

## Media awakens young voters How the Internet has 'forever transformed politics'



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ARTSci '08

Last Tuesday was a big day for our neighbours. After a mid-term election that saw the Democrats wrest control of the Senate and House of Representatives away from the Republicans, President George W. Bush said his party took a "thumpin'."

During the weeks leading up to the election, there was a frenzy of bloggers and talk show hosts discussing the parties, the platforms and the expected outcomes. With the Democrats in control of both houses for the first time since 1994, that lively discussion isn't expected to end anytime soon.

Political pundits across the globe have arrived at the same conclusion: these election results are attributed to America's policies in the Iraq war, corruption in Congress and a general disapproval of the Bush administration. Although such inferences are virtually indisputable, there was another dimension to these elections, the magnitude of which politicians have now begun to realize: technology and the new media.

We're all aware that the Internet has forever transformed politics, but many of us have yet to recognize that the ever-changing face of technology, and its effects in terms of access to knowledge, is playing an increasingly significant role in the election system. More specifically, technology is bridging the gap between the "men in suits" of the political sphere and today's younger generation.

Young Americans, who were once detached from the world of politics, now better understand the political system, and they educate themselves about the relevant issues. This year's mid-term election brought out a record number of young voters—the highest turnout of youth in several decades according to an article on msnbc.com—a shift largely credited to a new culture of Internet and technology use that has made political information more accessible than ever before.

Take popular political satirists such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert of Comedy Central. Their programs, among other late night talk shows, featured continuous coverage of the election campaigns. According to the Comedy Central website, Stewart and Colbert capture a nightly audience of 1.4 million, 90 per cent of whom are under the age of 30.

The two comedians

don't identify themselves as pro-democrat, but their material is primarily critical of the Bush administration. Not surprisingly, the majority of young voters this year voted Democrat. (Mind you, critics of the Democrats are also amply available, and most major news networks such as Fox News and CNN have an obvious conservative slant. These situations, however, failed to target the issues facing the younger population).

Clips from Comedy Central are also easily accessible on the Internet, and are viewed repeatedly on websites like YouTube and Google Video. These sites are visited countless times daily, predominantly by young users, and have added a new dimension to political satire. For young voters, these videos are the equivalent to political cartoons.

Howard Dean, Democratic national committee chairman, acknowledged *The Daily Show* last week when he said "Thank you Jon Stewart, and thanks to your audiences, 'cause you guys did it for us!"

Michael Ordone of the *LA Times* even named Colbert the winner of election night. He wrote, "The biggest winner this election season has risen from the parted waters—and it's not Nancy Pelosi. It's Stephen Colbert... Every incumbent candidate he interviewed in his

notorious 'Better Know a District' segment was re-elected."

Similarly, technology's impact on politics can also be seen in the rise of the blog culture, which allowed for increased expression and political debate; campaign issues and election-related topics were even seen creeping up on Facebook.

There's no doubt that these blogger websites and social networks are more popular among youth than any other segment of the population.

A study earlier this year in the *Sage Publications Journal* said *The Daily Show* and similar programs had a negative impact on the political views of young Americans, arguing that they aroused cynicism and consequently decreased civic involvement.

On the contrary, the results of this mid-term election demonstrate that Stewart, Colbert and the like may have actually improved voter turnout and even helped to inform the electorate.

In analyzing the closest of the races, we see that the Republicans only lost by a few thousand votes in Montana and Virginia. It's likely that somewhere in those two states, a few thousand young people were watching *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, or tuned in on YouTube.

### talking

### HEADS

... at BioSci  
PHOTOS BY ANDREW JOHNSON  
AND CHANTAL CLEMENT

*If you were stuck on a deserted island with one person, who would it be?*



"My housemate. We do everything else together, so why not?"

Stephanie Johnson, ArtSci '09



"Some amalgamation between Dane Cook and Hugh Laurie."

