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The internet and democratic debate

Wired Americans hear more points of view about candidates and key issues than other citizens. They are not using the internet to screen out ideas with which they disagree.

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Summary of Findings

The internet contributes to a wider awareness of political arguments. Fears that use of the internet might hurt healthy democratic deliberation are not borne out by online behavior.

Increasing numbers of Americans are getting news and information about politics online. More than 40% of those who use the internet have gotten political material during this campaign, according to the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, more than 50% higher than the number who had gotten such information in the 2000 campaign.

As internet use has grown, prominent commentators and scholars have expressed concern that this would be harmful to democratic deliberation. They worried that citizens would use the internet to seek information that reinforced their political preferences and avoid material that challenged their views. They feared that people would use internet tools to customize and insulate their information inputs to a degree that held troubling implications for American society. Democracy functions best when people consider a range of arguments, including those that challenge their viewpoint. If people screened out information that disputed their beliefs, then the chances for meaningful discourse on great issues would be stunted and civic polarization would grow.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project and the University of Michigan School of Information conducted a survey in June to test those concerns. We focused on the role of the internet related to four dimensions of contemporary politics: the arguments anchoring the campaign between George W. Bush and John Kerry; the arguments for and against the war in Iraq; the arguments for and against gay marriage; and the arguments for and against free trade. And our survey results belie the greatest fears about the impact of the internet on democracy:

The internet is contributing to a wider awareness of political views during this year's campaign season.

At a time when political deliberation seems extremely partisan and when people may be tempted to ignore arguments at odds with their views, internet users are not insulating themselves in information echo chambers. Instead, they are exposed to more

political arguments than non-users.

While all people like to see arguments that support their beliefs, internet users are not limiting their information exposure to views that buttress their opinions. Instead, wired Americans are more aware than non-internet users of all kinds of arguments, even those that challenge their preferred candidates and issue positions.

Some of the increase in overall exposure merely reflects a higher level of interest in politics among internet users. However, even when we compare Americans who are similar in interest in politics and similar in demographic characteristics such as age and education, our main findings still hold. Internet users have greater overall exposure to political arguments and they also hear more challenging arguments.

What do people know about politics and how they come to know it?

A primary objective of this research was to find out whether the internet is reducing the number of points of view that people hear about politics and public affairs, particularly arguments that are at odds with respondents' beliefs. Such a research undertaking has to be grounded in the context of people's overall media use, interest in politics, and other attitudinal and demographic factors. It is not sufficient, therefore, to ask people a question like this: "Do you use the internet to shield yourself against arguments that are at odds with your existing point of view?" Some people may do this, but they would not want to admit it, because most people like to say they are open-minded. Answers to these kinds of questions would not be trustworthy.

To avoid this pitfall, our survey was designed to examine the kinds of arguments people have heard about politicians and issues and to learn what communications and media channels they may use to gather such knowledge. For the presidential race, respondents were asked about their candidate preferences, and were read eight statements about the two major candidates; four statements were favorable to Bush and four were favorable to Kerry. In addition to inquiring about respondents' internet use, the survey also asked about people's media use, overall interest in the campaign, and open-mindedness. This allowed us to evaluate a more subtle question:

■ Is online Americans' use of the internet tied to their awareness of arguments for or against the politicians and issues they support, or do other factors besides internet use explain their awareness?

This approach is more reliable than just counting up the number of arguments people have heard about candidates and observing that internet users have heard more of them. That happens to be true. Yet it could be true not because people use the internet, but because internet users are more interested than others in politics, or because they have higher levels of education than others.

The real impact of internet use comes when statistical techniques are used to assess what portion of that truth can actually be tied to the internet, as opposed to other factors.

This further analysis shows that internet use predicts that people will have greater exposure to arguments that challenge their views.

These internet effects are independent of other things that *also* predict exposure to political information, such as advancing age, use of traditional media, or interest in the campaign.

Internet use is not the only factor associated with exposure to a wide range of political arguments. Education levels, interest in the campaign, and age are among the other factors tied to the number of points of view people encounter.

There are several traits that are associated with relatively broad exposure to arguments about the candidates and the issues we studied. The strongest predictors of the breadth of arguments heard about the candidates are interest in the campaign and advancing age. As for media use, the internet expands people's informational horizons about the candidates, as does daily attention to TV news and the newspaper.

People's degree of open-mindedness and their overall interest in the campaign are the largest factors relating to their exposure to challenging arguments.

Though these factors also shaped issue exposure, there were a few interesting variations. For example, men knew less about gay marriage and more about free trade than women did on average. The importance of community type also varied across issues. People living in rural areas typically knew more about gay marriage, but were no different than those living in urban or suburban communities with regard to their exposure to the Iraq conflict or free trade.

The presidential campaign: People have heard arguments that Bush misled the country about the rationale for war and that Kerry is a flip-flopper on issues.

At the time of this survey, 44% of respondents favored President Bush and 39% supported Senator Kerry. Here were some of the notable findings

■ As of early July, 42% of internet users had gotten news about the campaign online or through email. That represents more than 53 million people.

■ Of all the arguments being made in the campaign the most well-known about Bush was that he misled the public about the reasons for going to war with Iraq (94% of Americans had heard that argument) and the most well-known about Kerry was he

changes positions on issues when he thinks it will help him win an election (70% had heard that argument).

■ Those who are partisans of either candidate are more likely to have heard many arguments about the race – both pro and con – than those who do not yet strongly support either candidate. The partisans are clearly paying attention to all the back-and-forth of the campaign.

Respondents divide into four types when it comes to their exposure to arguments for and against their candidate.

Of the eight arguments people were presented about Bush and Kerry, the respondents said they had heard, either frequently or sometimes, an average of 5.2 of them. Internet use had a positive effect on the number of arguments they had heard. However, not all respondents are equally enthusiastic about finding out the arguments for or against the candidates.

■ Omnivores have heard many of the arguments pertaining to both candidates. They make up 43% of those with a position on the two candidates. Generally, Omnivores are very interested in the political campaign and they are the most ardent news consumers among the four groups. They get news from many sources, including TV, newspapers, and the internet. Omnivores have heard many of the arguments pertaining to both candidates.

■ Selective Reinforcers know a lot about the arguments in favor of their candidate, but relatively few about the opposing candidate. They make up 29% of those with positions on the candidates. They are about average in terms of their interest in the campaign, media consumption, and internet use. Two-thirds of Selective Reinforcers are Bush supporters, one-third support Kerry for president.

■ Tuned Outs have heard relatively few arguments about either candidate. They represent 21% of the population with stated preferences on a candidate. Those in this group do not express great interest in the campaign, and are not news hounds from any media source. And they are less likely than the general population to go online or have college degrees.

■ Contrarians know a good deal about the arguments *in favor* of the candidate they oppose, and relatively little about their guy. Some 8% of respondents who have a position on the candidates fall into this group. Their interest in the campaign is a little lower than average and their use of traditional media and the internet is at about the national average.

People's awareness on issues is different from their awareness about the presidential candidates.

On the three issues we probed, it was surprising to note that, in general, people had heard more about the issues than the candidates. This may be because we only asked people about issues that they said were important to them, while we asked every respondent about the campaign. Furthermore, in contrast to campaign exposure, in which respondents were equally likely to have heard arguments favoring Bush or Kerry, issue exposure was less balanced. People had generally heard more arguments favoring one position or another. For instance, respondents had heard more arguments for the Iraq war than against it, and more arguments against legalizing gay marriage than for it.

The evidence of selectivity in issue exposure is less consistent than with campaign exposure. Still, there is no indication in this survey that people are using the internet to avoid assertions that confront their views.

The Iraq war: People have heard assertions that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator and that Bush misled the public about the existence of weapons of mass destruction.

Some 53% of the respondents in this portion of the survey said they thought the decision to go to war was right and 39% thought it was wrong.

■ As of early July, 53% of internet users had gotten news about the Iraq war online or through email. That represents over 67 million people.

■ Compared to the other issues we explored, people had heard more of the arguments for *and* against the use of military force against Iraq. A typical respondent heard at least occasionally 7.1 out of 8 arguments we queried.

■ Of all the arguments being made in favor of the war, the most well-known was that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator who murdered and tortured his own people (98% of Americans had heard that). The most well-known anti-war argument was that the Bush administration had misled Americans about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction (87% had heard that argument).

Gay marriage: People have heard the argument that gay couples should have the same legal rights as heterosexuals when it comes to economic benefits and the argument that sanctioning gay marriage would hurt the "sacred religious institution" of marriage.

In this portion of the survey, 70% of respondents said they opposed gay marriage and 26% supported it.

■ As of early July, 35% of internet users had gotten news about gay marriage online or through email. That represents over 44 million people.

