

## Voter Behavior in the Nation's First Internet Election

March 14, 2008 by Ellen Romer

The United States presidential election of 2008, scheduled for November 4, 2008, will be the 56th consecutive quadrennial election for president and vice president of the United States. It will coincide with the 2008 Senate elections, House of Representatives elections, and gubernatorial elections, as well as many state and local elections.<sup>i</sup>

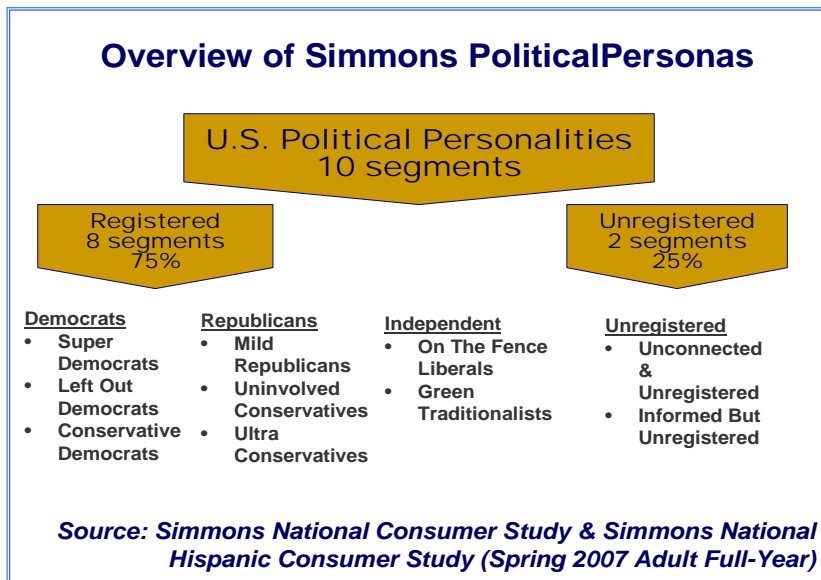
While presenting the electorate with a choice of candidates who represent a multitude of backgrounds, the 2008 election is also the first election in 80 years that will not feature an incumbent president or an incumbent vice president as a candidate.<sup>ii</sup> The candidates of this election face many unique challenges, one of which is an increasingly disparate voter population, even within the same party.

The oft-used blue state/ red state map that implies that all but a handful of states will definitely vote Republican or Democratic seems increasingly obsolete. Although only three states changed parties between the 2000 and the 2004 presidential elections, such hugely static political patterns now appear to be the exception rather than the rule.<sup>iii</sup> Despite some predictable differing popularity levels by age group for the three candidates McCain, Obama and Clinton – the reality of voter disparities is much more complex.

To address the increasing distinctive voting behaviors of potential voters in the 2008 election, Experian Research Services launched Simmons' PoliticalPersonas which brings the 60,000+ data variables in the Simmons National Consumer Study into relevant voter groups.

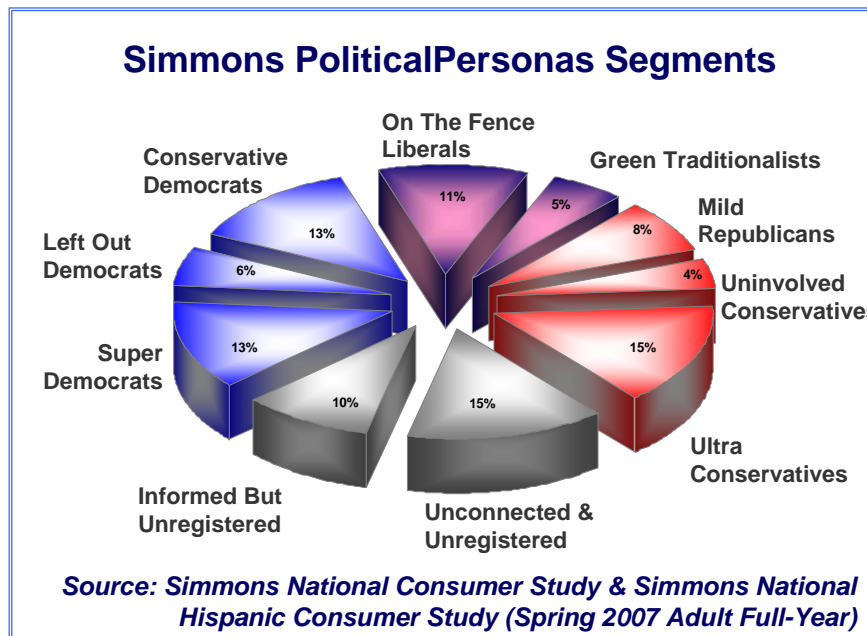
*Simmons' PoliticalPersonas* is a complex segmentation system designed to identify unique groups of American adults by political outlook and behavior. Incorporating nearly 200 of the most politically discriminating facts and insights about the American population, Simmons' PoliticalPersonas delivers analysis about:

- Voter Registration
- Party Affiliation
- Attitudes and Opinions
- Geography



*Political Personas* identifies 10 discrete segments of adults:

- The segments are divided into Registered and Unregistered voter groups
- Among Registered voters, there are 8 segments separated by party affiliation
- There are two separate segments identifying Unregistered voter groups

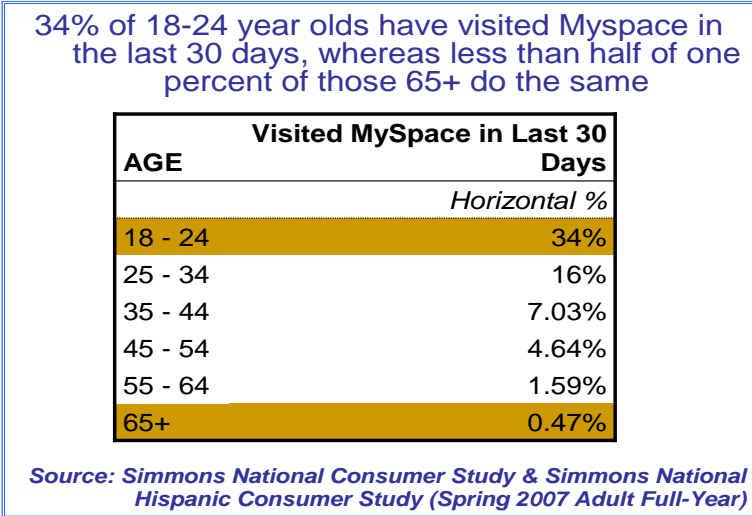


Another unique feature of this year’s Presidential Election is the increasingly visible impact of the Internet from very early on in the campaign. The Internet is now a major source of news about the presidential campaign, with nearly a quarter of Americans (24%) saying they regularly learn something about the campaign from the Internet, almost double the percentage for the 2004 campaign (13%).<sup>iv</sup>

Candidates have leveraged the Internet in creative ways – with John Edwards announcing his candidacy in December of 2006 via a video on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Over fifty thousand people watched Edwards’ video, far more than would have likely watched a television commercial with the same content. Interesting to note, Edwards’ video ran over 30 minutes, for free.<sup>v</sup>

