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POLICY VIEWPOINT

Information Policy in National Political Campaigns: A Comparison of the 2008 Campaigns for President of the United States and Prime Minister of Canada

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ABSTRACT. The parallel 2008 campaigns for President of the United States and Prime Minister of Canada provided a unique opportunity for a comparison of the issues raised in the campaigns of two neighboring countries with many similarities. After exploring the roles of information policy in recent political campaigns, this article compares the information policy and technology issues emphasized in the platforms and positions of the major party candidates in the 2008 races, both between the candidates of each nation and across the border. The article also compares the uses of information technologies by the campaigns to organize and disseminate their messages. As information policy issues are central aspects of the political agenda in technologically advanced nations and those nations that wish to become technologically advanced, the ways in which the issues are raised in political campaigns can be quite instructive about current approaches to and future directions in information policy.

KEYWORDS. Information policy, social networking, ICTs, campaign, United States, Canada

The parallel 2008 campaigns for President of the United States and Prime Minister of Canada provided a unique opportunity for a comparison of the information policy issues raised in the campaigns of two neighboring countries that share the world's longest border, are similarly technologically advanced, and have entwined economies. The United States and Canada often

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place similarly in world technological rankings, such as e-government maturity (West, 2007). Despite the differences in political systems and the different lengths of the political campaigns, strong commonalities in the issues emphasized in the campaigns would not be surprising given the numerous geographic, economic, and cultural connections between the two nations.

A key method of comparing the information policy issues addressed is through examinations of the policies that the concurrent campaigns proposed and advocated.[1] Policy, most broadly, is the set of government directives intended to shape decisions and actions of individuals, organizations, and government agencies within a society. "Policy is a way of labeling thoughts about the way the world is and the way it might be" (Colebatch, 1998, p. 8). Policy can be established by legislation, executive orders, judicial rulings, guidelines and regulations, rulemaking, agency memos, signing statements, agency circulars, and many other types of official statements by the government. Depending on the structure and organization of a government, it is not uncommon for different agencies to create incompatible, redundant, or conflicting policies. For example, in the United States, no central body of law or agency coordinates and oversees policy. Once implemented, policies directly affect actions of individuals, organizations, and governments, causing policy issues to be the subject of ongoing debate and long-term discussion (McClure, 1999). This article explores the issues of information policy raised by the major candidates in each of these two campaigns.

As information and related information and communication technologies (ICTs) are now essential to virtually every part of modern life—personal interactions, business transactions, education, and government operations—information policy issues have become central aspects of the political agenda in technologically advanced nations and those nations that wish to become technologically advanced. "Information policy can best be understood as the set of specific goals created by governments to shape the creation, access, usage, management, exchange, security, display, collection, and other uses of information" (McClure & Jaeger, 2008, p. 257). Information policy includes issues related to information access, retrieval, and use; privacy; secrecy; security of government records; freedom of information and government transparency; intellectual property; e-government; veracity of government information; ICT infrastructure; and information management. Information policy also determines the methods by which government information is made available to citizens (Bertot, Jaeger, Shuler, Simmons, & Grimes, 2009).

Given the omnipresent nature of information and ICTs in society, local, state/provincial, and national governments, as well as international bodies, have developed a range of policies related to information. "As printed and electronic information has become the lifeblood of government, commerce, education, and many other daily activities, information policy has come to influence most interactions in society" (Jaeger, 2007, p. 842). These information policies simultaneously shape the deployment of ICTs, create advantages and disadvantages in relation to information, influence other policy systems, govern the operation of institutions, determine the parameters of government information activities, and significantly affect political, societal, and economic choices related to information, among many other impacts (McClure, 1999).

With policies related to information being created by local governments, state and provincial governments, national governments, and supranational and nongovernmental organizations, the information policy environment is more complex and complicated than at any previous point in history (McClure & Jaeger, 2008; Relyea, 2008). As information and ICTs have mushroomed in importance in interpersonal, financial, and governmental transactions and interactions with the rise of the World Wide Web, many new information policies have emerged. The legal landscape "has become filled with laws and regulations dealing with information and communication," as more than "600 bills dealing with the Internet alone were on the table during the 107th Congress" in the United States (Braman, 2004, p. 153). The profusion of policy around the globe has closely paralleled the enormous changes in ICTs over the past 50 years.

New ICTs (e.g., the telegraph, radio, television, railroad, and telephone) have long influenced

the political processes and the functioning of governments (Bimber, 2003). The development of ICTs in the age of the Internet has greatly accelerated, creating questions for the longest traditions. For nearly a millennium, law in the Western world has been conceived of as a constantly growing and evolving body of concepts that change to meet social and technological changes over time (Berman, 1983, 2003). Yet law simply cannot be conceived, debated, and passed to keep pace with current levels of technological change (Braman, 2006; Grimes, Jaeger, & Fleischmann, 2008; Jaeger, Lin, & Grimes, 2008; Jaeger, Lin, Grimes, & Simmons, 2009). The overall approaches to and conceptions of information policy revealed in platforms and positions of national candidates indicate the ways in which national governments will attempt to deal with these enormous and rapid technological changes.

