willing to take stands on controversial issues or advocate issue positions that would be outside the main stream. However, this was not the case, suggesting that these unknown candidates enter the race for reasons other than disagreement with the major candidates on the issues.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Individual campaign websites were a prominent feature of candidates running for president in 2008. The vast majority of these candidates used campaign websites as part of their appeal to voters. The findings of this study indicate that websites are especially useful devices for communicating with potential voters. Candidates encourage visitors to use the Web as a source of information about the campaign by signing up for email newsletters, text messages, and by viewing campaign blogs. Visitors are also asked to participate in the campaign as financial contributors, and as traditional volunteers to work in the campaign off-line.

Apparently, the Web is viewed differently by most candidates running for president than traditional media, such, as television and radio. The primary emphasis on the Web is placed on communication, solicitation, and mobilization, in that order. This is in marked contrast to the traditional media which is used by presidential candidates for image building and contrasting themselves with their opponents on the issues (West 2005). This may be the result of the fact that voters who seeks political information on

the Web are younger, more educated, and willing to interact with the candidates than citizens who rely on traditional media (Pew Research Center 2008).

It is evident from the data gathered in this study that campaign websites have become an important source for soliciting campaign contributions. The publicity given to the success of online fundraising by previous presidential candidates such as, John McCain, and Howard Dean probably provided the impetus for so many candidates in 2008 to engage in online solicitation (Postelnicu 2006; Williams et al. 2005). The fundraising effort online appeared to be mostly low-key. Candidates either had a one or two sentence appeal or said nothing about donating and merely provided an online contribution form. This type of campaign solicitation seems to be a useful device for suggesting that the candidates have wide appeal among voters because the contributions are in small dominations, unlike the traditional fundraising methods such as, dinners, coffees, and direct mail appeals (Edsall 2006).

In the 2008 campaign it was reported that the leading Democratic candidates raised a third of their money through Internet contributions (Luo 2007). On the Republican side, Ron Paul broke records for raising money online even though he was never able to acquire more than a few percentage points of Republican voters in any of the primaries (Vargas 2007).

A notable characteristic of candidate websites is that they are remarkably similar in web content and appearance. Website similarities were not altered much by party affiliation, or candidate status. Typically, websites contain a biography, a list of issue positions, an appeal for financial contributions and volunteers. Most websites also contained photo galleries, video files, and email sign-up pages. Except for the pictures

and video files which mostly contain campaign speeches, television and web ads, most of the rest of the site is text-based content. Presentation of issues, endorsements, soliciting volunteers, donations and events scheduling is all presented in text format.

Many web features used in previous campaigns were abandoned in 2008. Features such as, pop-ups, cartoons, music, and screen-savers were not found on campaign websites studied here. Also, candidates no longer use some interactive features such as, surveys, guest books, bulletin boards, and chat rooms (Wiese 2004). Some of these devices, such as pop-ups, may have been considered a nuisance to visitors while others may have been viewed by the candidates as ineffective. It is also possible that interactive features may lead to undesirable effects, such as negative comments about the candidate left by opponent supporters who visit the site.<sup>12</sup> It may be that there is a faddish quality to many Web features.

New to this year's campaigns are the social networking websites. These are websites that bring people together with similar backgrounds and interests. They include sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. Presidential candidates link these sites to their own and encourage supporters to join them. Candidates join many different cyber social gatherings in an effort to reach large numbers of people and to specifically target their messages. Some candidates are also using these sites as a way to attract and organize volunteers, raise money, preview commercials, and as an online way to connect their supporters (Bain 2007).

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<sup>12</sup> This happened to Al Gore in the 2000 campaign. Several Bush supporters left derogatory remarks at his website.



Also new to the 2008 campaign is text messaging. A few presidential candidates are using this method in an effort to take advantage of the fact that three-quarters of the U.S. public have cell phones and send more than 15 billion text messages every month. Candidates are using text messaging to organize events, solicit campaign contributions, and distribute free campaign materials. One candidate distributed a petition to end the War in Iraq, while another asked visitors to her website to help select a campaign theme song (Vargas 2007).