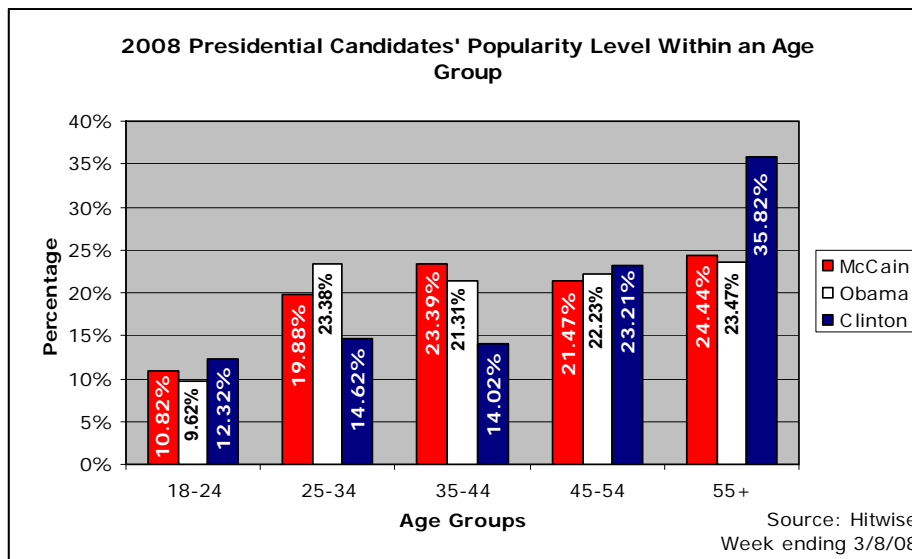
Howard Dean first set the ball rolling in his bid for the Presidential nomination in 2004, using the Internet to raise around \$50 million through large numbers of individual contributions. John Kerry followed suit in his 2004 Presidential campaign against George W. Bush, famously narrowing the funding gap with his Republican rival. This time around, candidates are plugging in and getting personal.<sup>vi</sup>

Getting personal for the 2008 candidates means participating in social networks like MySpace and Facebook to connect with the hard-to-reach teens and young adults who comprise the bulk of those online communities. Over a third of young adults aged 18 to 24 years old had visited MySpace in the last 30 days, according to the Simmons National Consumer Study – as compared to their older counterparts (just over 7% of those aged 35-44 had visited MySpace in the last 30 days). (See chart below.)



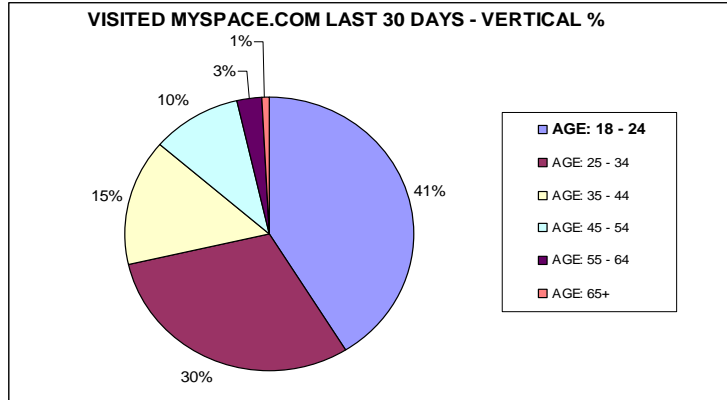
Potential voters increasingly employ the Internet for research purposes. Fully 42% of those ages 18 to 29 say they regularly learn about the campaign from the Internet, the highest percentage for any news source. In January 2004, just 20% of young people said they routinely got campaign news from the internet. National Public Radio is the only other news source to show significant growth since 2000; currently 18% say they regularly learn about the campaign from NPR, up from 12% eight years ago.<sup>vii</sup>

The differences in how potential voters source news about the 2008 presidential campaign is also reflected in the differing popularity of candidates McCain, Obama and Clinton across age groups (see data from Hitwise below).



Mitt Romney holds the honors as the first potential Republican Presidential candidate to launch a Facebook profile; Democrat John Edwards was the first to set up shop in virtual world Second Life; and Hillary Clinton launched her Presidential campaign via her website. All of the major candidates for the 2008 American Presidential election have support on Facebook and profiles on MySpace.<sup>viii</sup>