Information policies both address a societal issue regarding information and attempt to balance the interests of different stakeholder groups impacted by the issue (Thompson, McClure, & Jaeger, 2003). The policy activity related to information, however, is not always meant to promote growth and adoption of new technologies related to information. New ICTs often compel governments to alter policies to fit the new technical environment. Homeland security in the United States—and many other nations that have followed its lead, including Canada—has led to significant changes to the information policy environment, such as new information policies related to collection, access, and security (Caidi & Ross, 2005; Ross & Caidi, 2005). The homeland security era has also led governments to engage in "information politics," or, the creation of information policies that are tools for governments to shape use of and access to information in society to accomplish the partisan political objectives of those running the government (Jaeger, 2007, 2009). Such changes to the societal roles of information as a result of policy have far-reaching consequences in contemporary society, making the role of information policy issues in campaigns for head of a national government to be all the more significant.

Clearly, there are sizable differences between the governmental systems and approaches to campaigns between the two nations. In the United States, the presidential campaign now lasts about two years and is focused on individuals, while Canadian elections for Prime Minister feature campaigns run by the political parties that can be measured in weeks. Not only does this result in discrepancies in resources that can be raised and time that can be devoted to building a campaign structure, it can also cut into time available for building policy platforms and using technology in the campaigns. Furthermore, differing rules between the two countries prevent Canadian political parties from raising funds at the level of their American counterparts. However, even given these differences, comparative analysis of the approaches to an area policy by two similarly situated nations in concurrent national elections still provides considerable insight into the roles of information policy and ICTs in the campaigns as cross-national issues.

INFORMATION POLICY AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Despite the clear importance of information policy in a time that is considered the information age, many political leaders struggle with basic understandings of ICTs. Former U.S. President George W. Bush spoke of "the Internets" and "the Google" with a sense of bewilderment. An enthusiastic user of e-mail prior to becoming president, Bush avoided e-mail as president to keep such e-mails from becoming government records (Berke, 2001). Former Senator Ted Stevens, then the Chair of the Senate committee regulating the Web, became notorious for his "series of tubes" speech that demonstrated his non-comprehension of e-mail, the Internet, and much of the modern telecommunications infrastructure.

The history of candidates and the Internet has hardly been smooth (Klotz, 2004). In 1996, Bob Dole became the first U.S. presidential candidate to mention his Web site in a debate, but he said the wrong address and the people who found his correct URL went to a crashed Web site. In a 2000 debate, Al Gore famously made the odd assertion that he took the initiative in creating the Internet. Perhaps not

surprisingly, minor political parties in industrialized nations embraced the Internet as a means of reaching voters much faster than major parties (Klotz, 2004). Early studies of the use of the Internet by political parties show how rapidly the online environment has become central to campaigns. In 1999, party presence could be measured in terms of such basic measures as having "Web sites listed in Yahoo" and references to sites in print newspapers and magazines, online news sites, and Usenet groups (Margolis, Resnik, & Wolfe, 1999, p. 28).

During the 2008 presidential campaign, problems with understanding information technology were easy to find. Senator John McCain repeatedly said he would rely on his vice president for what he deemed less important things, like information technology. He then selected a running mate (Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska) who had established a Yahoo account to try to conduct the business of the state. This account was discovered when a teenager hacked into her account by answering her security questions using publically available information. Former Governor Mitt Romney was running as the business and technology expert among the candidates, but he repeatedly mixed up YouTube and MySpace in speeches. Yet, these events were treated as humorous rather than indicative of a major problem, even though much of the economic future of the nation depends on information technology policy (Graff, 2007).

Understanding of technology even played a role in political advertisements that were produced. The Obama campaign created an ad that was released on the Web and on television that was based solely around the fact that McCain admittedly was not computer savvy, arguing that someone could not be an effective national leader without understanding the technologies that are central to society. Perhaps not surprisingly, the presidential race provided a strong contrast in understandings of ICTs after the conclusion of the primaries when the McCain campaign opted for a limited emphasis on information policy and the use of ICTs in the race, while the Obama campaign made information policy a major focus of its platform and used ICTs in transformative ways in the campaign.

The McCain campaign unveiled its official technology policy statement on August 15th, 2008. The campaign called upon former FCC Chairman Michael Powell when constructing its statement. McCain also cited his own membership and former leadership position within the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, which oversaw the 1996 overhaul of telecommunications law as a unique qualification to "lead our nation during this technological revolution" (McCain, 2008). Among the broad ranging issues covered within the statement, such as Net neutrality, patent protection, broadband availability, and the preservation of technology through market forces, the McCain campaign highlighted the need for the federal government to lead by example in areas such as operating efficiently through the use of technology, placing more government information online, and making use of video conferencing and collaborative networks (McCain, 2008; McCain & Palin, 2008).

The Obama campaign site, on the other hand, featured two plans that combined for more than 20 pages of single-spaced text detailing how he would encourage the use of technology to address large-scale social problems. In addition to summarizing technology policy views on the campaign's issues page, a nine-page document titled "Connecting and Empowering All Americans through Technology and Innovation" was released that covers these topics in greater depth, along with an accompanying 11-page document on science and technology policy that reinforced the perspectives on these issues (Obama, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c).The Obama campaign presented these information policy plans ten months earlier than McCain, in November 2007. Obama assembled a cast of advisors including Reed Hundt (former Federal Communication Commission Chairman), Lawrence Lessig (Stanford Law Professor), Timothy Wu (Columbia Law School Professor), and Kevin Werbach (Professor of Legal Studies at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania). The campaign's policy statement contrasted with the McCain campaign's statement by calling for the use of cutting-edge technology to create a transparent and connected democracy that opens up government to its citizens and also for the appointment of a Chief Technology Officer (CTO).