Use of new features on campaign websites can help demonstrate to the public that the candidate is tech savvy, innovative, and keeping up with young people who make the most use of these new technologies. Use of new features may also be useful for performing traditional campaign functions. It is reasonable to suggest that only the techniques that are able to perform traditional functions will endure as more than just fads.

In 2008 candidates made better use of some advanced technologies that had been introduced in previous campaigns, such as, video files, blogs, live chat, and RSS feeds to portable players. Particularly noteworthy is the use of up-dated text and video files that allow the visitor to the candidates' websites to follow the campaign by reading and viewing portions of the speeches given by the candidates.

This is in marked contrast to a study conducted of the 2006 Senatorial, House and Gubernatorial races which found websites to be static, low tech and with few innovations (Gaziano and Liesen 2007). In 2006, most websites contained still pictures, audio and video clips which were presented in much the same way as they appear in traditional

media. Apparently, presidential candidates are much more innovative than other national and state candidates.

Another trait of the campaign websites discovered in this study was that few websites provided lengthy and detailed campaign information. Despite the fact that the Web has no space limitations and provides an opportunity to present large files of speeches, press releases, and position papers few candidates chose to use their websites to provide thorough and concise policy and issue statements. Instead, most chose to present only brief statements on the issues, in much the same way that issues are covered in traditional media.

Most 2008 candidates also avoided the socially charged controversial issues, such as, abortion, gay rights, capital punishment, affirmative action, and stem cell research that have been prominent in past campaigns especially with Republican candidates (White 2003). As a result, it may be difficult for website viewers to deduce candidate ideology or issue stands on many important issues. This suggests that the Web is being utilized in the same manner as other mass media for campaigning on the issues. It appears that the Web has not altered the way candidates are presenting their issue positions to voters. While candidates have the opportunity to present full-text versions of speeches, press releases, and position papers, they choose to present issues on the Web in much the same way as they discuss issues in traditional media.

Surprisingly, campaign websites were also devoid of reference to the political party affiliation of the candidates. Few candidates made mention of the fact that they are Democrats or Republicans. There were few party logos, and few links or references to the major parties by the vast majority of candidates. Even in biographical sketches most

failed to discuss their role in the party. Pictures and video files were generally devoid of party connections as well. This suggests that in this age of candidate-centered campaigns most candidates prefer to run as nonpartisan contenders appealing to voters of both parties as well as Independents. Candidates are more willing to identify interest group and media endorsements than their party affiliation. It seems clear that websites are aimed at promoting candidate images and issues rather than party affiliation.

Similar findings about party affiliation on campaign websites were reported in a study conducted on competitive House races in 2006 (Haynes 2006). Failure to identify a candidate's party appears to be part of the campaign strategy. Republicans were less likely to mention party than Democrats and Democrats avoided party identification if they were running in conservative districts. Among those who identified their party, none did so on the front page of their website.

Particularly noticeable, was the lack of negative campaigning on the Internet. Few candidates used their websites to attack their opponents. The negative campaigning that did occur was mainly in the form of television ads that appeared on the websites. Instead of negative comments about their opponents, most chose to focus the content of campaign websites on their own images, issue positions and attempts to convince viewers to participate in the campaign. This seems to be a positive trend, since most voters say they prefer not to see candidates engaging in negative campaigning (Freedman and Goldstein 1999, 1189-1208; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1996).

The Web is said to be different from other media because it provides an opportunity for interaction between the candidate and the constituency. Rather than just reading or viewing, the web affords a chance for citizens to voice opinions, question candidates

directly, and participate as e-volunteers. This study found that interactivity was a major feature of the average website. Candidates made a considerable effort to enable the visitors to their websites to participate in the campaign by donating money, becoming a volunteer, joining social networks, and sending email messages to the media, and their friends on behalf of the candidates. Website visitors were also encouraged to contact the campaign with opinions and questions and to sign-up for email newsletters. This use of the web appears to be helping it fulfilling one of its major potentials and to help separate it from the more traditional media.