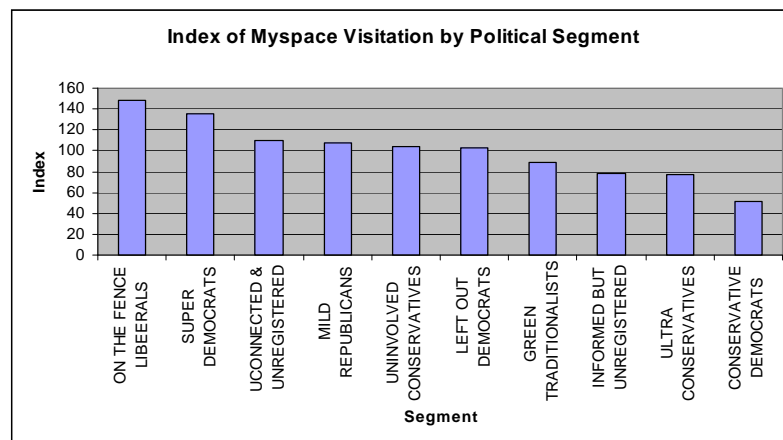
The 18-24 and 25-34 age groups make up 71% of Myspace visitors



Source: Simmons National Consumer Study & Simmons National Hispanic Consumer Study (Spring 2007 Adult Full-Year)

The Democratic candidates appear to be making heavier use of these social networking sites, most notably Barack Obama's campaign. At the time of this writing, his supporters include over 161,000 friends on MySpace against Clinton's 42,000-odd and John Edwards's 28,000. (Republican John McCain has 21,000; Mitt Romney trails him with just 12,000.)<sup>ix</sup> Data from Simmons PoliticalPersonas reflects the differences among party lines by examining specific segments: MySpace usage (see chart below).

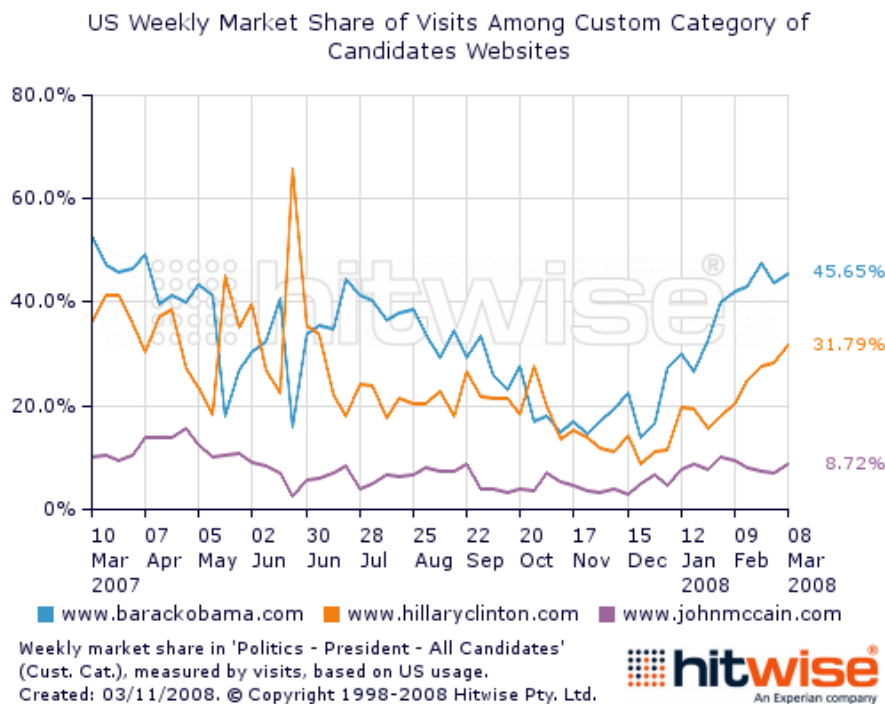
MySpace use by Political Segment



Source: Simmons PoliticalPersonas, integrated with the Simmons National Consumer Study & Simmons National Hispanic Consumer Study (Spring 2007 Adult Full-Year)

Obama's biggest Facebook supporters' group, "One Million Strong for Barack Obama" has over 320,000 members (compared to Hillary Clinton's "One Million Strong for Hillary Clinton," with 5,300); plus a growing pool of photographs on Flickr, the photo-hosting online community.<sup>x</sup>

Looking at the traffic to the respective websites of Obama, Clinton and McCain confirms the success the Obama campaign has seen in leveraging social media communities to garner interest among potential voters (see chart below with data from Hitwise).