In contrast to the recent U.S. election campaign, issues of information policy did not rise to the forefront of public attention in the Canadian federal election. This is somewhat surprising considering that Canadians tend to be leaders in adopting new forms of communications technology and Internet use (Jansen, 2004). Canada is consistently well positioned in rankings for "most wired" nation in the world, and one study found that Sweden was the only democracy that exceeded Canada's level of Internet use (Norris, 2002). Given the diverse demographics of the many geographically separated communities in Canada, a focus on Internet communication and use would be expected to go beyond discussions of access.

The 2008 election campaign in Canada had a central focus on the economy and the environment, with traditionally strong issues of healthcare, education, and national unity receiving the majority of the candidates' focus. No major policy initiatives, documents, speeches, or other announcements related to information policy were made. Any information policy issues that did receive attention were part of larger initiatives. For example, controlling the rising costs of text messaging from wireless devices would be part of "protecting the consumer" sections of campaign documents, and investing in technology would be classified as an economic issue. While the depth at which the issues could be covered is no doubt partly tied to the length of the campaign, the lack of sufficient focus on information policy did not go unnoticed.

Calls for more discussion in information policies came from varying organizations, such as the Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC). An open letter was sent to the leaders of all three national parties asking for discussion of issues related to the knowledge economy, such as science and technology education, developing and supporting a highly skilled workforce, technology investments for healthcare and government, broadband and wireless access, and an overall strategy that pulls these issues together (Courtois, 2008).

Information policy is a particularly effective lens through which to perform cross-party and cross-national comparisons, since information has become so central to economic, educational, personal, and governmental activities. It is hard to find a stakeholder group that lacks an interest in information policy. While historically left-leaning parties have been more open to government regulation and right-leaning parties more averse to it, information policy is an area where these differences are less about amount of government intervention and more about where such interventions occur. Internet filtering as a government intervention, for example, is strongly advocated by right-leaning parties. As Sandra Braman (2004) has noted, "How a policy issue is identified is political because it determines who participates in decision-making, the rhetorical frames and operational definitions used, and the resources—and goals—considered pertinent" (p. 154).

INFORMATION POLICY ISSUES IN THE U.S. CAMPAIGN

The policy issues related to information and ICTs on the Obama and McCain campaign Web sites demonstrated large differences in the information policies that the candidates felt were significant, as well as the overall importance of information policy. Given the details about the development, launch, and scope of the respective information policies of the two campaigns, these differences are not surprising, particularly considering that Obama proposed the creation of a cabinet-level CTO to oversee technology policy. Below are the major issues on which the information policy plans of the two campaigns focus.

Both campaigns had a stated goal of Internet access for all Americans. The McCain plan advocated for a trade-based approach to making Internet access affordable by emphasizing the role of competition and fair trade to lower costs, while also prohibiting taxes on Internet users and lowering taxes on wireless services. For broadband access, the McCain plan envisioned high-speed access for all through private investment in infrastructure. The main incentive offered for such private investment was a system of rewards for companies that offer services to low income customers. The Obama plan focused on quality of Internet access, wanting to provide true broadband access for

all. This goal was to be accomplished through government investment in the expansion of the broadband infrastructure, a reallocation of the wireless spectrum to increase citizen access, and the reform of the Universal Service Fund that provides funding for those who cannot afford access. The plan also included tax and loan incentives for the private development of new ICTs and infrastructure that would improve affordability and quality of access.

The campaigns made little mention of privacy and Internet security. Neither campaign's plan addressed issues that are of considerable importance to everyday users—spam, phishing, and other forms of Internet security. The McCain platform made little mention of these issues, while the Obama plan only referenced that one of the responsibilities of the CTO would be to oversee the security and safety of nation's infrastructure. Privacy of personal information, another issue of great importance to everyday users, was similarly lacking in many specifics presented by the plans. Once again, the McCain plan made scant mention of privacy protection. The Obama plan asserted a need to strengthen privacy protections. The primary means identified to accomplish this was to hold government agencies and businesses accountable for personal privacy.

Both plans gave a great deal of attention to issues of intellectual property. The McCain plan vowed to crack down on piracy online and offline and aggressively pursue intellectual property protection internationally. The McCain plan saw the value of strengthening the Patent Office by promising to provide it with greater resources and develop new affordable and reliable approaches for resolution of patent challenges. The Obama plan similarly highlighted the need for better international enforcement of U.S. patents, copyrights, and trademarks. However, the Obama plan emphasized the promotion of greater cooperation on international standards. It also sought to reform copyright to simultaneously protect corporate interests and promote discourse, innovation, and investment. The Obama plan included reforms of the patent system to improve predictability and clarity of process through new resources for the Patent Office.

Both plans also paid significant attention to technology investment and innovation. As with Internet access, the McCain plan focused on business solutions, while the Obama plan focused primarily on government solutions, with both including a permanent research and development tax credit. The McCain plan was based on lowering corporate taxes, allowing for expensing of corporate technology purchases, keeping capital gains taxes low, and supporting risk capital to encourage technology investment and innovation. In contrast, the Obama plan focused on more technology investment and innovation through government and academic research. The points included doubling federal funding for basic research over 10 years and investing more extensively in university-based research. In addition, the Obama plan sought to reinvigorate antitrust to better prevent monopolization of technology sectors by specific companies.