■ People were more likely to have frequent exposure to the arguments against legalizing gay marriage than for it. On average, respondents heard 2.3 arguments challenging legalization frequently, versus only 1.9 arguments supporting it frequently.

■ Of all the arguments being made in favor of gay marriage the most well-known was that gay couples are entitled to the same legal rights as heterosexual couples when it comes to things like health insurance and inheritance (85% of Americans had heard that). The most well-known argument against gay marriage was that marriage is a sacred religious institution that should be between a man and a woman (97% had heard that argument).

Free trade: People have heard that free trade improves U.S. relations with other nations and that American firms have used free-trade deals to ship American jobs overseas.

Some 31% of those queried in this portion of the survey believe that free trade has been mostly good for the U.S. economy and American workers, while 41% believe free trade has been mostly bad for the economy and workers.

■ As of early July, 26% of internet users had gotten news about the debate over free trade online or through email. That represents over 33 million people.

■ Of all the arguments being made in favor of free trade, the most well-known was that free trade improves U.S. relationships with other countries (77% of Americans had heard that). The most well-known anti-free trade argument was that it allows companies to lay off American workers and send their jobs overseas (89% had heard that argument).

Television is the primary news source for political information, but broadband users increasingly get their information online.

Three-quarters of all Americans (78%) say television is a main source of campaign news. Some 38% of Americans say newspapers are a primary source; 16% say radio; 15% say the internet; and 4% say magazines. (These figures don't add up to 100% because respondents were allowed to give up to two answers.) In addition:

■ 83% of respondents say TV is where they get most of their information about the war in Iraq.

■ 69% of respondents say TV is where they get most of their information about the issue of gay marriage.

■ 59% of respondents say TV is where they get most of their information about the issue of free trade.

■ 31% of Americans with high-speed connections at home identify the internet as a main source of campaign news. This rivals the share of broadband users who say newspapers are a main source (35% do) and far exceeds the 15% who identify the radio as a main source of campaign news.

Internet news is mostly used as a complement to more traditional media. Still, a large number of people have gone to non-traditional Web sites to get information.

People are not abandoning traditional news media for the internet.

■ Of those who get news online on an average day, 90% also got news from a newspaper or TV.

■ Of those who ever get news online, 99% also get news from a newspaper or TV.

The Web sites of major media organizations continue to dominate as sources of online news about politics and public affairs. But political news sites not associated with a major news organization are beginning to get a foothold for internet users, particularly those with broadband at home.

Some 24% of home broadband users are going to alternative online sources. Some 24% have visited the web site of an international news organization, and 16% say they have visited a more partisan alternative news organization's site. Use of these alternative sources is almost always accompanied by use of other more mainstream sources. Nearly 100% of the users going to the alternative sites we asked about also use some other mainstream source. Again, this supports the idea that internet users, especially those with high-speed connections, are not organizing their searches to avoid arguments that would conflict with their views.

■ 59% of all internet users have gotten news from a major news organization, with nearly three-quarters of broadband users having done so.

■ 18% of internet users have gone to the Web site of an international news organization such as BBC or al Jazeera; one-quarter of home broadband users have done this.

■ 11% of internet users have gone to alternative news sites such as AlterNet.org or NewsMax.com; one in six home broadband users have done this.

■ 10% of internet users have gone to Web sites of liberal groups such as MoveOn.org, with 15% of broadband users having done this.

■ 10% of internet users have gone to Web sites of conservative organizations such as the Christian Coalition. Some 10% of broadband users have done this.

Taken together, 30% of all internet users have been to at least one of the four latter non-mainstream media sites. Notably, supporters of John Kerry are more drawn to non-mainstream sites than Bush supporters:

- 36% of Kerry supporters have been to a non-mainstream media site for political news.

- 29% of Bush supporters have been to a non-mainstream media site for political news.

Most Americans prefer their news media sources to have no obvious bias. Yet, many others prefer news sources that either confirm their own views or challenge them. Surprisingly, almost as many prefer news that challenges their views.

Most Americans prefer their news straight, without an obvious point of view. However, about one-quarter of respondents say they like to get news from sources which conform to their political outlooks.

One of the surprises in the survey is the finding that a fifth of Americans (18%) say they prefer media sources that are biased and challenge their views, rather than reinforce them.

The internet and democratic debate: Summary of Findings at a Glance
The internet contributes to a wider awareness of political arguments. Fears that use of the internet might hurt healthy democratic deliberation are not borne out by online behavior.
Respondents divide into four types when it comes to their exposure to arguments for and against their candidate: Omnivores, Selective Reinforcers, Tuned Outs and Contrarians.
Internet use is not the only factor associated with exposure to a wide range of political arguments. Education levels, interest in the campaign, and age are among the other factors tied to the number of points of view people encounter.
The presidential campaign: People have heard arguments that Bush misled the country about the rationale for war and that Kerry is a flip-flopper on issues.
People's awareness on issues is different from their awareness about the presidential candidates.
The Iraq war: People have heard assertions that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator and that Bush misled the public about the existence of weapons of mass destruction.
Gay marriage: People have heard the argument that gay marriage is a civil rights issue and the argument that sanctioning gay marriage would hurt the traditional institution of marriage.
Free trade: People have heard that free trade improves U.S. relations with other nations and that American firms have use free-trade deals to ship American jobs overseas.
Television is the primary news source for political information, but broadband users increasingly get their information online.
Internet news is mostly used as a complement to more traditional media. Still, a large number of people have gone to non-traditional Web sites to get information.
Most Americans prefer their news media sources to have no obvious bias. Yet, many others prefer news sources that either confirm their own views or challenge them.
Source: Horrigan, John, and Kelly Garrett and Paul Resnick. *The internet and democratic debate.* Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, October 27, 2004.

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Part 1. Introduction

The internet and political arguments

There is renewed concern about the issue of "selective exposure" – the possibility people use the internet to tailor the information they receive to their beliefs or interests.

Political scientists and campaign practitioners have been concerned for more than a half century about the ways in which people use media to get political information and then act on it. Two central issues are people's psychological preferences and their ability to act on those preferences. Do people gravitate to information that supports their ideological preferences, and avoid information that challenges their beliefs? And if they do have such preferences, do the available news sources make it easy to get one-sided coverage? If the answers to both these questions are yes, the result will be what researchers have called "selective exposure."

The ominous implications of this phenomenon are obvious. In an effective democracy, it is important that people consider a range of arguments, including those that challenge their viewpoint. If people screen out information that disputes their beliefs, then the chances for true democratic debate will be stunted. Moreover, if people develop habits that continually reinforced their views and shun opposing views, they might become more rigid and perhaps extremist. That could lead to the kind polarization that would make deliberation and consensus impossible.

A generation of research seemed to settle the question. By the late 1960s there was a consensus among scholars that there was not much evidence that selective exposure was occurring. The conclusion drawn at the time was that people do _not_ demonstrate a great preference for supportive information, nor do they avoid information that challenges their beliefs. Researchers observed that people may exhibit a slight tendency to encounter information supportive of their own views, but this does not appear to be the product of a psychological preference. Rather, it results from information screening that is based on factors such as education levels that are not related to people's ideological views.

Yet, now the question has arisen again. The explosive growth of the internet has renewed interest in selective exposure. New communication technologies allow people to customize the information they receive in even more powerful ways than were possible in the age of mass media. People could tailor their information inputs in a way that would reinforce even slight preferences and have a significant effect on their overall

consumption of news. By the late 1990s, many scholars and internet analysts had written about this possibility. The most common concern centered on the risk of fragmentation and balkanization. Some feared that people would use the control afforded by new information technologies to reduce dramatically their exposure to views and information that did not fit their worldview.

As Chicago Law School Prof. Cass Sunstein argued in his book *Republic.com:* "What I … suggest is that there are serious dangers in a system in which individuals bypass general interest intermediaries and restrict themselves to opinions and topics of their own choosing. *In particular, I will emphasize the risks posed by any situation in which thousands or perhaps millions or even tens of millions of people are mainly listening to louder echoes of their own voices.* A situation of this kind is likely to produce far worse than mere fragmentation."[1]

The internet plays a growing role in people's news gathering.

The role of the internet as a news source has been growing both for general news and for news about politics and public affairs. In March 2000, 30 million Americans had gotten news about politics using the internet, and 51 million had gotten news of any kind. By the middle of 2004, these numbers had grown to 63 million and 92 million respectively. The internet is now an important, but largely supplementary, source of news for people. This role may grow as the penetration of broadband internet connections at home grows and the internet goes from being a supplementary to primary source of news for many Americans.

Moreover, the internet's character as a news source may also be very different from traditional media. The internet – and high speed connections especially – may allow people to filter out information that they would prefer not to see. At the same time, they might seek out only that information which supports their existing points of view.

