

## Party-driven and Citizen-driven Campaigning: The Use of Social Media in the 2008 Canadian and American National Election Campaigns

**Andrea Holmes**

University of Toronto

Andrea Holmes is a second year Master's student with the School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Toronto. In the spring of 2010, she graduated from Queen's University with a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Political Studies. She recently spent a term studying abroad in Berlin, Germany at the Hertie School of Governance, and was awarded the national 2011-2012 Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She currently resides at Massey College as a Resident Junior Fellow.

*Political election campaigns have been significantly transformed by the rising use of online social networking tools and new information and communication technologies. Dr. Andrea Römmele argues that this new interactive relationship has empowered citizens across the world, and led to a shift in campaign power from party-driven to citizen-driven campaign techniques. This paper builds on the work of Dr. Rommele to get a better understanding of the role of citizen-driven campaigning during both the 2008 Federal election in Canada and the 2008 Presidential Election in the United States. Using original statistical analyses, this paper answers two questions: 1. How many citizens receive campaign material through these new ICT's? And what social-determinants predict which type of campaign activity?*

### I. The Rise of Professionalized Campaigning: Web 2.0<sup>1</sup>

Within the past four years, political election campaigns in North America have been significantly transformed by the rising use of online social networking tools and new information and communication technologies. Joe Trippi, long-time campaign consultant for the United States Democrat Party, argues that "the tools changed between 2004 and 2008" (Miller 2008). While the use of online blogs and email lists during Howard Dean's 2003/4 primary campaign set the stage for Internet campaigning, the Obama campaign in 2008 took Web 2.0 election campaigning to "new and dizzying heights" (Rommele 2010, 3). During his election campaign alone, Presidential candidate Barack Obama acquired over 1.5 million friends on the popular social networking website Facebook (Small 2008). At the same time, more than half of the adult population in the United States of America accessed campaign information online, communicated with others about politics through online forums, and received campaign information via social networking, text and instant messaging (Smith 2008). The use of interactive online tools during Obama's campaign

1 Statistical data collected and analyzed with the assistance of T. Rudmik & Associates.

“changed the way politicians organize supporters, advertise to voters, defend against attacks and communicate with constituents” (Miller 2008).

Many scholars use terms such as “Americanization” or “professionalization” to describe the particular changes in election campaigns that have taken place over the last two decades and under Web 2.0 (Römmele 2010). A key characteristic of this professionalized campaign era includes the decline of political communication via the party headquarters and the rise in the role of the media. Due to declining party attachment, election campaigns have become permanent features of party organizations, more crucial to candidate success and more professionally organized. As parties begin to function more as commercial entities, it has become harder for them to maintain their grassroots support base. Therefore, information and communication technologies, including social networking, emails and online blogging, have become critical tools for the organization and mobilization of supporters (Miller 2008).

What distinguishes this era of professionalized campaigning from periods in the past is not only the use of information and communication technologies, but also the way in which these tools are used by citizens as means of participation. Social networking websites, blogging, online video sharing and social bookmarking sites allow users to interact with others and collaborate in the creation of site content (Small 2008). In “Citizen Leaders and Party Laggards? Social Media in the 2009 German Federal Election Campaign”, Andrea Römmele argues that Web 2.0 “has the potential to empower citizen-driven campaigning and to challenge or even reshift the campaign power map from party headquarters to citizens” (2010, 2). She also posits that this new interactive relationship could strengthen the already weakened relationship between political parties and citizens. In order to explore this relationship further, Römmele develops a dyadic typology of campaign types that differentiates between the two main actors driving campaign activities: political parties and citizens. Citizen-driven campaigning involves participatory citizens who take the initiative to engage in the political campaign themselves, “producing a new more self-directing, spontaneous, and socially embedded (rather than institutionally/organizationally driven) layer of political action during a campaign”

(Römmele 2010, 2). On the other hand, party-driven campaigning is executed by political party organizations, and includes the dissemination of campaign information via booklets, canvassing or online party websites. Both party and citizen-driven campaigning can be performed offline and online, but what separates the two is the political actor (Römmele 2010).

The aim of this paper is to get an understanding of the role of citizen-driven campaigning during both the 2008 Federal election in Canada and the 2008 Presidential Election in the United States. Drawing upon the work by Andrea Römmele on the 2009 German Federal election campaign, this paper will answer two important questions: How many citizens actually receive campaign material through social networking and how many actively post campaign material on these platforms? And what social determinants predict citizen-driven campaign activity?