On the topic of access to information content, the plans had very different levels of emphasis. The McCain plan only addressed one issue of access to information—the expansion of federal laws mandating filtering of Internet content to protect children. The Obama plan took a much more detailed approach to information access. Emphasizing the preeminence of the First Amendment, the Obama plan asserted that restrictions on information access should be as minimal and constrained as possible. The plan included specific ways for increasing protection—giving parents tools to control content for their own children and increasing law enforcement efforts in protection of children online. The Obama plan also addressed issues of expanding the types of information available to be accessed. By encouraging diversity in media ownership and outlets and strengthening public obligations of broadcasters, the Obama plan intended to expand the range of perspectives available for access.

The two plans simply disagreed on the issue of Net neutrality. The McCain plan stated that McCain "does not believe in prescriptive regulation like 'Net-neutrality.'" The Obama plan stated that Obama "strongly supports the principle of Net-neutrality." In place of a concept like Net neutrality, the McCain plan argued for ensuring free choice among providers and avoiding government regulation of the Internet

unless really necessary, with the example of Internet filtering given as a case where government intervention was truly needed.

Both campaigns included science and technology literacy and education as a part of their information policy platforms. The McCain plan included goals of retraining displaced workers to become technologically literate, expanding the number of H-1B visas, and increasing undergraduate enrollment in math, science, and computer science. Most interestingly, it also included the goal of appointing government scientists with science and technology experience, a goal that may have been intended to refute the Bush administration's reputation for appointing government scientists based on their political views. The goals of the Obama plan in this area were more expansive, beginning at the elementary and secondary levels to make math and science education a national priority by recruiting researchers into teaching, to promote the use of scientific assessment tools for students, and to address drop-out levels in secondary schools. At the college level, the plan proposed college aid for math and science majors and efforts to increase underrepresented populations in these fields. The plan also proposed lifelong technology retraining of workers through a new Workforce Investment Act and portable health and retirement accounts as a safety net for workers who need time to improve their technology literacy. Further, the Obama plan also stated the need to bring scientific integrity back to government research after the Bush years.

While both campaigns discussed e-government and technology leadership, the two diverged on the importance of the issue. The McCain plan offered the idea of establishing an Office of Electronic Government to coordinate e-government across agencies and enable the federal government to lead businesses and users in technology by example. The McCain plan also encouraged greater cooperation in ICT research between government and industry. The Obama plan focused on the issues of e-government to improve governance by heightening transparency, participation, and accountability. The CTO office would ensure agencies "have the right infrastructure, policies, and services" to provide open government (Obama, 2008b, p. 5). The CTO would also work to improve the network security, safety, and interoperability of government technology. The Obama plan also foresaw the use of e-government and information technology investment to address major social problems such as healthcare, climate change, and response to emergencies.

INFORMATION POLICY ISSUES IN THE CANADIAN CAMPAIGN

The platforms communicated by the three national parties [Conservatives, Liberals, and New Democrat Party (NDP)] in the 2008 Canadian election demonstrated a focus on similar policies, with strikingly different positions on each issue. The amount of detail provided greatly varied, from a single bullet point on a Web site about one issue to detailed descriptions of information policy within the main campaign policy document. One prominent thread running through these areas was fewer cross-party comparisons for some topics, as they received far less focus than in the U.S. campaign. Another thread was the lack of attention that the Liberal Party gave to information policy issues. This lack of focus can likely be attributed to the propensity of Canadian political parties to focus on only a few key issues during an election and not allow the debate to go much further than healthcare, education, government accountability, and in this particular election, the environment. Furthermore, some have speculated that the Liberal campaign was not well organized and, by focusing on the environment, neglected other issues that resonated with the Canadian electorate (Simpson, 2008; Stinson, 2008).

In terms of Internet access, the Conservatives and the NDP concentrated their efforts on the increasing costs to access and use of the Internet by taking issue with the soaring costs of wireless and text message rates in Canada. Currently, Canada is one of the most expensive countries for cell phone plans, including text messaging rates. Increases by the major carriers have caused services such as Twitter to opt not to send mobile updates to subscribers due to the

cost prohibitive nature of these rates (CBC, 2008). The Conservatives stated they would prevent fees for consumers who receive text messages, which would be included in a larger Code of Conduct document for wireless services companies. Through amendments to the Telecommunications Act, the Commissioner of Complaints for Telecommunications Services would gain further powers to investigate complaints related to similar and unfair charges. The NDP also addressed charges for incoming text messages by stating they would "stop the shameful rip-offs and gouging by cell phone giants" (NDP, 2008, p. 12) by reducing hidden fees and requiring more accountability from companies providing cell phone services. Surprisingly, no mention was made of the cost of Internet access or fees for other portable devices. The issue of increasing broadband access to improve the services available to northern and remote communities was addressed by both the Conservatives and the NDP.