This puts the internet potentially in conflict with a key value in a democracy – a richly informed public that has weighed the different sides of issues and thereby makes the best informed electoral decisions. With widespread concern that the nation is increasingly polarized, the possibility of a vicious cycle presents itself. People, in an environment of polarization that perhaps *already* encourages them to seek out information that reinforces and avoid information that challenges their existing views, may use the internet to accelerate that trend. That would reduce people's ability to find political common ground, and increase the risk of extremist beliefs and radical action. The internet-driven "daily me" might further degrade the climate of public discourse.

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[1] Sunstein, Cass. 2001. *Republic.Com.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pg. 16

Americans getting more news online over time
(millions of Americans)

Chart — Bar graph showing millions of Americans getting news online by type of news (Political news, General news) across four dates (Mar-00, Nov-00, Oct-02, May-04).
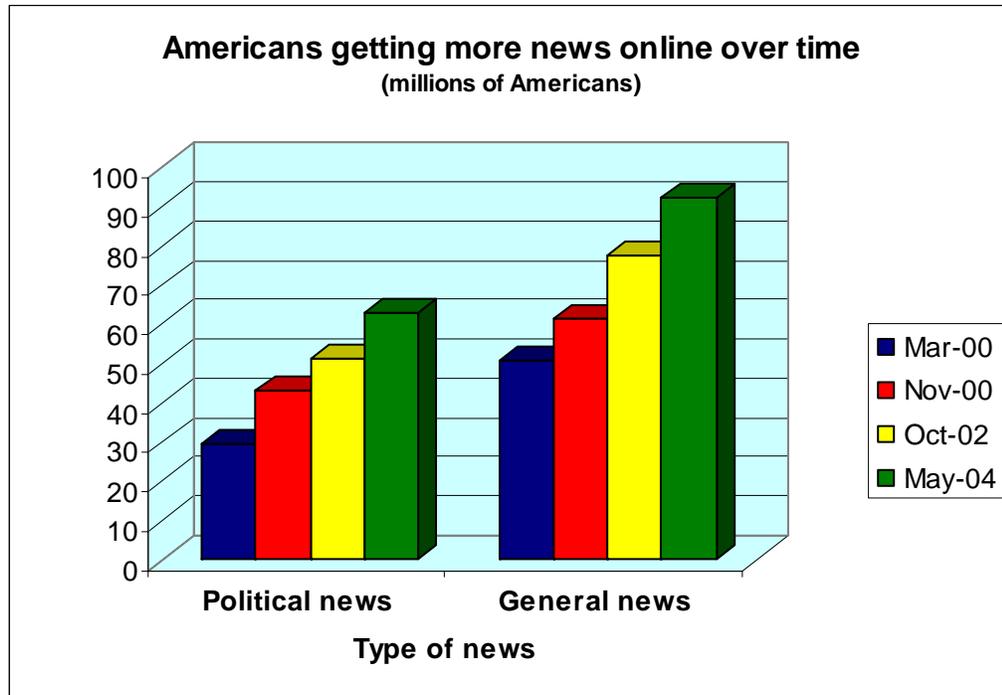
There is another possibility, though. Running counter to the potential of an internet-aided information balkanization is the notion that the internet may improve the quality of democratic deliberation as people have a new and easy-to-use resource to become informed about civic issues.

To explore these cross currents, the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the University of Michigan School of Information conducted a survey in June 2004 to examine people's newsgathering patterns in the election season. The survey sought to examine the degree to which individuals encounter information that is at odds with their positions on issues or candidates. To the extent that healthy democratic discourse relies on collisions – people (actively or not) being exposed to information that informs and challenges their views, with the result being better-informed electoral choices – our purpose is to see whether the internet contributes to, or inhibits, such collisions.

Part 2. How people get news

The internet as a news supplement

Television remains the dominant source of political news and information.

Television is the main source of news for Americans on the typical day. When asked whether they *yesterday* got news from a variety of sources, 74% of Americans said they got news yesterday from the television. The radio and newspapers come in next, with 54% and 51% of respondents, respectively, saying they got news from these sources. The table below shows the breakouts for all media sources asked about, comparing dial-up internet users with those with broadband connections at home.

People's basic news sources on the average day				
	All respondents	*Broadband-at home*	*Dial-up at home*	*Non-internet users*
Television	74%	72%	77%	73%
Radio	54	60	61	39
Newspapers	51	52	56	45
Email (including listservs) or the web	34	64	43	*
Magazines	21	26	22	15

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older). "At home" internet users represent 93% of all internet users in the sample.

Those with high-speed internet connections at home are more reliant on the internet for news on the average day than dial-up users. Broadband users have a more varied mix of news media than other respondents. Of the news sources we asked about, broadband users seek out about 3 on the average day, while dial-up users turn to 2.7 sources, and non-users try 1.7 sources.

For the first time in the research history of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, these data show that high-speed home internet users are more likely to turn to the internet than the newspaper on the typical day for news. In fact, when focusing on whether online Americans used *either* the web *or* email newsletters or listservs to get news, fully 64% of

home broadband users use an online resource for news on the average day – nearly as many as use TV. Fully 42% of American internet users who go online from home have high-speed connections and it is clear that the internet is a news source of growing importance for this group.

When we probed specifically about news consumption for the 2004 presidential campaign, it is apparent how important TV is as a source of campaign news. When asked where they get *most* of their news about the presidential election campaign, three quarters of all respondents include TV as one of their top sources[2], about 40% say newspapers, with radio and the internet trailing significantly. Our June numbers do not differ much from findings in a survey we conducted with the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press in January 2004. However, compared to our findings in January 2000, TV has seen its primacy chipped away somewhat while the internet's prominence has grown.

People's main sources of campaign news over time			
	June 2004	*January 2004*	*January 2000*
Television	78%	78%	86%
Newspaper	38	38	36
Radio	16	15	14
Internet and email (including listservs)	15	13	7
Magazines	4	2	4

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older). Numbers add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Breaking the numbers down based on levels of internet use shows how reliant those with high-speed connections have become on the net for campaign news. Broadband users are about as likely to cite the internet as the newspaper as a main source for campaign news.

Americans' main sources of campaign news by relationship to internet			
	Broadband at home users	*Dial-up from home users*	*Non-internet users*
Television	72%	72	89%
Newspaper	35	39	40
Radio	15	18	12
Internet and email	31	16	1
Magazines	4	6	2

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older). Numbers add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

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[2] Respondents could list up to two sources.

Internet news use is almost always accompanied by use of more traditional media

Though internet news is important to an increasing number of people, the vast majority of online news consumers continue to get news from newspapers and television, too. Internet news sources are not rapidly displacing traditional news media. Overall, 90% of those who got news online yesterday also used one of the older media types. Furthermore, 99% of those who ever use online news got news from a traditional outlet at some time. The kind of access people have at home is correlated with whether online news users also get news from other media on a typical day, but the effect appears fairly small. Online news users with different kinds of internet connections are equally likely to use newspapers or television at least occasionally.

Percentage of online-news users who use other traditional news sources				
	All respondents	*Broadband-at home*	*Dial-up*	*Non-internet users*
Used sources yesterday				
Television	86%	83%	88%	87%
Newspapers	67	63	70	77
Television or newspaper	90	88	91	95
Ever use sources				
Television	93%	92%	94%	99%
Newspapers	87	83	91	91
Television or newspaper	99	98	99	100

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older).

Most news consumers like nonpartisan sources, but some like their news with a partisan angle.

In addition to asking about the media sources people use to get news, the survey asked questions about the kinds of news people prefer. That is, we queried whether they like to get news from sources that share their political point of view, sources that do not have any particular point of view, or sources that challenge their political point of view. The sample was split so these questions could be asked in two different ways. One offered a choice between news sources that share respondents' points of view and news sources with no point of view. The other offered those two choices and a third: whether the respondent prefers news sources that challenge his or her political point of view.

Preferences about news sources – battery 1	
I prefer to get news from sources that …	
SHARE my political point of view	27%
DON'T HAVE a political point of view	61
Don't know/refused	12

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 761 Americans adults.

Preferences about news sources – battery 2	
I prefer to get news from sources that …	
SHARE my political point of view	22%
DON'T HAVE a political point of view	50
CHALLENGE my political point of view	18
Don't know/refused	10

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 749 Americans adults.

As the tables show, most Americans prefer their news straight, without an obvious point of view. However, about one-quarter of respondents say they like to get news from sources which conform to their political outlooks. When prompted, nearly one-fifth like to explore the other side of the argument; they like news that challenges their existing views.