Knowing how potential voters engage with different websites can be very useful for campaign strategists to know how best to communicate their key themes online. According to the Simmons Multi-Media Engagement study which tracks the engagement that consumers have with over 300 different websites, certain URLs do a better job of engaging voters on one end of the political spectrum than those on the other end.

For candidates seeking to gain the trust of potential voters, starting a conversation on a website already trusted by those potential voters can speed along the process. Simmons Multi-Media Engagement study *proves* that there is a strong connection between a users' engagement with the content of a medium and their attention and receptivity to the advertising.

Six global engagement dimensions are measured across television, Internet and print media channels: inspirational, trustworthy, life enhancing, social interaction, personal time-out and ad attention/ receptivity.

According to the latest Simmons Multi-Media Engagement Study (W4 full-year), conservatives and liberals alike place a great deal of trust in the websites for National Geographic Channel ([channel.nationalgeographic.com](http://channel.nationalgeographic.com)) and Consumer Reports ([consumerreports.org](http://consumerreports.org)).

Self-identified liberals seem to trust [goodhousekeeping.com](http://goodhousekeeping.com) and [marthastewart.com](http://marthastewart.com) more than their conservative counterparts – with liberal visitors rating these two sites as 11% more trustworthy than conservative visitors to these same URLs. Liberals also find [pbs.org](http://pbs.org) 12% more trustworthy than do conservatives.

Conservative voters, on the other hand, rate [self.com](http://self.com) and [lifetimetv.com](http://lifetimetv.com) more inspirational than do their liberal counterparts (top 10 vs. liberal visitors inspirational ranking as number 50 and number 56, respectively). The sites [sunset.com](http://sunset.com) and [ellentv.com](http://ellentv.com) are ranked as top ten most inspirational by liberal visitors while conservative visitors rank them at 78 and 37, respectively.

As important as the Internet increasingly is in influencing the 2008 Presidential Elections, consumer behavior online doesn't tell the whole story. Where regional and local differences matter, drilling down to look at the potentially significant differences at county level can deliver valuable insight.

Taking Florida as an illustrative example, Unconnected and Unregistered over-index in Florida compared to the national level where they under-index. Mild Republicans over-index on both a national and state level, but over-index more on a national level. Uninvolved Conservatives under-index on a national and state level, but under-index significantly more at the state level.

### Comparison of National and Florida Online Information Seeking Activities

SEGMENT	INFORMATION SEEKING ONLINE ACTIVITIES	
	National Index	Florida Index
UNCONNECTED & UNREGISTERED	84	109
INFORMED BUT UNREGISTERED	65	73
<b>SUPER DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>122</b>
LEFT OUT DEMOCRATS	76	82
CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS	68	62
<b>ON THE FENCE LIBEERALS</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>122</b>
GREEN TRADITIONALISTS	94	103
<b>MILD REPUBLICANS</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>126</b>
UNINVOLVED CONSERVATIVES	98	69
ULTRA CONSERVATIVES	115	108

Source: Simmons National Consumer Study & Simmons National Hispanic Consumer Study (Spring 2007 Adult Full-Year)

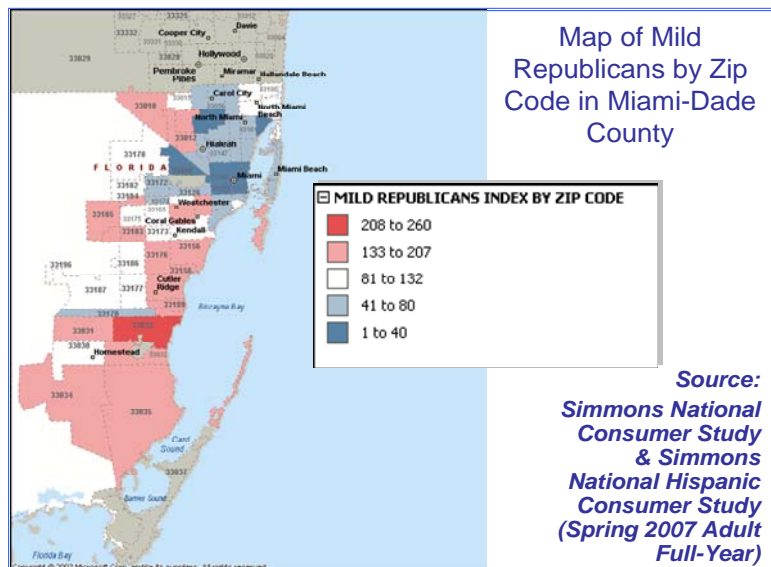
### Comparison of Indexes of Segments Engaging in Online Research Activities