To promote privacy and Internet security, both the Conservatives and NDP proposed new legislation to prevent spam and increase penalties for spam whose purpose is "to collect personal information under false pretenses and to engage in criminal conduct" (Conservatives, 2008, p. 6), commonly known as phishing. Both the introduction of new laws and increased fines were proposed to accomplish this goal. The NDP went further to examine the issue of spam through telecommunications, proposing to establish a "more effective" do-not-call list to prevent intrusive calls from telemarketers. Legislation would be introduced to implement sanctions and monetary penalties on violators. Also included within the NDP platform was mention of new legislation to require all Canadian Internet service providers (ISPs) to take responsibility for the prevention of publication of child pornography by their users.

Recently, intellectual property has been a contentious issue in Canada, and this was reflected in the polarity of positions by the Conservatives and the NDP. In the previous session of parliament, the Conservative minority government attempted to introduce a bill (C-6) that would create strict copyright laws in Canada, to the dismay of many citizens. It was not presented to parliament once it was apparent that it would not pass, re-emerging in the information policy area of its platform as bill C-10, described as legislation that "brings Canada's intellectual property protection in line with that of other industrialized countries" (Conservatives, 2008, p. 27). The NDP clearly stated its opposition to this bill by including in its platform the statement that they would "reverse the efforts to legislate censorship, as the Harper Conservatives snuck into bill C-10. If passed, it would restrict and censor publicly-supported artistic works" (NDP, 2008, p. 36).

All three parties included policies supporting technology investment and innovation. The Conservatives were the most specific, pledging $850 million in the next budget for science and technology initiatives. This would be in addition to funding available for internationally recognized technology projects. The Liberal Party identified opportunities for growth in the areas of education and entertainment, and stated their intention to create new highly skilled jobs in these sectors. A Canadian Digital Media Strategy would also be launched in order to focus on the creators of digital content. The NDP mentioned that it would support pan-Canadian technological sector–based strategies, which could include "information processing, telecommunications, media, and cultural industries" (NDP, 2008, p. 8).

The remaining three areas discussed in the campaign were each mentioned by one party. In terms of information content, the Conservative Party restated its commitment to preserving Canadian content rules, which are enforced by the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Committee (CRTC). The NDP addressed the area of Net neutrality by committing to enact policy to allow for free access to content, at a flat rate with transparent rules. The party also mentioned its goal of preventing a so-called two-tier Internet that provides different levels of performance based on different levels of cost. To promote literacy and education, the NDP stated an intent to provide long-term, sustainable funding in order to create the Canadian Literacy Agency in conjunction with the provinces to "fund, monitor and measure progress"

in achieving previously stated literacy targets (NDP, 2008, p. 13).

THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES IN THE CAMPAIGNS

A sensible information policy relates heavily to an understanding of the ICTs that frame information and the social behaviors related to information (Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; McClure & Jaeger, 2008). As was raised earlier in the discussion of the brief history of the relationships between candidates and the Internet, political leaders still frequently lack basic knowledge of ICTs and their importance in society. Yet, many decisions that contemporary political leaders must make require an understanding of information and ICTs to rationally examine an information policy issue and whether the policy measures will create the desired outcome. Otherwise, policy decisions are based on considerations of the Internet as a series of tubes. As such, the uses of social networking technologies by these five campaigns were selected for study as a means to explore whether the attention paid to information policy in platforms correlated with the organization and operation of the campaigns.

During the U.S. presidential campaign, the differences in the approaches to ICTs were reflected in the attention the campaigns paid to using them to organize voters as well as the ways in which the supporters of each candidate employed ICTs. The Obama campaign placed a much greater emphasis on reaching out to voters through technology, recognizing that the Internet alters the traditional top-down campaign. In addition to establishing a strong social media Web presence, creating profiles on 16 social networking sites, posting 1,792 videos to YouTube, uploading over 50,000 photos to Flickr, and "tweeting" over 200 times on Twitter, the campaign also launched its own social networking site, MyBarackObama.com on February 10, 2007, the day that Obama announced his candidacy (Owyang, 2008). The campaign relied on technology to "connect with voters better, faster, and more cheaply than ever before," and beat out companies such as Google, Hulu, and Apple to win the title of Fast Company's most innovative company of the year (McGirt, 2009, n.p.).

Obama's social network, developed by Blue State Digital and overseen by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, not only allowed users to connect with the candidate and talk to one another online, but also provided tools allowing them to organize offline and reach out to other potential supporters. Creating meaningful opportunities for campaign involvement through online mobilization played a crucial roll in building Obama's grassroots movement and allowed the campaign to compete in areas of the country where it never would have been able to establish field offices. In the primaries, Obama had few employees in California, but thousands of self-organized volunteers used databases (voter profiles and precinct information) and Web calling tools to mobilize voters across the state; after the California primaries, the same volunteers continued to use the phone tools they had developed to make calls in other states (Google, 2008).

Over the course of the 21-month campaign, two million profiles were created on the network, 400,000 blog posts were written, 200,000 offline events were planned by users, and 35,000 volunteer groups were created (Vargas, 2008a). The social network also allowed users to reach out to other voters through a virtual phone banking platform, which generated over three million calls over the last four days of the campaign alone (Vargas, 2008b). Many site users also signed up to receive e-mail and text message updates. Over 13 million e-mail addresses were collected and 7,000 different targeted messages were delivered for a total of over 1 billion e-mails sent (Vargas, 2008b). Over 1 million voters signed up to receive text message updates, receiving anywhere from five to 20 targeted text messages per month based on state, region, Zip code, and college campus affiliation (Vargas, 2008b). Text recipients in swing states also received at least three messages on Election Day reminding them to vote. In the month leading up to the election, the campaign also released an iPhone application developed by a team of volunteers, which

included a "Call Friends" feature allowing users to make crucial last minute calls to contacts in key battleground states (Zachary, 2008).