There are some differences in the news sources people prefer when their relationship to the internet is considered. As the tables below show, non-internet users are less likely to prefer straight news and they have a tendency to seek out news that conforms to their political viewpoint. There is a small tendency on the part of home high-speed internet users to prefer straight news and no higher inclination on their part to be challenged by their news sources. So, broadband users are a bit less likely than others to prefer news sources that share their views. This is one modest indicator that broadband users might be *less likely* to use the internet to narrow their political information gathering because they are less interested in using media to confirm their views.

Preferences about news sources by relationship to the internet – battery 1			
	Broadband users	*Dial-up users*	*Non-internet users*
SHARE my political point of view	20%	25%	32%
DON'T HAVE a political point of view	69	65	54
Don't know/refused	11	10	14

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 761 Americans adults.

Preferences about news sources by relationship to the internet – battery 2			
	Broadband users	*Dial-up users*	*Non-internet users*
SHARE my political point of view	18%	19%	28%
DON'T HAVE a political point of view	56	54	43
CHALLENGE my political point of view	18	17	19
Don't know/refused	9	11	10

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 749 Americans adults.

While it might come as a surprise that a quarter of Americans prefer news sources that share their political views, it is important to note that this figure has not changed much over time. When the question was asked by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in December, 2003 (without the option for respondents to say they like news that challenges their points of view), 25% said they preferred news that shares their political views, while 67% said they preferred news with no political point of view. It does seem clear, however, that high-speed internet connections at home are not associated with any greater tendency on the part of respondents to seek out news sources that reinforce their points of view. In fact, the opposite is true.

People use a variety of Web sites to get political news and information.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project's previous work with the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press has shown that internet users mainly go to Web sites of the mainstream media to get both general news and political news. The table below shows that this is largely the case from the June 2004 survey. Some 59% of all internet users have gone to sites of major news organizations and nearly three-quarters of home high-speed users have done that.

Still, for a sizable share of home broadband users, alternative sources of news about politics and public affairs play a role in their informational universes. Of the four alternative news sites that all respondents were asked about (an international news site such as al Jazeera, alternative sites such as AlterNet, politically liberal, and politically conservative sites), fully 30% of internet users have gone to at least one of these. Among internet users with high-speed connections at home, 36% have been to at least one of these sites.

When broken out by candidate support, it is clear that Kerry supporters are more taken than Bush supporters with getting news online from alternative sources. Fully 36% of Kerry supporters have gone to at least one of the four alternative sites specified; the number for Bush supporters is 29%.

The kinds of Web sites people use to get political news and information	Broadband users	Dial-up users
Web site of major news organizations, such as CNN.com	72%	51%
Web site of an international news site such as al Jazeera	24	14
Web site of alternative news site like AlterNet.org or NewsMax.com	16	7
Web site of politically liberal group such as People for the American Way or MoveOn.org	15	7
JohnKerry.com, the Democratic nominee's official site	14	8
GeorgeWBush.com, the president's official re-election site	13	7
RNC.com, the official site of the Republican National Committee	11	5
Web site of a politically conservative group such as the American Enterprise Institute or the Christian Coalition	10	11
DNC.com, the official site of the Democratic National Committee	6	6

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. N= 398 for broadband users and n=524 for dial-up internet users (age 18 and older).

Use of partisan web sites complements use of mainstream sources

Online partisan news sources are becoming more popular, but people are not abandoning the mainstream news media in favor of those sites. Of those who say they use alternate news sites, 92% also report using the site of a major news organization, and every person we talked to said that they also get news from at least one of three mainstream sources: TV news, newspapers, or major news organizations news sites.

Percentage of partisan-news users who use other mainstream news sources at least sometimes	At least one mainstream source	Newspaper	Television	Web site of a major news organization
Alternative news site	100%	86%	86%	92%
International news site	100	89	90	91
Partisan organization site	99	87	90	85
Party-affiliated site	98	90	91	82

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older).

Part 3. Candidate information

The arguments people hear about Bush and Kerry

Internet users get more news, but are they *Omnivores, Selective Reinforcers, Tuned Outs,* or *Contrarians* when it comes to their exposure to political arguments?

Internet users are more likely to get news on the typical day than non-users and those online users are a bit more inclined than non-users to state a preference for unbiased news sources. On its face, this is good news about the internet's effect on democratic discourse; people who have broadband access say they prefer balance, so that the internet can expand people's news horizons without driving them into ideological warrens of their own choosing.

However, that would be a premature conclusion for two reasons. First, there is a possibility that some respondents felt inclined to say they value news sources with no political point of view because that is a socially desirable answer to give. Those responses, then, should be interpreted with some caution. Second, and more importantly, though we know something about the relative amount of news people get from various sources, we do not know the nature of the information they get from them. A better measure of the internet's impact on political discourse is the nature of the information people get about issues and candidates.

To probe this issue, the survey asked respondents whether they had ever heard of specific arguments about the presidential candidates or specific policy issues. We did this to get a measure of the breadth of arguments about this year's presidential candidates and issues citizens have learned about. This section of the report will cover respondents' exposure to arguments related to the presidential campaign.

Each respondent was also probed about exposure to arguments related to one of three issues relevant to this political season: the Iraq war, gay marriage, or free trade and the impact of globalization on the U.S. and world economies. A discussion of the internet's impact on the information people get about those issues follows in subsequent sections of this report.

The basic question guiding this research is whether people are using the internet to confirm their views and avoid information that might challenge their views. Thus, in these sections we are trying to understand whether internet users, especially with broadband connections, are screening in arguments that back their candidate and denigrate his opponent and screening out arguments that challenge their man *or* on the other hand whether they are being exposed to a diversity of arguments.

We call those who gravitate towards supportive arguments and away from challenging arguments *Selective Reinforcers.* At the same time, we call those who expose themselves to a wider diversity of views *Omnivores.* A third category is evident, as well. They are the people who are largely indifferent to information of any kind – that is, they are largely unaware of information that supports their views or challenges them. We call them the *Tuned Outs.* Finally, there is a sizable minority of people who are drawn to arguments contrary to their views, while not encountering very many of the arguments that support what they believe. We call them *Contrarians.*

The internet's role is of main interest. Are people who get their news online more likely to be Omnivores and Contrarians? Or are they disproportionately Selective Reinforcers?

How much argument for and against the presidential candidates are internet users encountering?

To measure people's exposure to information about the presidential race, respondents were read eight statements, four that either favor George Bush or criticize John Kerry and four that either favor Kerry or criticize Bush. We chose arguments that were evident in the candidates' speeches, campaign ads, or other campaign material, or because they were prominently mentioned in the news media. We intentionally selected a mix of high- and low-prominence statements to help ensure that some arguments would be unfamiliar even to those who regularly follow the campaign.

The following table shows the percent of respondents who had heard these statements about the candidates either frequently or sometimes. At the time of this survey, 44% of all respondents said they would vote for George Bush if the election were held today (sometime between June 14 and July 3, 2004), 39% said they would vote for John Kerry, 7% said Ralph Nader, and 10% were undecided.

The percentage of respondents who have heard arguments for and against each candidate	Heard this argument frequently	Heard this argument sometimes
Pro-Bush arguments		
George Bush is a stronger leader than John Kerry in the war on terrorism	42%	28%
John Kerry changes his positions on the issues when he thinks it will help him win the election	42	28
The Bush administration's policies have helped the economy begin to recover	39	37
John Kerry has a history of accepting money from special interest groups	16	33
Pro-Kerry arguments		
The Bush administration misled the American public about the reasons for going to war about Iraq	74	20
Some Bush administration policies are a threat to basic civil rights and civil liberties	30	32
John Kerry has a better strategy than George Bush for creating peace in Iraq	20	33
John Kerry will end special treatment for corporations and wealthy Americans	18	32

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older).

The amount of exposure respondents have had to arguments about the candidates does not vary a lot based on whether people use the internet or not.

On average, a respondent had heard of 5.2 of arguments either sometimes or frequently. Focusing on only having heard an argument frequently, respondents had heard of 2.8 arguments frequently.

Respondents, on average, are about as likely to have heard arguments sympathetic to Bush (either for Bush or critical of Kerry) as to have heard arguments sympathetic to Kerry (either for Kerry or critical of Bush). The typical respondent heard frequently 1.4 arguments tilting Bush's way and 1.4 arguments favoring Kerry. Summing statements heard sometimes or frequently yields 2.6 statements heard that favor Bush and 2.6 statements heard that favor Kerry.

There are small variations across types of internet connections and whether one is an internet user. As the following table shows, broadband internet users have, on average, heard of more arguments about the candidates than dial-up users, and both types of internet users have heard more arguments than non-users. Broadband connections at home have the largest impact, it seems, for arguments "sometimes" heard, suggesting that the easy access to information enabled by broadband may foster casual encounters with arguments people might otherwise not hear.