However, if interactivity is defined as direct dialogue between candidates and citizens than most avoided communicating with the public. The findings in this study are similar to those identified by Stromer-Galley (2000); and Gaziano and Liesen (2007). These studies found that web technologies designed for two-way communication, such as, chat rooms, web conferences, and discussion boards were resisted by candidates. They avoided this form of interaction because it was considered too time consuming, could result in questions and comments that are critical, and may deprive the candidate of addressing the issues in general rather than specific terms. In other words, direct communications was considered too risky. It could result in a loss of control by the candidate over the message of the campaign. Candidates opted instead to present their messages in an environment that they could manipulate, such as campaign advertising.

Even campaign blogs were not interactive. Typically, blogs allow readers to post messages in response to the blogger, but the pattern indicated that campaign blogs did not have any mechanism for two-way communications. Instead, they consisted of postings by the candidate or staff members. These postings were typically a form of journaling

about the campaign, usually describing specific campaign events. These were almost all positive and offered little real insight into the workings of the campaign organization or its members.

It also seems that candidate bloggers do not want to provide an opportunity for opposition supporters to make negative comments on their websites. This is what happened in the 2004 presidential primary. In that campaign it was reported that Bush supporters posted messages on Democratic websites challenging the Democrats' credibility on taxes, military, defense spending, and the War on Terror (Wiese 2004)

The overall impression gleaned from this study was that candidates in 2008 did a much better job of utilizing the potential of the web than did candidates running in 2006. The Web's uniqueness was largely ignored in 2006, but in 2008 some candidates were willing to experiment with uses of the media such as, blogging, text messaging, and social networking in an effort to communicate with and activate potential voters. However, when it came to presenting personal information and their stands on the issues, most candidates chose a more traditional approach.

Websites offer candidates the opportunity to present information to voters without the mediation present in traditional print and electronic media. This suggests the possibility of a future in which there is more direct communication between candidates and voters. Websites also offer the potential to activate citizen participation in election campaigns. Currently, there are very few people willing to engage in politics beyond the act of voting. Efforts by candidates to mobilize volunteers through their websites offer the possibility of changing this pattern. Although the potential to dramatically change the

relationship between candidates and the public has yet to be realized, this modern media offers hope for a new kind of politics.

**Table 1** Content of Campaign Websites  
N=36

Functions	Web Features	Number	Percent
Information about	Bio	34	91.9
	Candidate		
	Press releases	23	62.2
	Stands on issues	21	56.8
	Photo gallery	15	40.5
	Video files	15	40.5
	Endorsements	12	32.4
	Achievements	6	16.2
	Audio files	5	13.5
	Opponent information	3	8.1
Mobilization	Volunteer sign-up	24	64.9
	Email sign-up (volunteer)	17	45.9
	Tell a friend	13	35.1
	Send a letter to media	4	10.8
	Send a letter to friend	1	2.7
Communication	Email sign-up (messages)	36	100.0
	Contact us	28	75.7
	Blogs	20	54.1
	Social networking	19	51.4
	RSS feed	7	18.9
	Podcasts	3	8.1
	Text messaging	2	5.4

Education	Events schedule	13	35.1
	Links	7	18.9
	En Espanol	6	16.2
	Voter information	5	13.5
Solicitation	Contribute	30	81.1
	Merchandise	17	45.9



**Table 2** Means for Web Functions\*

Web Function	Mean	S.D.
Candidate information	14.28	1.907
Mobilization	10.06	1.548
Communication	8.53	1.298
Education	5.55	.793
Solicitation	2.86	.683

\*Means score closest to the number of items in the category constitute the highest score. For example, a mean of 9.00 would be a perfect score in the Campaign Information category. In general, lower scores constitute higher means.