## II. Typology of Campaign Activity

The two dimensions of campaigning can be further explained using the following cross-table:

*Table A*

	Offline	Online
Party-Driven	Campaign Material (brochures, leaflets, flyers, as well as SMS etc)	Party and candidate web sites
Citizen-Driven	Conversations with friends, family, at work, etc.	Actively posting information material on the campaign in social media

Source: Römmele 2010

### *Party-Driven Campaigning*

Although party attachment is declining, political parties in North America still rely on the physical contributions of supporters to help manage a successful campaign. This traditional party-driven campaigning relies heavily on party members and can involve political discussion between its members, canvassing, and the distribution of party

information (through brochures, leaflets and flyers etc.). Political actors can also take this traditional form of campaigning online, using ICTs and social media to advertise to a larger base of citizens over the Internet. Party-driven online campaign activities can include the development of party websites, the posting of online campaign material and announcements and general top-down news disseminated from party headquarters (Römmele 2010).

#### *Citizen-Driven Campaigning*

On the other hand, citizen-driven campaigning involves a variety of actors, including both citizens and non-party actors, such as interest groups and non-government organizations. Offline citizen-driven campaigning frequently involves the interference of non-party actors in the process of election campaigns, including the public endorsement of a party, financial support and indirect selection of candidates (Römmele 2010). More recently, online tools have provided new, easier opportunities for these non-party actors to become involved in politics and the political campaign. Unorganized voters are now able to engage in the political debate unlike any time before, and mobilize in support of certain candidates (Römmele 2010).

### **III. Social Media use in the United States and Canada**

According to the 2011 Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project survey, 65% of all adult Internet users in the United States use a social networking site such as MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn. This is a dramatic increase from the 8% of Americans - or 5% of all adult Internet users in the country - that said they used similar sites in February of 2005. According to the same results, women and young adults under the age of thirty are the most common users of social networking sites in the United States. However, in the past two years, the use of social networking sites by 50 to 64 year-old Internet users has doubled, from 25% in April 2009 to 51% in May 2011 (Madden and Zickuhr 2011).

Internet usage in Canada has increased in all age categories since 2000. The adoption of social media has been just as rapid and widespread in Canada as in the United States. In

2007, 34% of Canadians aged 16 to 34 contributed content on the Internet by blogging, participating in discussion and posting photos. In 2009, a reported 86% of Canadian Internet users within the same age group also had a profile on a social network. This is comparable to similar results in the United States where 75% of adult Internet users aged 18 to 24 also had a social network profile in 2008. In both countries, an equal proportion of men and women use the Internet. However, in both countries, women are more likely than men to use the Internet for personal communication purposes (Dewing 2010).

The difference between the two countries lies in the level in which political parties have utilized social networking and online tools to both mobilize and contact supporters. While Canadian political parties have been able to create dynamic and integrated websites for citizens, the use of citizen engagement tools by political parties lags far behind that of their American counterparts. The use of Facebook, online blogs and email lists by Canadian political parties was very minimal in 2008 as compared to its usage by the Democrat and Republican Party candidates in the United States (Small 2008). Some scholars argue that these differences may be a condition of each country's political system. Since the United States operates under a presidential system with a candidate-centered focus, parties tend to rely more heavily on the personalization of their candidates and the creation of a strong 'online identity'. As well, the United States has a vastly different regulatory regime and media environment than Canada (Small 2008).

#### **IV. Social Media in the 2008 United States Presidential Election: Results**

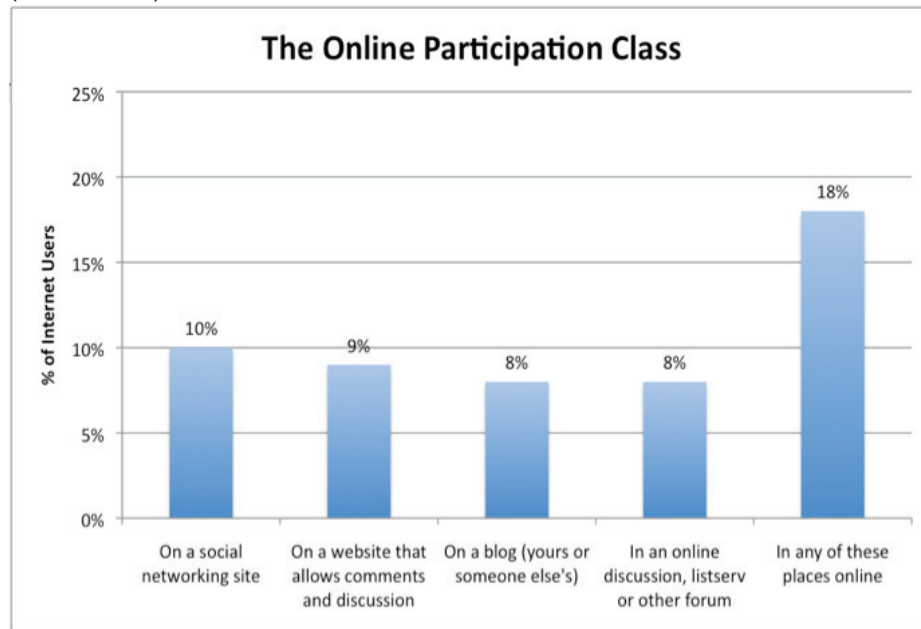
In order to answer the first question, this paper will begin by looking at the number of citizens in the United States who participate in party-driven campaigning versus citizen-driven campaigning. According to the American National Election Study Post-election Survey in 2008, only 4% of those surveyed said they were actively engaged in offline party-driven campaign work.<sup>2</sup> However, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project Post-election Survey, 34% of American online political users received party-issued campaign material online, including candidate speeches and announcements