The number of arguments heard about the candidates by different groups in relation to their internet access		
Number of arguments heard…	*Frequently*	*Frequently and sometimes*
All respondents	2.8	5.2
Broadband-at-home users	3.0	5.5
Dial-up from home	2.8	5.3
Non-internet users	2.7	5.0

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older).

More variation emerges when comparing respondents who say they support Bush with those who support Kerry, and when comparing subsets of the respective supporters who support their candidate strongly. The partisans – those who support either Kerry or Bush strongly – are more likely to have heard various statements about the candidates than average.

The number of arguments heard about the candidates by different groups of supporters		
Number of arguments heard…	*Frequently*	*Frequently and sometimes*
Supports Bush (leaners and strong supporters)	2.9	5.5
Supports Bush strongly	3.2	5.7
Supports Kerry (leaners and strong supporters)	2.9	5.3
Supports Kerry strongly	3.4	5.6

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older).

There is some evidence of selective exposure or belief reinforcement, but it is *not* associated with use of the internet. In fact, use of the internet exposes users to a wider array of arguments.

Our data offer a way to consider whether selective exposure is occurring and the extent to which the internet is a factor in it. To do this we examine the degree to which those who support one candidate have heard arguments in favor of the other. In other words, are people who support Bush hearing many arguments sympathetic to Kerry, and vice versa?

The tables below show that some degree of selective exposure appears to exist when comparing the number of pro-Kerry arguments heard by Bush supporters with the

average, and then the number of pro-Bush arguments heard by Kerry supporters. Partisans of a particular candidate are more likely than the average to have heard arguments that support their candidate, but are only slightly less likely than average to have heard arguments that favor the candidate they don't support.

However, use of the internet, especially with high-speed links at home, doesn't exacerbate selective exposure. Rather, broadband use seems to diminish selective exposure somewhat. Those with broadband are exposed to more arguments than others.

The number of arguments that people hear frequently or sometimes that are ….		
	Pro-Bush	*Pro-Kerry*
All respondents	2.6	2.6
Supports Bush (leaners and strong supporters)	3.1	2.4
Supports Bush strongly	3.2	2.5
Supports Bush, has broadband at home	3.2	2.7
Supports Kerry (leaners and strong supporters)	2.4	2.9
Supports Kerry strongly	2.6	3.1
Supports Kerry, has broadband at home	2.5	3.1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults (age 18 and older).

Many of the traits of internet users are tied to their interest in politics. Yet, when we control for all those other factors, it is clear that their internet use alone is a factor in their wide exposure to political arguments.

For both general exposure to information and selective exposure to information there seem to be internet effects. The internet seems associated with higher levels of exposure to statements about the presidential candidates, and seems to mitigate tendencies among partisans to ignore dissonant views.

In either instance, the apparent internet effect needs to be tested further. Other attributes of internet users, separate from their status as online users or speed of their home connections, may be behind these effects. Internet users, for example, may be more interested in the campaign (and thus perhaps in getting a variety of information on it) or may have higher levels of education, which may encourage people to seek out lots of campaign information.

This section reports the results of regression analysis, which enables the independent effects of the internet and various other variables, to be isolated.

The internet's effect on overall information exposure

For exposure to statements about the candidates, both favorable and unfavorable, a number of factors, many of them having nothing to do with the internet, have independent positive effects on the number of statements people say they have heard.

People who say they follow the campaign very closely are aware of a wider range of statements about the candidates than other Americans. The same is true of older people, compared to younger Americans. Being a male is associated with higher rates of awareness of statements about the candidates. And the other demographic finding of note was that English-speaking Hispanics were significantly more likely than average to have heard a wider range of arguments, while Blacks were less likely than average to have heard a wide range of arguments.

In a number of ways, the survey also measured people's openness to finding out about different or new things. People who said they like to read about different subjects or enjoy hearing about politics and world affairs were aware of a wider range of arguments about the candidates than others who were less inclined to do wide-ranging reading or inquiries.

We also asked respondents about their attitudes towards exposure to information – for instance, whether they like news sources with no point of view, or those that conform to their points of view, or those that challenge their point of view. Interestingly, those questions did not generally yield significant results. People who say they like news from sources that share their point of view were no more or less likely to hear statements about candidates. Those who like news with no point of view are not significantly different than those who don't. Finally, those who like news that challenge their point of view are no more likely to have heard statements about the candidates.

Internet use did have an independent and positive effect on the number of statements people heard about candidates. Simply being an internet user, controlling for demographic factors such as gender and education, as well as the other factors already discussed, increases the likelihood that a person has heard more arguments about a candidate. Not surprisingly, specific online behaviors pertaining to the election season, (e.g., getting campaign news online or going online to get more in-depth news about the campaign) also increased the chances that a respondent had heard more arguments about the candidates.

In sum, the strongest predictors of the breadth of arguments heard about the candidates are interest in the campaign and advancing age. As for media use, the internet expands people's informational horizons about the candidates, as does daily attention to TV news and the newspaper.

The internet's effect on exposure to arguments that challenge users' political views

To assess whether people are avoiding information that opposes their points of view, our analysis focuses on the amount of information they have heard that challenges their candidate preference. In this way, a positive association means that people are finding out arguments for the other candidate or critical of their own. Conversely, a negative association means a factor contributes to people *not* finding out about arguments that are critical of their candidate.

The results for exposure to challenging arguments are not too different from what we found when looking at people's overall exposure to information about the candidates. For Bush supporters, those who have high-speed internet connections at home were significantly more likely than non-users to have heard arguments favorable to John Kerry. For Kerry supporters, the internet effect was positive, as well.

In sum, people are not using the internet to avoid information and arguments that challenge their candidate preferences.

Still, the internet's role is only part of the story here. People's degree of open-mindedness and their overall interest in the campaign also have a big impact on their exposure to challenging arguments. People who are not interested in the campaign – those who are not likely to hear a lot of arguments of any kind about the candidates – are not likely to hear opposing views.

Those who expressed open-mindedness in our survey also were exposed to more challenging arguments. For instance, those who showed a willingness to revise their beliefs, those who showed enjoyment of politics and world affairs, and those who showed a desire to gather facts about issues before taking a position, were also more likely than others to be exposed to arguments that opposed their candidate.

There is also the perhaps less interesting case of partisan selectivity, that is, what drives the number of arguments the supporter of a candidate has heard about his or her favored candidate. Again, the internet is a door opener. For Kerry supporters, those who have gone online for campaign news are more likely to have heard a greater number of arguments than those who have not done this. The same is true for Bush supporters, though at a lower level of statistical certainty than for Kerry supporters.

The political information "market" segments four ways.

On average, respondents said they had heard of 5.2 out of the eight arguments presented about the presidential candidates, but there is variation within the population on the nature and amount of information they have encountered about the candidates.

Americans who have a position on the two major-party presidential candidates sort into four groups in their predilections for finding out information about the presidential race.

■ Omnivores: These are people who have heard three of more of the four arguments about each of the two candidates. Fully 43% of Bush or Kerry supporters fall into the category of having heard at least three pro-Bush arguments and three pro-Kerry arguments.

■ Selective Reinforcers: People in this group have heard three or more of the arguments that favor the candidate they support, but only two or fewer of the arguments in favor of the other candidate. They make up 29% of respondents who said they support either Kerry or Bush. Close to two-thirds of this group are Bush Selective Reinforcers, meaning they know all the arguments in favor of Bush but no more than two pro-Kerry arguments. A bit more than one-third of this group is Kerry Selective Reinforcers.

■ Tuned Outs: This is a group of people who, even though they support one of the two candidates, tune out of political debates. These are the people who have heard two or fewer arguments about either candidate. Roughly 21% of those with a position on the candidates fall into this category.

■ Contrarians: About 8% of those with a position on the candidate are contrarians, meaning they support a specific candidate, know comparatively few of the arguments in favor of that candidate, but a lot about the candidate they *do not* support.

Omnivores are the most politically interested and news-hungry group. Fully half (49%) say they follow the campaign very closely (versus 31% of all Americans) and 86% watch TV news on the typical day and 72% read the newspaper on the average day, well above the figures for all Americans of 73% and 50% respectively. Omnivores are also more likely to get news online on the typical day; 37% compared with the 27% for others.

Omnivores also fit the profile of technologically sophisticated Americans. Nearly three-quarters (73%) go online, compared with 65% of everyone else, and 31% of high-speed connections at home versus 23% of everyone else. This group is more educated (37% have college degrees versus 20% of everyone else), more likely to be male (54% are), and white (85% are versus 76% of those in other groups).

Selective Reinforcers distinguish themselves from Omnivores in their lower level of interest in the political campaign and less ardent consumption of news. About 28% of Selective Reinforcers say they follow the campaign very closely, 40% read the newspaper on the typical day and 72% watch TV news. As for online news consumption, 30% go to the internet for news on the typical day, which is right at the average for all respondents. And 69% of all Selective Reinforcers are internet users, with 26% having high-speed connections at home. In sum, Selective Reinforcers are, as a group, very much the average American when it comes to interest in politics, news consumption, internet use, and other variables such as gender and level of education.