**Table 3** Party Affiliation by Web Features

Web Features	Party N	M	S.D.	T-test
Contact us	D=15	1.00	.000	2.953*
	R=13	1.38	.498	
Achievements	D=5	1.67	.488	2.380*
	R=1	1.95	.218	
Stands on issues	D=12	1.20	.414	2.333*
	R=9	1.57	.507	
Photo gallery	D=9	1.40	.507	1.930
	R=6	1.71	.463	
Biography	D=13	1.13	.352	1.747
	R=21	1.00	.000	
Text messages	D=2	1.87	.352	1.747
	R=0	2.00	.000	
Opposition information	D=0	2.00	.000	1.537
	R=3	1.86	.359	
Endorsements	D=3	1.80	.414	1.435
	R=9	1.57	.507	
En Espanol	D=4	1.73	.458	1.358
	R=2	1.90	.301	
Survey on issues	D=0	2.00	.000	1.221
	R=2	1.90	.301	

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Video files	D=8	1.47	.516	1.190
	R=7	1.67	.483	
Send letter to friend	D=1	1.93	.258	1.190
	R=0	2.00	.000	
Events scheduling	D=7	1.53	.516	1.102
	R=6	1.71	.463	
Tell friend	D=7	1.53	.516	1.102
	R=6	1.71	.463	
Merchandise	D=6	0.50	.507	1.000
	R=5	1.76	.436	
Links	D=4	1.73	.458	.910
	R=3	1.83	.359	
RSS feed	D=4	1.73	.458	.910
	R=3	1.86	.359	
Podcasts	D=2	1.87	.352	.902
	R=1	1.95	.218	
Audio files	D=3	1.80	.414	.881
	R=2	1.90	.301	
Social networking	D=9	1.40	.507	.718
	R=10	1.52	.512	
Volunteer sign-up	D=9	1.40	.507	.702
	R=15	1.29	.463	

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Send letter media	D=1	1.93	.258	.702
	R=3	1.86	.359	
Email sign-up	D=8	1.47	.516	.607
	R=8	1.57	.507	
Contribute	D=13	1.13	.352	.442
	R=17	1.19	.402	
Blogs	D=9	1.40	.507	.442
	R=11	1.48	.512	
Download campaign material	D=6	1.80	.414	.442
	R=5	1.86	.359	
Press releases	D=9	1.40	.507	.400
	R=14	1.33	.483	
Voter information	D=3	1.87	.352	.349
	R=2	1.90	.351	
Bulletin board	D=0			
	R=0			
Guest book	D=0			
	R=0			
Sign up for newsletter	D=0			
	R=0			

M=mean, SD=standard deviation, \*p<.05

**Table 4** 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Status of Candidates by Web Features

Web features	Tier N	M	S.D.	T-test
Video files	1st=8	1.22	.428	6.237***
	2nd=7	1.94	.236	
Merchandise	1st=11	1.39	.502	5.169***
	2nd=0	2.00	.000	
Social networking	1st=15	1.17	.383	4.513***
	2nd=3	1.78	.428	
Tell a friend	1st=11	1.39	.502	3.554**
	2nd=7	1.89	.323	
Volunteer sign-up	1st=9	1.11	.323	3.117**
	2nd=15	1.56	.511	
Press releases	1st=9	1.17	.383	-2.581**
	2nd=14	1.56	.511	
En Espanol	1st=4	1.67	.486	2.915*
	2nd=2	2.00	.000	
RSS feed	1st=4	1.67	4.85	2.185*
	2nd=3	1.94	2.36	
Achievements	1st=5	1.72	.461	1.821
	2nd=1	1.94	.236	
Photo gallery	1st=9	1.44	.511	1.712
	2nd=6	1.72	.461	

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Email sign-up	1st=8	1.39	.502	1.689
	2nd=8	1.67	.485	
Biography	1st=13	1.00	.000	1.458
	2nd=21	1.11	.323	
Survey on issues	1st=0	1.89	.323	1.458
	2nd=2	2.00	.000	
Text messages	1st=2	1.89	.323	1.458
	2nd=0	2.00	.000	
Endorsements	1st=3	1.56	.511	1.414
	2nd=9	1.78	.428	
Blogs	1st=9	1.33	.486	1.338
	2nd=11	1.56	.511	
Links	1st=4	1.89	.323	1.256
	2nd=3	1.72	.461	
Send letter to friend	1st=1	1.94	.236	1.000
	2nd=0	2.00	.000	
Stands on issues	1st=12	1.33	.485	1.000
	2nd=9	1.50	.514	
Send letter media	1st=1	1.83	.383	1.047
	2nd=3	1.94	.236	
Events scheduling	1st=8	1.56	.511	1.027
	2nd=5	1.72	.461	

