



US Elections and mainstream media: go online for the real story

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 It's no surprise that Americans are turning to new media for proper coverage of the Presidential elections this year. Mainstream US political journalism is not inspiring. The main network shows are very narrow and the cable channels are frantic and often shallow. Newspapers like the New York Times give good analysis but overall there is much more debate and policy detail online.

[The New York Times](#) had a fascinating critique of US media coverage. It's by Democrat loser John Edwards' wife [Elizabeth](#), so not surprisingly she is bitter. She bemoans the lack of attention to policy instead of personality:

"Watching the campaign unfold, I saw how the press gravitated toward a narrative template for the campaign, searching out characters as if for a novel: on one side, a self-described 9/11 hero with a colorful personal life, a former senator who had played a president in the movies, a genuine war hero with a stunning wife and an intriguing temperament, and a handsome governor with a beautiful family and a high school sweetheart as his bride. And on the other side, a senator who had been first lady, a young African-American senator with an Ivy League diploma, a Hispanic governor with a self-deprecating sense of humor and even a former senator from the South standing loyally beside his ill wife. Issues that could make a difference in the lives of Americans didn't fit into the narrative template and, therefore, took a back seat to these superficialities."

Websites like the [Huffington Post](#) are absorbed by process and personality. They are also partisan. But if you cruise sites like HuffPost, [Realclearpolitics](#) and [The Next Right](#) and [Daily Kos](#) I think you will find yourself connected to a much richer political conversation.

It will be interesting to see if the [Pew Institute](#) replicates their analysis of mainstream media election coverage for the online version to see if it offers a healthier diet. Back in the autumn they found that:

"63% of the campaign stories focused on political and tactical aspects of the campaign. That is nearly four times the number of stories about...the candidates' ideas and policy proposals (15%)."

[David Runciman](#) has an excellent article in this month's [London Review of Books](#) which reflects eloquently on the added value of Internet political journalism in this most dramatic of US election years:

"What is so striking about all this talk poured out day after day is not simply its volume, but also the quality of much of it, and not only in the mainstream media; although many of the blogs are hideous, rambling screeds, many are not, and a selection of the best will always produce plenty of wit and passion, along with unexpected insights. No election in history can ever have generated so much nicely turned opinion. If nothing else, the existence of the internet has destroyed the claims of the mainstream media in Britain to be able to offer any insight into this election. The BBC, whose coverage of British politics looks increasingly lame, has been hopeless at Obama v. Clinton. It's not enough any longer for a correspondent to paint some local colour about the weather or the quirks of the voting system before asking a seasoned observer from the New York Times or Washington Post

to explain to a British audience what it all means. The seasoned observers no longer have even the appearance of a monopoly on wisdom. They are just shouting to be heard like everyone else.”

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