The Tuned Outs, even though they have developed a preference for a candidate, are simply not very interested in politics and public affairs. Just 11% have followed the presidential campaign very closely, 37% get news from the newspaper on the average day, and 62% get news from the television. Only 19% get news online on the typical day, and this group has relatively low internet penetration. Three in five (60%) go online, and 17% have high-speed connections at home (versus 25% for all Americans). This group has lower levels of educational attainment (15% are college graduates) and is more diverse racially, with 70% whites, 22% blacks, and 11% English-speaking Hispanics (the figures do not sum to 100 because the categories were not mutually exclusive). Finally, 60% of Tuned Outs are women.

The Contrarians by and large have somewhat below average stated interest in the campaign and public affairs. Still, they are willing to reach out to find out information about the presidential campaign. About a quarter of this group say they follow the campaign very closely, half get news from the newspaper on the average day, and about one quarter get news online on the typical day. They also come in about average in terms of overall internet penetration and use of high-speed at home. As a group, Contrarians tilt toward women (57%) and the college educated (32% have at least college degrees). Though it is hard to sum up the Contrarians, they seem to have an interest in the campaign – enough to have encountered just about the average number of arguments about the candidates – but the presidential race is not a consuming passion for them.

Americans' perceptions of media bias don't influence their exposure to pro and con arguments about candidates.

Respondents were asked whether they believe that the media has a bias in the way the presidential campaign is covered, and the results were very different for Kerry and Bush supporters. Nearly half of Bush supporters see a media biased in favor of Kerry, a fifth of Kerry supporters say this about media coverage in Bush's favor.

In the way they cover the presidential race, do you think the news media are …			
	All respondents	*Bush supporters*	*Kerry supporters*
Biased for Kerry	25%	45%	9%
Biased for Bush	12	6	21
Not biased	34	25	43
Biased both ways	7	6	6
Depends on media source	11	12	13

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey of 1,510 Americans adults.

However, these perceptions of bias do not seem to correlate with the number or nature of the arguments that people have heard. Bush supporters' exposure to pro-Kerry arguments was no higher than Kerry supporters' exposure to pro-Bush arguments. And Bush supporters' exposure to arguments for their man was slightly higher than Kerry supporters' exposure to argument for their man.

Part 4. The war in Iraq

The arguments people hear for and against the conflict

In addition to asking respondents about their candidate preferences and the arguments for and against the candidate they support, we also wanted to probe how people use media sources to gather information about key policy questions. We asked respondents to tell us how important they considered each of five controversial issues: the decision to use military force in Iraq, free trade and its impact on American workers, and legalizing gay marriage, health care, and abortion.

If a respondent identified one of the first three issues as somewhat or very important, we followed up with a series of question about the topic. If a respondent said that multiple issues were important, we placed them into one of the issue categories and then posed questions related to that issue. This allowed us to make sure that the number of respondents for each topic was about even: 465 American adults answered questions about the situation in Iraq, and 512 answered questions about gay marriage and about free trade.

Some 53% of the respondents who responded to this part of the survey said they thought that the U.S. made the right decision in using military force against Iraq, 39% said they thought it was the wrong decision, and 8% were undecided.

People have heard most of the arguments for and against the war.

To measure their exposure to information, respondents were read eight statements, four supporting the war and four challenging it. The table below shows the percent of respondents who had heard these statements about the each issue either frequently or sometimes.

A typical respondent had heard 5.3 arguments related to Iraq frequently. If we also include arguments heard sometimes, a typical respondent was familiar with 7.1 arguments. On average, respondents were more familiar with the arguments supporting the decision to use military force in Iraq than against it. Looking just at those arguments they encountered frequently, they heard 2.9 arguments supporting the decision and 2.4 against it. Adding to this the arguments heard less often, they heard 3.8 supporting arguments, versus only 3.4 opposing arguments. Interestingly, this is a higher level of general public awareness than was evident in the presidential race. The average American

was at least somewhat aware of nearly all the core arguments that were raging about the war in the spring of 2004.

The percentage of respondents who have heard arguments for and against the decision to use military force against Iraq…		
	Heard this argument frequently	*Heard this argument sometimes*
Arguments in favor of the decision to go to war		
Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator who murdered and tortured his own people	88%	10%
Saddam Hussein was seeking weapons of mass destruction, which he might someday use against the United States	79	16
Iraq posed an imminent threat to American security	64	25
Saddam Hussein had connections with Al-Qaeda and may have played a role in the September 11th terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center	63	29
Arguments against the decision to go to war		
We should not have gone to war with Iraq without the support of the United Nations and our allies	68	27
The Bush administration misled the American people about Iraq's weapons program and the threat it posed to the United States	67	20
The President should have found a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Iraq, instead of risking lives through war	55	30
Going to war with Iraq will only increase anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world	55	22

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 465 American adults answered questions about this issue.

A respondent's position on the issue was unrelated to overall exposure: supporters and opponents were familiar with the same number of arguments. As with exposure to arguments for the candidates, however, people with broadband connections at home were more likely than dial-up users to be exposed to all the arguments about the war that we tested.

Number of arguments heard about the war in Iraq by different groups…		
	Frequently	*Frequently and sometimes*
All respondents	5.3	7.1
Agrees with Iraq decision	5.4	7.2
Disagrees with Iraq decision	5.4	7.1
Broadband-at-home users	5.9	7.4
Dial-up from home	5.3	7.2
Non-internet users	5.2	6.9

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 465 American adults answered questions about this issue.

There is wide exposure to arguments that challenge people's positions on the war.

Examining the extent to which respondents had greater exposure to the arguments supporting their viewpoint about the war, we find that people's familiarity with arguments regarding the situation in Iraq is an exception. In the case of arguments for and against the candidates, gay rights, and free trade, people tended to be more familiar with arguments that buttress their existing views. On the Iraq war, though, no matter what their viewpoint, respondents were more familiar with arguments justifying the decision to go to war than with those challenging it.

Respondents with broadband access typically had heard more arguments for both sides than those who share their point of view but don't have broadband.

The number of arguments heard about each side of the Iraq debate that…		
	Support the decision to go to war	Challenge the decision to go to war
All respondents	3.8	3.4
Agrees with Iraq decision	3.8	3.5
Agrees, has broadband at home	3.9	3.7
Disagrees with Iraq decision	3.8	3.4
Disagrees, has broadband at home	3.9	3.7

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 465 American adults answered questions about this issue.

There are several factors, including internet use, that are tied to how many arguments people hear.

In order to separate the influence of internet use on issue exposure, it is again necessary to use regression analysis to control for a variety of correlated characteristics. These analyses mirror those used in the analysis of the campaign. They look first at overall issue exposure, and then look at exposure to arguments challenging respondents' viewpoints.

Age, education, use of other news media, and open-mindedness were significantly related to exposure to arguments about the Iraq war. Older Americans and those who have more education are more familiar with arguments about the Iraq war than others, as are people who use television or newspapers to get news about the issue. On the other hand, people who say that they are quick to make a decision once they have gathered the relevant facts are familiar with fewer of the arguments than those who say they need more time to reach a conclusion.

Internet use was also associated with increased issue exposure overall. Controlling for other likely factors and other demographics, including party affiliation and overall news media use, internet users typically heard more arguments pro and con about the decision to go to war in Iraq.

There is an internet effect on the exposure people have to arguments that challenge their positions on the war.

In order to assess whether people are using the internet to avoid challenging information, we looked at respondents' exposure to arguments opposing their viewpoint on the Iraq decision. In this case, this means that we looked at how exposed war supporters were to anti-war arguments and how exposed war opponents were to pro-war arguments. We wanted to find out if people are creating an environment in which they only encounter arguments that support their position.

In the analysis, a positive association between internet access and exposure means that users are encountering more information that challenges their viewpoint, while a negative association means they are encountering less. We found that the correlation was positive for supporters and opponents. We conclude that people are not using internet access to screen out or avoid exposure to views that challenge their position on the war. To the contrary, people interested in Iraq are likely to use the internet to become more familiar with both sides of the debate.

There are four segments of the information "market" on the Iraq war.

As with the campaign, we have divided respondents who expressed an opinion about each of the issues into four categories based on their exposure to information supporting and challenging their viewpoint. Our definitions of Omnivores, Selective Reinforcers, Tuned Outs, and Contrarians are unchanged, but the characteristics of these groups vary.