The Obama campaign also raised unprecedented amounts of money through online fundraising efforts:

- The campaign raised over $500 million from donations made online.
- Three million donors made a total of 6.5 million donations online.
- The average donation was $80.
- Obama received over $10 million in online donations within 24 hours of Sarah Palin's September 3 speech at the Republican National Convention in which she said, "I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a community organizer, except that you have actual responsibilities" (Vargas, 2008b).

The campaign sent targeted messages to donors based upon contribution levels asking for continued support, but also asked that people give their time by volunteering to travel to battleground states in the days leading up to the election, canvassing their own neighborhoods, or making calls to undecided voters using the campaign's virtual phone banking tools.

In contrast to the Obama's intensive new media approach, the Republican National Committee and the McCain campaign had fewer than 20 Web staff employees combined (Google, 2008). The Republican platform comment site—gopplatform2008.com—only got 160,000 visits and 13,000 comments; to comment, users were required to provide their name, phone number, e-mail, and home address (Google, 2008; Pariser, 2008; Vargas, 2008a). While the McCain campaign did make use of social media, its efforts were demonstratively less effective then those of the Obama campaign, reflecting an attempt to keep up with the competition rather than an understanding of online community building. Table 1 lists the social networking statistics just before the November election in the United States.

TABLE 1. U.S. Candidates' Social Networking Statistics: November 3, 3008

	Obama	McCain
Facebook supporters	2,379,102	620,359
MySpace friends	833,161	217,811
YouTube videos uploaded	1,792	329
Twitter followers	112,474	4,603
Flickr photos	50,000+	n/a

Note: Data from Owyang, 2008.

McCain established a presence on Facebook and MySpace, posted 329 videos to YouTube, and made 25 tweets on Twitter in the final months of the campaign, though it is interesting to note that McCain's Twitter account was launched by Biz Stone, a Twitter cofounder, in an effort to help balance out Twitter Election Hub coverage (All, 2008). The campaign also launched its own social network, McCainSpace, in February 2007 before an official announcement of candidacy was made. However, this network offered little more than the tools available on popular existing social networking sites and did little in terms of community building. Network advertisements promoted the concept of "user-generated politics," but focused mainly on the creating future opportunities for establishing a dialogue through blogging, showing little understanding of the network's potential (Bogatin, 2007). McCain relaunched a much more polished version of McCainSpace in August 2008, which included features like forums, groups, and options for sharing user-generated content (Ostrow, 2008).

The candidate's daughter, Meghan McCain, played an important role in youth outreach throughout the campaign, maintaining her own blog that documented adventures from the campaign trail, McCainblogette.com, but has since stated that her initial proposal to blog for her father's campaign was "met with confusion and resistance," and that she "got the sense that people on the campaign thought [she] was wasting [her] time" (McCain, 2009, n.p.). From her unique insider's vantage point, Meghan McCain has also commented that "until the Republican party joins the twenty-first century and learns how to use the Internet, its members will keep getting older and the youth of America will just keep logging on to the other side" (McCain, 2009, n.p.). While the McCain

campaign may not have recognized the potential of social media, the Republican party is paying attention to these issues in light of its defeat, as evidenced by the release of an action plan to rebuild the party identifying the Internet as the number one priority for the next four years and by the 2009 GOP Tech Summit held to discuss the incorporation of technology into the party's structure, campaigning, fundraising, communications, and grassroots activism efforts (Rebuild the Party, 2009; Republican National Committee, 2009).

Extensive use of social networking applications also occurred in the three Canadian campaigns. While it is hard to compare the depth of the use of these technologies in campaigns lasting almost two years with those run over the course of five weeks, the Canadian candidates made use of social media to varying degrees. The Conservative Party employed a great many of these tools, providing links to its presence in Facebook, Twitter, Digg, Flickr, YouTube, Friend Feed, and MySpace on the main page of its campaign Web site. Perhaps reflecting a lack of understanding of the potential of the technology, Stephen Harper, the Conservative Party's candidate, disabled the wall on his Facebook page, meaning users were not able to leave publicly viewable comments. Such a decision effectively turns the social networking site into a one-way means of communication, largely defeating its interactive nature. RSS feeds were also available to provide customized Web content streaming. The Liberals and the NDP also provided links to the above Web 2.0 tools, with two exceptions—Liberals did not use Friend Feed, and the NDP did not have a MySpace page. Still, it was significant to note the use of a broad portfolio of these tools by all parties in order to not only communicate with the electorate, but also to establish a strong Internet presence. Table 2 details the social networking statistics for the Canadian campaign.

The NDP, which made the best use of established social media in terms of content and contacts, created a site called The Orange Room to allow supporters to "find and share digital media related to the New Democrat campaign" (NDP, 2009, n. p.). Users were asked to share:

TABLE 2. Canadian Candidates Social Networking Statistics

	Liberal	Conservative	NDP
Facebook supporters	13,504	18,842	26,208
MySpace friends	420	673	n/a
YouTube video uploads	153	2	120
Twitter followers	960	1,308	1,565
Flickr photos	249	560	1,059

Note: Data from Lake, 2008.