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Contribute	1st=13	1.11	.323	.879
	2nd=17	1.22	.428	
Download campaign material	1st=6	1.78	.428	.879
	2nd=5	1.89	.323	
Opposition information	1st=1	1.94	.236	.589
	2nd=2	1.89	.323	
Podcasts	1st=2	1.89	.323	.589
	2nd=1	1.94	.236	
Audio files	1st=3	1.83	.383	.470
	2nd=2	1.89	.323	
Contact us	1st=15	1.22	.428	.000
	2nd=13	1.22	.428	
Voter information	1st=3	1.89	.323	.000
	2nd=2	1.89	.323	
Bulletin board	1st=0			
	2nd=0			
Guest book	1st=0			
	2nd=0			
Town hall meeting	1st=0			
	2nd=0			
Sign up for newsletter	1st=0			
	2nd=0			

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M=mean, SD=standard deviation, \*p<.05. \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 5** Mean Scores and T-Tests of Democrats and Republicans by Web Functions

Functions	Party	N	M	S.D.	T-test
Info Candidate	Democrat	15	13.87	2.264	1.097
	Republican	21	14.57	1.599	
Solicitation	Democrat	15	2.73	.704	.948
	Republican	21	2.95	.669	
Mobilization	Democrat	15	9.87	1.846	.613
	Republican	21	10.19	1.327	
Communications	Democrat	15	7.87	1.125	.013
	Republican	21	8.52	.680	

Note: N=Number, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, p<.05.



**Table 6** Mean Scores and T-Tests of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Candidates by Web Functions

Functions	Tier	N	M	S.D.	T-test
Mobilization	1st	18	9.06	1.30	5.056***
	2nd	18	11.06	1.06	
Info Candidate	1st	18	13.22	1.66	3.957**
	2nd	18	15.33	1.53	
Solicitation	1st	18	2.50	.71	3.708**
	2nd	18	3.22	.43	
Communication	1st	18	7.76	1.00	3.466**
	2nd	18	8.72	.57	

Note: N=Number, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 7** Issue Content of Websites

Issues	Number	Percent
Abortion	13	3.51
Affirmative action	2	5.4
Budget deficit	8	21.8
Campaign finance reform	2	5.4
Capital punishment	2	5.4
Child abuse	4	10.8
Child care	2	5.4
Crime	4	10.8
Disarmament	1	2.7
Divided government/gridlock	0	
Domestic spying	0	
Drugs (illegal)	3	8.1
Drugs (prescription)	3	8.1
Economy	8	21.6
Education	22	61.1
Environment	6	16.7
Foreign aid	0	
Free trade/protectionism	3	8.3
Gay rights	4	10.8
GITMO	0	
Global warming	11	29.7

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Government ethics	8	21.6
Government spending	0	
Gun control	14	37.8
Hate crimes	0	
Health care	20	55.6
Homeland Security	2	5.4
Immigration	20	54.1
Interest group influence	0	
Iran	1	2.7
Military preparedness	1	2.7
Military spending	2	5.4
Minimum wage	5	13.9
NAFTA	4	10.8
National debt	0	
National security	12	32.4
NATO	0	
North Korea	1	2.7
Nuclear weapons	1	2.7
Patriot Act	4	10.8
Racism	0	
Same sex marriage	11	29.7
Scandals/corruption	1	2.7
Sexual discrimination	0	

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Social security	12	33.3
Stem cell research	2	5.4
Stricter laws	0	
Taxes	21	56.8
Tort reform	1	2.7
Trade deficit	1	2.7
Traditional values/family decline	10	27.0
UN	2	5.4
Unemployment	1	2.7
Veterans benefits	5	13.5
War in Afghanistan	2	5.4
War in Iraq	27	75.0
War on Terror	11	29.7
War profiteering	0	
Welfare	1	2.7

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**Table 8** Issue Content of Websites by Political Parties