Omnivores: Fully 77% of the respondents that we asked about the Iraq decision had extensive exposure to both sides of the issue. This is a much larger percentage than we saw for campaign arguments. We suspect that this reflects the high salience of this issue at the time of the survey, combined with the fact that we only asked people about the issue if they said it was personally important. Given how many people fall into this category, it is unsurprising that their characteristics look very similar to those of the whole sample.

Selective Reinforcers: Only 7% of those we asked about Iraq had high exposure levels to supportive arguments and low exposure to those that were challenging. Though similar to Omnivores in many respects, these individuals were less likely than omnivores to get news about Iraq online (14% versus 39%), and had lower educational attainment (19% had completed a college degree versus 27% of all Americans).

<u>Tuned Outs:</u> Individuals with limited knowledge about both sides of the Iraq debate constituted only 4% of the respondents. The characteristics most clearly differentiating this group from the population at large are that its members are less educated – only 7% of Tuned Outs are college graduates – and they are not online. About 50% of these individuals had internet access (versus 67% of all Americans), and only 8% had a broadband connection at home (versus 26% of all Americans).

<u>Contrarians:</u> Representing 6% of the people interested in Iraq, those who knew the majority of arguments against their position, but only a few that supported it were the least likely to follow the news. Only 20% read the newspaper on a typical day (versus 60% nationally), and only 11% get news related to Iraq online. The number of Contrarians watching TV news does approach the national average, though (75% versus 80%). Contrarians are also a more racial diverse group (55% whites, 32% blacks, and 13% English-speaking Hispanics), and predominantly (77%) female.

Part 5. Gay marriage

The arguments people hear about a major social issue

In all, 512 respondents were asked questions about gay marriage. There was a greater partisan imbalance among them than on any of the other issues probed in this research. Some 26% of the respondents to this part of the survey said they favored legalizing gay marriage, 70% said they opposed it, and 4% were undecided.

The most prominent arguments people have heard about gay marriage tie to values.

The following tables summarize people's exposure to the 8 different statements we asked about. A typical respondent had heard 6.3 arguments about gay marriage. They had frequent contact with about two-thirds of these arguments, reporting that they heard 4.2 gay marriage arguments frequently.

The percentage of respondents who have heard arguments for and against the decision to allow gay marriage…	Heard this argument frequently	Heard this argument sometimes
Arguments in favor of gay marriage		
Gay couples are entitled to the same legal rights as heterosexual couples when it comes to things like health insurance, inheritance, or pensions	59%	26%
Legalizing gay marriage is an important civil rights issue, protecting a group of Americans who have been discriminated against in the past	49	33
It is not the government's role to tell people who they can and cannot marry	45	33
Legalizing gay marriage benefits everyone because it encourages long-term, monogamous relationships between two people who love one another	36	31
Arguments opposed to gay marriage		
Marriage is a sacred religious institution that should be between a man and a woman	87	10
Legalizing gay marriage sends the message that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle	64	24
Legalizing gay marriage would result in more gay couples raising children, and children should only be raised in households where there is a mother and a father	54	35
Legalizing gay marriage would open the door to legalizing other forms of marriage, such as polygamy	21	28

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 512 American adults answered questions about this issue.

In our survey, respondents typically had greater familiarity with the arguments favoring one position than another on issues and that is certainly true here. In the case of gay marriage, they heard more arguments against legalizing gay marriage, 2.3 frequently and 3.2 at least sometimes, than for it, 1.9 frequently and 3.1 at least sometimes.

Examining overall exposure, we find that supporters had more occasional contact with the arguments made about gay marriage than opponents. The number of arguments heard frequently was the same on either side of this issue. Turning to the internet, we find once again that access speed was positively related to exposure. The faster an individual's internet connection, the greater is his or her familiarity with the statements that we asked about.

The number of arguments heard about gay marriage by different groups…		
	Frequently	*Frequently and sometimes*
All respondents	4.2	6.3
Supports gay marriage	4.3	6.6
Opposes gay marriage	4.2	6.4
Broadband-at-home users	4.5	6.7
Dial-up from home	4.2	6.4
Non-internet users	4.0	6.1

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 512 American adults answered questions about this issue.

Internet users do not limit their exposure to arguments supporting their position on gay marriage.

Examining the extent to which respondents had greater exposure to the arguments supporting their viewpoint, we find some evidence that people have been exposed to more arguments in support of their position on gay marriage than arguments challenging their position. Partisans on both sides were more familiar with arguments consistent with the viewpoint than with those challenging it.

Broadband access, however, is not a factor reinforcing this selectivity. It had no effect on exposure to argument supporting gay marriage, and respondents on both sides with

broadband access typically had heard more arguments challenging gay marriage than those who share their point of view but don't have broadband.

The number of arguments heard about each side of the gay marriage debate that…		
	Support legalizing gay marriage	*Challenge legalizing gay marriage*
All respondents	3.1	3.2
Supports gay marriage	3.5	3.2
Supports, has broadband at home	3.5	3.4
Opposes gay marriage	3.0	3.3
Opposes, has broadband at home	3.2	3.5

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 512 American adults answered questions about this issue.

Factors influencing overall argument exposure

The regression analysis shows that several factors are significantly related to exposure for arguments about gay marriage. Being males is associated with lower rates of awareness of the arguments. People living in rural areas were more likely than average to have heard a range of arguments. Respondent who used news media, including television, newspapers, magazines, and radio, were familiar with more arguments.

People's openness to finding new information was also important, though some of the results were unexpected. People who said they enjoyed reading about different things, and those who said they sometimes change their minds after reaching an opinion were both more familiar with the statements about gay marriage than those who didn't. Surprisingly, those who said that they tend to reach a decision quickly, and had difficulty making a decision when faced with too much information were also more familiar with the arguments than those more inclined to explore an issue thoroughly.

Here again, internet use was positively correlated with overall issue exposure. Internet users had heard more arguments on average than those who don't use the internet.

The internet has an impact on people's exposure to arguments challenging their positions on gay marriage.

Examining the extent to which respondents had greater exposure to the arguments supporting their viewpoint, we find some evidence that people have been exposed to more arguments in support of their position on gay marriage than arguments challenging their position. As with campaign information, broadband access is not associated with a decrease in exposure to arguments that challenge respondents' views. Respondents with broadband access typically had heard more arguments for both sides than those who share their point of view but don't have broadband.

The segments of the information market on gay marriage

Omnivores: They are the vast majority of respondents answering questions about gay marriage. Some 72% of this sample were Omnivores. Again, because so many respondents fall into this category, we find that the group is quite similar to the population at large.

Selective Reinforcers: Some 16% of those we asked about gay marriage were Selective Reinforcers. Members of this group were slightly less likely that the average American to follow the news. Only 53% read a newspaper on a typical day (versus 60%), and 21% get information about gay marriage online (versus 25% of omnivores). These individuals also had lower educational attainment on average, with only 8% holding a college degree.

Tuned Outs: This group made up 8% of gay marriage respondents. Tuned Outs are least likely to be online (55%), and to have a broadband connection at home (13%). They also pay less attention to the news. On a typical day, 37% read a newspaper, 68% watch TV news, and 31% get news online. Finally, Tuned Outs are a more diverse racially: 60% are whites, 14% are blacks, and 16% are English-speaking Hispanics.

Contrarians: The smallest of the four groups, 5% of respondents fell into this category. The characteristics that distinguish members of this group from the general public are their slightly lower educational attainment (17% are college graduates), slightly lower levels of broadband access (18%), and the fact that 85% are women.

Part 6. Free Trade and jobs

The arguments people hear for and against free trade

We asked 512 respondents a series of questions regarding free trade. The respondents were fairly evenly divided between supporters and opponents: 31% said that free trade agreements have been mostly good for the U.S. economy and American workers, 41% said the consequences of the agreements have been mostly bad, and 28% were undecided.

Free trade is the least familiar of the three policy issues.

The eight arguments we asked about are summarized below. Respondents' familiarity with different points of view about free trade is summarized in the tables that follow. A typical respondent heard 5.9 arguments about free trade. As in the other two cases, respondents heard more than half these arguments on a regular basis, with an average of 3.2 free trade arguments heard frequently. Though awareness of the arguments surrounding this issue was lower than either for Iraq or gay marriage, respondents were still more familiar with free trade arguments than they were with the arguments about the candidates.

Unlike the other issues, respondents' exposure to the two sides of the free trade debate was quite balanced. The typical respondent heard 3.0 arguments from each side.