- Videos from the campaign trail
- Photos from election events in the community
- Facebook applications and blog widgets
- Interesting blog posts and news stories

The visually appealing site featured video updates from candidate Jack Layton and links to the NDP's other social media profiles.

CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISONS

As detailed above, a range of information policy issues was raised in both the U.S. and Canadian elections in 2008, though the breadth and focus of these discussions diverged considerably. Further, while the level of investment in social networking did parallel the attention paid to information policy by the campaign, such efforts did not necessarily translate to electoral success. Table 3 summarizes the different information policy issues addressed in the two campaigns by major party.

Within the U.S. campaign, both candidates mentioned many information policy issues in their platforms, though the Obama campaign addressed the majority of the issues in greater depth. In total, though, these two platforms supported a large-scale debate about the role and direction of information policy, with differences in policies about Internet regulation, support for technology research, the role of e-government, the need for equality of access, and other issues.

In the Canadian election, the information policies chosen by the three national parties to

TABLE 3. Summary of Information Policy Issues Addressed by Each Campaign

	Obama	McCain	Harper	Dion	Layton
Internet access	X	X	X		X
Privacy/Internet security	X		X		X
Intellectual property	X	X	X		X
Technology investment	X	X	X	X	X
Information content	X	X	X		
Net neutrality	X	X			X
Literacy and education	X	X			X
E-government	X	X			

highlight in their election platforms focused on the voter as consumer. Issues such as fees for text messaging, broadband access, literacy programs, and the problem of spam all appeal to the consumer, yet do not signify a broader policy initiative. The broader policy initiatives raised—such as Net neutrality and broadband connections to schools—were typically vague, with little detail on how such plans could be operationalized. The short length of the campaign may help to explain the focus on the immediate issues, as such issues may more readily connect with voters when there is little time to articulate broader proposals. It is also interesting that one of the three major parties made almost no direct mentions of information policy issues in its platform. This approach contrasts with the United States, where the election campaign provided a forum for large policy initiatives that potentially signaled a new direction for the government. Instead, Canadian politicians decided to tackle much smaller issues with short term appeal and impact. Noticeably missing from the Canadian platforms were mentions of e-government and technology leadership, which may explain the lack of bold policy shifts or new directions, as e-government was an important focusing mechanism for many policies by the Obama campaign in particular.

Given these major differences between the U.S. and Canadian campaigns, it is particularly curious that the emphasis given to information policy in the U.S. campaign plans was not paralleled by the Senate Web sites of both candidates. During the election, the McCain Senate site gave nearly as much thought to information policy as did the McCain campaign site. His Senate site (http://mccain.senate.gov) features an information policy and technology section, arguing for pro-business positions on Internet taxes, cell phone taxes, cable bills, regulation of communication companies, and the fairness doctrine. The only issue that was not a corporate interest was his focus on increasing the requirements for Internet filtering. And despite the greater depth and breadth of coverage of information policy issues on his campaign site, the Obama Senate site did not even have a section on information or technology policy.

And yet the Obama campaign invested the most effort into both developing a true vision for information policy and for using social networking technologies in innovative ways to drive its campaign successes. While the social networking technologies used by the campaigns were fairly similar, the uses varied greatly. These differences in use by the Obama campaign played an important part in both primary and general election victories (Google, 2008; Pariser, 2008; Vargas, 2008a). In the election in the U.S., the winning party had both a much more detailed information policy platform and a much broader and more effective use of ICTs in the campaign. On the other hand, the Canadian party with the most investment in social networking and with the platform that dealt with the most information policy issues lost to the party that was second in both social networking and focus on information policy.

The finding that such a gap existed between the focus on information policy in the United States and Canada may seem surprising considering both the similarities and ties that exist between the two countries, and considering that in many policy arenas, it is beneficial when the two closely connected countries are on a similar path. The lack of attention that information policy received in Canada during this recent election may seem unexpected, especially considering how detailed the discussion became in the United States.

However, in retrospect, this increasing divide reflects a continuance of the Canadian

government's information policy activities over the past 15 years. A review of the minutes and reports for the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology and the Standing Committee on Transportation and Communication, the two committees that dealt most closely with information policy issues between the years 1996–2009, revealed an absence of sustained information policy discussions. These committees lacked a stated focus on information policy; they were overwhelmed with work on transportation laws, healthcare review, and other social program work. Only two bills with explicit information policy implications came before these committees and resulted in observations being reported back to the government. These included amendments to the broadcasting act and proposals for changes in the fees related to broadband spectrum use. One report was issued during this time period on the Canadian News Media (Fraser, 2004). Even if information policy issues are addressed indirectly, this approach gives the impression that they are being treated as inconsequential issues by the government, when they are raised at all. Such a perception could have a significant impact on the amount that information policy issues were discussed during the Canadian campaign.

These findings are further reflected in the relatively small amount of research published specifically on Canadian information policy (Nilsen, 1993, 1994). Given what was observed during the recent U.S. election and the ability of the Obama campaign to shape the information policy discussion and promote reaction within the McCain campaign, it remains to be seen if the emphasis on information policies in the U.S. will serve as an example for Canadian politicians, who may perceive the need to maintain pace with their close neighbor and therefore create new, broad initiatives on the subjects of information, communication, and e-government.