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<sup>2</sup> "Did you do any {other} work for one of the parties or candidates?"

(Smith 2008).<sup>3</sup>

In comparison, citizen-driven campaigning took place on a lower, but still quite significant, level during the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign. During the campaign, nearly one in five Internet users engaged in online citizen campaigning, posting their thoughts, comments or questions about the campaign on a website, blog, social networking site or other online forum (Smith 2008). Some 38% of Internet users went online in order to communicate and connect with others about politics using the Internet, while a full 60% of Internet users went online for news about the campaign (Smith 2008). During the 2008 election campaign, American voters took a more active role in the political process by contributing their own thoughts and comments to the online campaign debate, as can be seen in the following graph. This 'online participatory class' was composed largely of young adults, with 30% of those posting political content online under the age of 25 (Smith 2008).



*Pew Internet & American life Project Post-Election Survey. November-December 2008. Margin of error is +/-3% based on Internet users (n=1,591).*

<sup>3</sup> "In the past several months, have you [watched video online of candidate speeches or announcements], or not? In the past several months?"

But how do those individuals engaged in citizen-driven campaigning differ from those who participate in party-driven campaigning? What social determinants predict citizen-driven campaign activity? Using a classification and regression tree analysis, we clearly see that age is the key predictor for campaign activity of any kind in the United States, be it party-driven or citizen-driven. Individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 recorded being involved in an average of 1.38 online citizen-driven campaign activities, including the signing of online petitions, posting of political commentary and the use of social networking sites to discuss election information with friends. Compare this to those individuals between the ages of 47 and 70, who were involved in an average of 0.51 online citizen-driven campaign activities. What is interesting is that the average number of online party-driven campaign activities between the same age groups follows a similar pattern, with the younger cohort participating in an average of 2.0 online party-driven activities versus the older cohort's average of 1.03. Unfortunately, consistent and comparable data on offline party-driven campaigning is not available in the United States.

Although younger individuals are more likely to be involved in a greater number of online party-driven and citizen-driven activities, a different result can be seen when looking at the percentage of individuals involved in each type of campaign. Some 22.6% of those involved in at least one online party-driven campaign activity were between the ages of 45 and 54. While, in contrast, only 8.2% of individuals engaged in the same activity were under the age of 24. The percentage of online citizen-driven campaigning via social networks, such as Facebook and MySpace, shows a very different story. Almost 25% of individuals who reported being engaged in at least one political activity on social network sites were under the age of 24. While only 9.4% of individuals aged 45 and 54 were involved.

Other determinants of citizen-driven campaigning include level of education, income, gender and party identification. While gender does not seem to have an overall influence on the likelihood of citizen-driven campaigning during the 2008 election campaign, it is clear that males over the age of 54 are more heavily involved in political activities than females of the same age. The employment status of an individual also has an

influence on the nature of campaign involvement. Interestingly enough, whether or not a respondent was employed on a full-time or part-time basis was a strong determinant of citizen-driven campaigning in the 2008 election. While 51.7% of respondents employed full-time participated in a citizen-driven campaign activity in 2008, only 16.3% of those employed part-time did the same.

Party identification also has an interesting influence on the levels of citizen-driven campaigning during the 2008 Presidential Election campaign. During the campaign, Obama voters took a leading role in engaging in online political activism, including posting their thoughts online to donating money via the party website. Individuals who identified themselves as Democrats were also more likely than Republicans to be engaged in both types of campaign activities in 2008. However, supporters of Republican candidate John McCain were also more likely than supporters of Barack Obama to be regular Internet users. This contrasting statistic may be a result of the demographic and educational position of those individuals who identify themselves as members of the Republican Party.