Courtney Brennan, ArtSci '09



"David Attenborough. He would be able to tell me what to eat and what not to eat."

Connor Cox, ArtSci '09



"Someone tall, muscular and has good hair. I want good looking kids. It's all about repopulation."

Amanda Leonard, ConEd '08



"Mr. PacMan because I'm Mrs. PacMan."

Mrs. PacMan, ArtSci '07

## LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

### 'No shame' in running for city council

Dear Editors:

Re: "Student candidates shut out" (*Journal* election extra, November 14, 2006).

Last place is not the most flattering of positions, especially in an election. One hundred and sixty-three votes are not too many in comparison to the other candidates that ran here in Sydenham.

I have no shame in running in this election and I was glad to run. Collectively, the two students had about 460 votes. Bill Glover, who is now our city councillor, had 1,180 votes and Floyd Patterson had 912. Whether or not Nathaniel Erskine-Smith and I were running against each other, we didn't have a prayer.

Smith has blamed his defeat partially on me, simply because I was another student and derailed his chances to win by splitting the vote. This argument is terribly undemocratic.

Everyone has the right to run, student or not. Democracy is about fair and competitive elections, not a buffet line where it's first come, first serve. I'm surprised that Erskine-Smith, as a fourth-year politics student, even bothered to make this immature argument.

Moreover, he lost the focus. The moment I registered to run in Sydenham, his campaign shifted from some important issues that the city should consider to "why you shouldn't vote for Alex Huntley."

In fact, instead of concentrating his efforts on getting students out to vote for him, he was busy advertising to students why not to vote for me through extremely biased documents such as his "Comparative analysis: An open letter to students," Facebook ads, and his articles on his website.

How could he argue that we split the vote if, collectively, we didn't have enough votes to beat Patterson's second place?

It wasn't vote splitting that prevented students from getting on council; it was student apathy. Students felt a lack of motivation to get out to the polls.

I realized this first-hand through canvassing in the student Ghetto. Students didn't say that they were not voting because two students were running against each other, but because they either did not have the time or the reason to care about Kingston municipal politics.

As candidates and as fellow students, we failed miserably in giving students a reason to vote. Therefore, it would be arrogant of either one of us to say that we lost because two of us ran.

I hope Nathaniel uses his intelligence, which he mentioned

in his open letter, and realizes this point before he decides to run for office again.

Alex Huntley  
ArtSci '08

### AMS loses its credibility after municipal election endorsements

Dear Editors:

Re: "AMS endorses Rosen for mayor" (*Journal*, October 27, 2006).

I would like to record my amazement on discovering that the AMS Assembly has chosen to endorse candidates in the upcoming municipal elections.

According to the *Journal*, this means that "municipal affairs commission volunteers can help with the incumbent Rosen's campaign, that he receives positive publicity from the AMS and written endorsement for his campaign material."

There are many reasons why this is inappropriate, but chief among them is the fact that the AMS, among its many roles, serves as a liaison between Queen's and city residents, and thus should be a neutral body.

Now that the AMS has decided to officially back a candidate for

mayor, it has lost its credibility in the community. I am having second thoughts about using AMS services such as the P&CC since this no longer seems to be a simple way of supporting Queen's, but rather a means of providing indirect support for a particular political candidate.

Secondly, although it is appropriate for the AMS to organize all-candidates debates for students, we should keep in mind that the majority of students will be gone within four years, while decisions made by the mayor and council will have long-lasting consequences. The AMS has no business attempting to sway student votes for what can only be short-term gains.

The municipal election has produced some unpleasant and illegal behaviour—people on Albert Street, specifically those who do not support the AMS choice, have had their signs stolen repeatedly. It doesn't matter that the AMS itself would not counsel this sort of behaviour, nor that it claims not to be making up students' minds for them.

By coming out in favour of a particular candidate, the AMS is responsible for exacerbating town/gown conflict, rather than repairing it.

Ruth Wehlau  
English professor and  
Kingston resident