Issues	Democrats	Republicans	T-test
Abortion	3	10	1.724
Affirmative action	1	1	.239
Budget deficit	1	7	1.944
Campaign finance reform	2	0	1.747
Capital punishment	1	1	.239
Child abuse	4	0	2.686
Child care	2	1	1.747
Crime	3	1	1.435
Disarmament	1	0	1.190
Divided government/gridlock	0	0	
Domestic spying	0	0	
Drugs (illegal)	2	1	.902
Drugs (prescription)	3	0	2.227
Economy	4	4	.529
Education	11	11	1.264
Environment	4	2	1.358
Foreign aid	0	0	
Free trade/protectionism	3	8	1.151
Gay rights	1	3	.702
GITMO	0	0	
Global warming	10	1	***5.158

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Government ethics	2	6	1.071
Government spending	0	0	
Gun control	3	11	2.021
Hate crimes	0	0	
Health care	10	10	1.122
Homeland Security	2	0	1.747
Immigration	5	15	*2.380
Interest group influence	0	0	
Iran	1	0	1.190
Military preparedness	0	1	.842
Military spending	2	0	1.747
Minimum wage	5	0	3.149
NAFTA	0	4	1.826
National debt	0	0	
National security	3	9	1.435
NATO	0	0	
North Korea	1	0	1.190
Nuclear weapons	1	0	1.234
Patriot Act	2	2	.349
Racism	0	0	
Same sex marriage	3	8	1.151
Scandals/corruption	0	1	.842
Sexual discrimination	0	0	

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Social security	6	6	.702
Stem cell research	1	1	.239
Stricter laws	0	0	
Taxes	5	16	*2.766
Tort reform	0	1	.842
Trade deficit	0	1	.8421
Traditional values/family decline	3	7	.866
UN	0	2	1.221
Unemployment	1	0	1.190
Veterans benefits	4	1	1.917
War in Afghanistan	1	1	.239
War in Iraq	14	13	2.234
War on Terror	0	0	
War profiteering	0	0	
Welfare	1	2	.298

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 9** Issue Content of Websites by 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Candidates

Issues	1st Tier	2nd Tier	T-test
Abortion	2	6	.38
Affirmative action	1	1	.000
Budget deficit	4	4	.000
Campaign finance reform	1	1	.000
Capital punishment	1	1	.000
Child abuse	3	1	1.047
Child care	2	0	1.458
Crime	3	1	1.047
Disarmament	1	0	1.000
Divided government/gridlock	0	0	
Domestic spying	0	0	
Drugs (illegal)	2	1	.238
Drugs (prescription)	3	0	1.844
Economy	3	5	.789
Education	15	7	2.986
Environment	4	2	.879
Foreign aid	0	0	
Free trade/protectionism	2	1	.589
Gay rights	3	1	1.047
GITMO	0	0	
Global warming	7	4	1.073



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Government ethics	5	3	.789
Government spending	0	0	
Gun control	7	7	.000
Hate crimes	0	0	
Health care	11	9	.656
Homeland Security	2	0	1.458
Immigration	10	10	.000
Interest group influence	0	0	
Iran	1	0	1.000
Military preparedness	1	0	1.000
Military spending	1	1	.000
Minimum wage	4	3	1.448
NAFTA	1	0	1.047
National debt	0	0	
National security	6	6	.000
NATO	0	0	
North Korea	1	0	1.000
Nuclear weapons	1	0	1.030
Patriot Act	2	2	.000
Racism	0	0	
Same sex marriage	5	6	.353
Scandals/corruption	0	1	1.000
Sexual discrimination	0	0	

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Social security	6	6	.000
Stem cell research	1	1	.000
Stricter laws	0	0	
Taxes	10	11	.329
Tort reform	0	1	1.000
Trade deficit	1	0	1.000
Traditional values/family decline	4	6	.729
UN	2	0	1.458
Unemployment	1	0	1.000
Veterans benefits	4	1	1.448
War in Afghanistan	2	0	.239
War in Iraq	14	13	.375
War on Terror	7	4	.073
War profiteering	0	0	
Welfare	2	1	.589

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