The percentage of respondents who have heard arguments for and against free trade…		
	Heard this argument frequently	*Heard this argument sometimes*
Arguments in favor of free trade		
Free trade creates a strong global economy, which benefits everyone	38%	37%
Free trade is good for the United States because it improves our relationships with other countries	37	40
Free trade results in better products and better prices for American consumers	37	37
Free trade creates demand for US products abroad, which stimulates economic growth and creates jobs here at home	33	37
Arguments opposed to free trade		
Because of free trade, corporations have laid off American workers and sent their jobs overseas	70	19
Free trade allows companies to exploit workers in developing countries with low wages, poor working conditions and no job security	52	33
Free trade is bad for the environment because a lot of countries have lower environmental standards than the United States	31	36
Free trade widens the gap between rich and poor in the United States and in the world as a whole	26	31

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 512 American adults answered questions about this issue.

As with exposure to campaign information and information about Iraq, respondents' attitude toward free trade had no significant effect on the average number of claims heard. The effect of internet access, however, was mixed. People with broadband access typically heard more arguments at least once in a while compared to those with dial-up, but dial-up users heard more arguments frequently than either broadband or non-internet users.

Number of arguments heard about free trade by different groups…		
	Frequently	*Frequently and sometimes*
All respondents	3.2	5.9
Supports free trade	3.4	6.2
Opposes free trade	3.6	6.2
Broadband-at-home users	3.1	6.2
Dial-up from home users	3.5	5.9
Non-internet users	3.0	5.6

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 465 American adults answered questions about this issue.

People are more familiar with arguments that back their views than challenge their views on free trade.

The typical respondent is more familiar with arguments supporting his or her viewpoint about free trade, matching our finding regarding the campaign and gay marriage. In contrast to the other analyses, however, there were no significant differences in exposure among respondents with different internet access.

The number of arguments heard frequently or sometimes about each side of the free trade debate that…		
	Support free trade	*Challenge free trade*
All respondents	2.9	3.0
Supports free trade	3.4	2.9
Supports, has broadband at home	3.4	2.9
Opposes free trade	2.9	3.3
Opposes, has broadband at home	3.0	3.4

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 2004 survey. 512 American adults answered questions about this issue.

Other factors influencing overall argument exposure

Many of the same factors reported in the other sections of this report influenced people's exposure to the free trade arguments overall. Men were typically aware of more arguments than women. Older Americans had typically heard more arguments than their younger counterparts. Respondent who also used radio or magazines to get their news were also more likely to be have heard free trade arguments than those who did not.

The effects of openness on exposure to free trade exposure were generally as expected. People who said they like to hear about politics and world affairs were more likely to have heard most of the arguments than those who shy away from politics. Those who said they tended to be slow to make a decision even after gathering the relevant information had, however, heard less about free trade.

As in all other analyses, internet use was associated with increased issue exposure overall. Controlling for other factors, internet users were typically familiar with a greater number of arguments.

The internet's effect on exposure to arguments that challenge people's position

Using regression analyses to look at people's exposure to cross-cutting views on the issue of free trade yields results that are somewhat ambiguous. For free-trade proponents, broadband access is negatively correlated with exposure to arguments critical of free trade. However, it is also negatively correlated with exposure to arguments favoring it.

This suggests that people who support free trade are not aggressively using the internet to acquire information on this topic. Opponents of free trade, on the other hand, have heard more arguments in defense of free trade when they use the internet. At the same time, broadband use is negatively correlated to a modest degree with exposure to anti-free trade arguments these arguments. Thus, for free trade opponents, the internet's net effect is to increase exposure to challenging viewpoints.

The segments of the information market on free trade

Omnivores: Of those who answered questions about free trade, 62% were Omnivores. As they were in the campaign analysis, Omnivores appear to be most technologically sophisticated. They are more likely than average to have internet access (72%), and to have a broadband connection (33%). They also tend to be better educated: 37% having completed at least an undergraduate degree.

Selective Reinforcers: This group, representing 21% of those responding to the free trade questions, was very similar to the population at large. Individuals in this category were, however, slightly less likely to read a newspaper (52%) or to have a college degree (21%).

Tuned Outs: The defining characteristic of Tuned Outs, who made up 13% of the sample, was their lower level of news media use. They were slightly less likely than average to get issue news from a newspaper (42%), TV news (76%), or online (10%).

Contrarians: Only 4% of those interested in free trade were Contrarians. Interestingly, free trade Contrarians were more likely than any other group to get online issue news (39%), even though they were still less likely than the average American to have broadband access (19%). These individual also had higher educational attainment than average, with 49% of respondents holding a college degree.

Part 7. Conclusions and implications

The act of going online for news about politics and public affairs increases the amount of information people know about the different sides of issues. In a contemporary political environment that seems highly partisan and in which people seem to talk past each other rather than weigh each other's arguments, it is heartening to see that a relatively new newsgathering and communications tool may be stemming this tide.

A word of caution is in order, however, because this report measures the breadth of people's exposure to arguments about politics and selected issues. It does not explore how they come to find these arguments or their motives for doing so. Undecided voters may use the internet to research the details of the candidates' positions in order to make up their minds. Inquisitive Bush supporters may go online to learn more about Kerry's health care proposal, whether that influences their vote or not. Likewise, Kerry supporters with an interest in energy policy may use Republican campaign or other sites to learn something of Bush's proposals on these issues. Such even-handed approaches to learning about politics represent an ideal of being well-versed on both sides of an issue.

However, some motives for learning political arguments may fall short of this ideal. It is possible, for example, that some Kerry supporters have found out about pro-Bush arguments at stridently pro-Kerry Web sites or blogs. Their exposure to these arguments may be incidental to the fun of reading Kerry partisans eviscerate them. Still, even in the most partisan of online political scrums, this way of learning something about opposing viewpoints may have value. Moreover, those who use the internet this way are arguably not far removed from those who used America's highly politicized newspapers at the turn of the 19th and into the early 20th centuries.

Whatever wired Americans' motives for their use of the internet for news about politics, online resources are on balance a door-opener to a more informed political discourse. The convenience of the internet shifts some people away from the TV and newspaper and to the internet as a way to get news. They often get the same news they would otherwise get from traditional outlets. There are also signs that the internet is beginning, for home broadband users especially, to be a source for "online only" news or international news that would be very difficult to get otherwise. Even when people visit partisan sites, these are rarely their only news sources.

The worry that the internet might channel people into informational warrens of one-sided arguments is not borne out by the data in this report.

Methodology

The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates from June 14 to July 3, 2004, among a sample of 1,510 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points. For results based internet users (n=1,036), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.3 percentage points. For results based on respondents in the Iraq module (n=465), the margin of error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points. For results based on the gay marriage and free trade modules (n=512), the margin of error is plus or minus 4.3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

Sample was released for interviewing in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. Each household received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the oldest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender. The final response rate on this survey was 31%.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's March 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement Survey. This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived

using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

Appendix: Regression analysis results

Many of the findings in this report are built around regression analysis that assesses the independent effects of several variables on the number of arguments a respondent has heard. In some instances, the dependent variable (that is, the number of arguments heard) takes the form of the entire scope of arguments a respondent has heard about, say, the two major presidential candidates. In other cases, the focus was just on the number of arguments heard about a specific candidate among those who do not support that candidate.

The rationale for using regression analysis is to isolate the independent effects of different variables on predicting the number of arguments heard. For example, an important issue in this report is whether internet use might result in a Kerry supporter hearing fewer arguments that support George Bush's candidacy for reelection. Although the analytical focus is on the internet effect, it is necessary to control for other effects or, in other words, to look at the internet effect while holding everything else constant. Regression analysis does this.

In the example of people's awareness of arguments about the two presidential candidates, there were four pro-Kerry arguments and four pro-Bush arguments. It is possible for a respondent to have heard up to eight arguments. The dependent variables are numeric ranging from 0 to 8 when focusing on all arguments, and 0 to 4 when the analysis focuses just on arguments heard in favor of a single candidate. Ordinary Least Squares regression was used in conducting the analysis.

Taking the regression models run regarding the presidential campaign as an example, the number of arguments heard were modeled as a function of the following variables:

- satisfaction with the direction of the country

- open-mindedness

- several measures of news consumption

- partisan predictors (e.g., party affiliation)

- interest in the campaign

- demographic characteristics (e.g.., age, gender, race, marital status)

- internet use

Four different measures of internet use were used in the models, namely whether one goes online at all, whether one uses a high-speed internet connection at home, whether

one goes online for campaign news, and whether one goes to non-traditional Web sites for political news. Internet effects discussed reflect results of models run with one measure included in the equation, with the other three excluded.

Overall, the internet effects tended to show up for Kerry supporters who said they go online for campaign news or have gone to Web sites of non-mainstream media. This was also the case for predicting exposure to the total number of Bush and Kerry arguments for *all* respondents. For Bush supporters, internet effects were a bit weaker and evident among high-speed users, internet users at large (in a separate model specification), and those who had gone online for campaign news. For Bush supporters, the act of going to non-mainstream media did not predict greater exposure to arguments (either arguments for Bush or arguments for Kerry).