CONCLUSION

Given the proximity, economic and social interconnectedness, and equitable levels of technology adoption and innovation, it initially seems incongruous that the candidates in 2008 campaigns in these two countries would take such different tacks in presenting information policy issues on their campaign sites. Within the two national elections, one party in each country clearly paid more attention to information policy and invested more effort in using social networking to organize voter support. However, the focus of the Canadian campaign sites on information policy as a small, practical, and often economic consideration diverges from the treatment by the U.S. campaign sites of information policy as a large-scale social issue. Clearly, the differences in the length of campaign and the subsequent depth at which issues can be explored are contributing elements to the different national approaches to information policy.

However, these differences may be explained less by social or political differences between the countries and more by the influence of one candidate with a strong interest in focusing campaign platform and strategies on information. The Obama campaign was defined by its creative use of new technologies—including Web sites, social networking, and multimedia—to raise money, mobilize volunteers, and coordinate voter turnout. With a technologically savvy candidate and staff, the Obama campaign was unusually aware of the broad social implications for information and technology policy. With its two printable information and technology policy plans totaling 20 pages of single-spaced text (Obama, 2008b, 2008c), the Obama campaign clearly demonstrated that information and technology would be keys to its campaign.

This emphasis of the Obama campaign may have spurred the McCain campaign to focus more on information policy than it otherwise would have. The McCain campaign also showed its inability to compete on this front with its printable information and technology policy plan being one page dominated by pictures (McCain & Palin, 2008). These differences in the understanding of information and technology were further reinforced by the significant lag of the McCain campaign in effort and creativity put into Internet-based fund raising, organizing, and information dissemination.

The focus on information policy and the creative uses of information technologies have continued to be strongly emphasized in the aftermath of the U.S. election. Immediately after his election, President-elect Barak Obama posted a new site, http://www.change.gov, devoted to gathering citizen input and applications from people wishing to work in the new administration, as well as beginning a new policy of posting all of his presidential speeches on YouTube. As soon as he took the oath of office, the Obama administration began a quick relaunch of major government Web sites in completely new forms. Gone was the Bush www.whitehouse.gov composed of basic text about the administration, photo-ops, and limited video dissemination, and replaced with a site that incorporated usability principles of Web site design, multimedia functions, and enhanced navigability and searchability. The new www.whitehouse.gov provided contact and feedback forms to send ideas and feedback to the administration, as well as easily accessible policy statements and orders of the president. Other agencies soon followed with a similarly major overhaul of their e-government presence. Also on his first full day as president, Obama issued "The Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government" and "The Executive Order on Presidential Records," both of which were intended to increase transparency and access to government information in print and online.

The prominence of information and technology policy in the U.S. campaign appears to have been at least partly driven by the Obama campaign's innovative use of technology. As a result, Obama's focus on information policy has the potential to inspire national leaders in other nations to attempt a similar embrace of information and technology policy. There are historical precedents for a focus on information policy issues in one country leading other nations to focus on the same issue, so a broad focus on information policy by one government spurring other governments to think about information policy is not unthinkable. Laws passed in the United States in the 1960s drove the worldwide move toward freedom of information and government transparency laws, while the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001 encouraged many other nations to adopt similarly restrictive national security laws (Hosein, 2004; Mueller, Page, & Kuerbis, 2004; Relyea, 2008). Deserving special attention is the U.S.'s close neighbor, Canada, in light of the benefits of compatible policy initiatives in order to facilitate close economic and political cooperation. Given the similarities in demographic, social, and economic considerations, it will be illuminating to monitor whether the success of focusing on information policy and the use of social media technologies in the U.S. presidential election will serve as an example to the Canadian political parties. As other election campaigns occur in the wake of the Obama election, it will be interesting to study the roles that information and technology policy play in other elections.

It will also be extremely important to study how the Obama administration translates its campaign focus on information and technology policy into actual governing. Some of the elements of its vision—such as a federal CTO—will present many challenges in implementation. Ultimately, the 2008 campaign may have significantly shifted the attention paid to information and technology policy in the political arena in not only the U.S. but other similar democracies, and research needs to focus on tracking these major political and subsequent social changes. One change is already evident in Canada created by Obama's success, where the new Liberal Party leader Michael Ignatieff has announced that his party has purchased the technology behind the voter databases and social media strategies used by Obama's campaign team in the 2008 election in preparation for future Canadian elections (Valpy, 2009).

In what is widely acknowledged to be an age of information, it is quite surprising that "little scholarship has explored the boundary between public policy and mass political behavior" (Hacker, Mettler, & Pinderhughes, 2005, p. 181). This statement is especially true for the area of information policy, which now is an underlying aspect of many laws ostensibly about other matters due to the omnipresence of information and ICTs in social, political, commercial, educational, and personal interactions. The focus on

information policy by many of the 2008 campaigns discussed in this article demonstrates how far-reaching information policy is and how it can play a significant role in the political process.

NOTE

1. Replication footnote: The source materials for this study—the information and technology policy statements disseminated through the Web by the major party candidates and major parties in the 2008 campaigns for U.S. Presidential and Canadian Prime Minister—have been archived electronically at: http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/jitp/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=43667&tab=files&rvn=33.

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