SEGMENT	INFORMATION SEEKING ONLINE ACTIVITIES		
	National Index	Florida Index	Miami Index
UNCONNECTED & UNREGISTERED	84	109	96
INFORMED BUT UNREGISTERED	65	73	75
<b>SUPER DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>138</b>
LEFT OUT DEMOCRATS	76	82	60
CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS	68	62	76
<b>ON THE FENCE LIBERALS</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>147</b>
GREEN TRADITIONALISTS	94	103	106
<b>MILD REPUBLICANS</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>129</b>
UNINVOLVED CONSERVATIVES	98	69	113
ULTRA CONSERVATIVES	115	108	93

Source: Simmons National Consumer Study & Simmons National Hispanic Consumer Study (Spring 2007 Adult Full-Year)

Drilling down further, the unique attributes of the Miami market becomes increasingly apparent. The high concentration of foreign-born Hispanics heavily skews the political party composition. Though the heavily Cuban population has traditionally leaned towards the right, that trend appears to be shifting. The percentage of independent and unregistered Hispanics in Miami is increasing at an unprecedented pace.<sup>xi</sup>

The Republicans that remain are more likely to be of the milder and more vulnerable variety. These “Mild Republicans” may vote along Democratic lines if the Republicans do not have a strong enough candidate or platform. The map below depicts the concentration of Mild Republicans by ZIP code in the Miami market.



### Conclusion

*The Long Tail*, by Chris Anderson, achieved both the New York Times top-ten bestseller list and the status of number one non-fiction book in China. Anderson describes how the trend towards market fragmentation and consumer demand for niche products is playing out across an increasingly wide array of sectors from church communities to traditional retail and packaged goods industries.<sup>xii</sup> While not as dramatic as in the pure digital realms, the increasing differentiation among potential voters seems to be following a similar trajectory.

Although the 2008 Presidential election may be the first Internet election in terms of how important that channel has become for influencing and communicating with potential voters, local geographic differences still matter.

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With over 20 years of research experience, Ellen Romer leverages expertise gained across multiple sectors and in both customized and syndicated market research. In her current role at Experian Research Services, Ellen oversees brand management and new product development, placing special emphasis on providing unique and relevant solutions to clients using Simmons' syndicated databases, proprietary modeling and data integration techniques.

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Presidential Elections 2008, wikipedia.org

<sup>ii</sup> 2008 Presidential Elections May See Several Firsts, KentNewsNet.com (February 2, 2007)

<sup>iii</sup> Throw Out the Old Electoral Maps in 2008 by Michael Barone, U.S. News and World Report, Rasmussen Reports.com (March 1, 2008)

<sup>iv</sup> Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008, The Pew Research Center (January 11, 2008). Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,430 adults, 18 years of age or older, from December 19-30, 2007 (1,089 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 341 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 113 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were designed by Survey Sampling, Inc.

<sup>v</sup> Meatball Sundae by Seth Godin Penguin Books Ltd (2007)

<sup>vi</sup> Will the 2008 USA election be won on Facebook? Linnie Rawlinson for CNN (May 29, 2007)

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<sup>xi</sup> <http://uscubanormalization.blogspot.com/2007/08/hispanics-shunning-party-labels.html>

<sup>xii</sup> Exclusive: The Latest on The Long Tail, [www.longtailbook.co.uk](http://www.longtailbook.co.uk) (2008)