#### **V. Social Media in the 2008 Canadian Federal Election: Results**

Unfortunately, data on the usage of social media during the 2008 Canadian federal election campaign is not as robust or exhaustive as that in the United States. Only one question in the 2008 Canadian National Election Study asked respondents about their use of social networking sites during the political campaign. Therefore, it is difficult for this paper to acquire an idea of the type of people who engage in which campaign activity and what social characteristics are most important in influencing this participation. Using statistical cross-tabulations and significance testing, this paper will attempt to make an accurate assessment.

According to the 2008 Canadian Election Study, most Canadian citizens obtained the majority of information about the 2008 federal election via the television. What is surprising is that 20% of respondents in this particular survey also acquired the majority of their information via newspapers, while only 7.5% used the Internet. As well, over 65%

of respondents paid little to no attention at all to news about the federal election on the Internet (See Chart below).

*Table C: Main Sources of Election News, 2008*

	<b>2008 Canadian Federal Election</b>
<b>Television</b>	<b>56.8%</b>
<b>Radio</b>	<b>8.5%</b>
<b>Newspapers</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
<b>Internet</b>	<b>7.5%</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
<b>Friends</b>	<b>1.7%</b>

Source: Canadian National Election Study, Post-Election Survey, 2008. n = 3689, frequencies based on unweighted data.

Although the use of the Internet by respondents in the Canadian election study was quite low, over half of individuals surveyed did participate in some form of offline citizen-driven campaigning in 2008. Over 30% also engaged in online citizen-driven campaigning through participation in online blogs. However, party-driven campaigning was still more popular during the 2008 Canadian federal election campaign, with 66% of respondents receiving party-driven campaign information by phone or mail.

There is evidence that social media did play an important role in the 2008 Canadian election despite the lack of consistent survey data. During the 2008 Federal Election, the VoterPair website was created, along with an accompanying Facebook page, that allowed Canadians to swap votes with other people in a riding where their votes could make a bigger difference. According to this website, about 2,800 voters swapped their votes in 2008. More parliamentarians have also taken notice, and have begun to create both Facebook and Twitter accounts that are used on a regular basis to communicate with citizens.

Hopefully in the future some data on the use of social media platforms during the 2011 Canadian federal election will be collected, and a more thorough comparison with the United States will be possible.

## VI. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to give a brief overview of the role of Web 2.0 technologies in the current professionalized election campaigns of North America. It is also to answer the question, “Has the steady increase in the use of social networking tools during election campaigns weakened the relationship between the political parties and the citizen?” The findings of this paper can be summarized as follows:

- Offline party-driven campaigning is considerably low with only 4% of the American population. Although online party-driven campaigning remains strong with 34%. Older, well-educated citizens are most likely to participate in both offline and online party-driven campaign activities.
- Age is the strongest social determinant of both citizen-driven and party-driven campaign activity in the United States. Younger citizens participate in the greatest average number of citizen and party-driven activities, particularly those activities that are on the Internet and involve social media.
- Those individuals in the United States who identify most strongly with the Democratic Party are more likely to be engaged in online citizen-driven activities than those who identify as Republicans.
- Party-driven campaigning was more popular than both online and offline citizen-driven campaigning during the 2008 Canadian federal election.
- Canadian citizens acquire the majority of information and news about election campaigns via the television and newspapers. The Internet is the fourth highest source for election news among Canadian adults.

Using this background information, similar conclusions can be made about the United States and Canada that have been previously made about Germany (Römmele 2010). It is likely that in all three countries, citizen-driven participation will rise in the next few years while party-driven campaign activities will decline. Therefore, it is important that parties organize citizens in a way that increases citizen support and participation in party-oriented activities. As is shown, the rising popularity of online party-driven campaign activities is a good indicator of how parties can accomplish such a task. Increasing the participatory nature of party websites, be it through the introduction of blogs, interactive forums or twitter, could help to strengthen the relationship between parties and citizens and move citizen-driven and party-driven campaigning closer together.

The conclusions of this study are limited by the modern nature of social media tools. This is clearly evident in the Canadian National Election Study, where social media has yet to be integrated as a topic into any surveys related to election campaigns. This modern trend also poses problems when trying to predict future trends. Although the popularity of particular social networking sites may change, the use of ICTs and the Internet as an important tool of political communication will not be changing any time soon. Therefore, it is time for parties, governments and particularly statistical consultancies and survey corporations, to consider the effects that these new tools are having on modern election campaigns.

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