



**Pew Internet**  
Pew Internet & American Life Project

a project of the  
**PewResearchCenter**

# Politics goes mobile

**26% of Americans used their cell phones to connect to the 2010 elections**

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## Overview

More than a quarter of American adults – 26% – used their cell phones to learn about or participate in the 2010 mid-term election campaign.

In a post-election nationwide survey of adults, the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project found that 82% of adults have cell phones. Of those cell owners, 71% use their phone for texting and 39% use the phone for accessing the internet. With that as context, the Pew Internet survey found that:

- 14% of all American adults used their cell phones to tell others that they had voted.
- 12% of adults used their cell phones to keep up with news about the election or politics.
- 10% of adults sent text messages relating to the election to friends, family members and others.
- 6% of adults used their cells to let others know about conditions at their local voting stations on election day, including insights about delays, long lines, low turnout, or other issues.
- 4% of adults used their phones to monitor results of the election as they occurred.
- 3% of adults used their cells to shoot and share photos or videos related to the election.
- 1% of adults used a cell-phone app that provided updates from a candidate or group about election news.
- 1% of adults contributed money by text message to a candidate or group connected to the election like a party or interest group.

If a respondent said she or he had done any of those activities in the last campaign season, we counted that person in this 26% cohort. Throughout this report we call this group “mobile political users” or the “mobile political population.”

Some 71% of cell owners say they voted in the 2010 election, compared with 64% of the full adult population in this survey who say they voted. (Note: The overall reported turnout was about 40% in the election. It is common for post-election surveys to hear from a greater number of people who say they voted than was actually the case.) There was no partisan tilt in the makeup of the mobile political user population. They split their votes equally between Democratic and Republican congressional candidates – 44% to each. About 2% said they voted for other candidates and 10% didn’t answer the question or said they didn’t know. Generally, there were few partisan or ideological differences in way this group used their cell phones for politics.

In most cases, those ages 18-29 were more likely than those in older cohorts to use their cell phones for getting and sharing political information.

## Introduction and overall findings

Cell phones have become an essential communications tool for American adults. Fully 82% of American adults say they have cell phones, and 71% of them use text messaging. Some 39% of cell owners also use their handheld devices to access the internet.

Mobile connectivity has become a growing feature in all kinds of communication and information exchanges—including politics—and mobile connectivity is becoming a regular feature of political campaigns. The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project tested the depths of this connection in the most recent campaign.

The results reported here come from a survey of 2,257 adults conducted November 3 through November 24, 2010. Among them, 1,918 are cell phone users. The margin of error in the cell-user sample is +/- 3 percentage points. The survey was conducted both on landline phones and cell phones and some 755 of the interviews were conducted on cell phones in this sample. This is the first time the Project has asked questions about use of cell phones in a mid-term election, so there are no comparable data for previous non-presidential elections. In 2008, we asked questions about texting and found that 29% of text messengers had traded texts with others or with candidates, their campaigns, or other groups.

This survey after the 2010 election found that more than a quarter of American adults – 26% – used their phones in one way or another to connect to the elections around the country:

- 14% of all American adults used their cell phones to tell others that they had voted. Some 71% of cell owners voted in the election, so that amounts to 27% of the mobile phone users who voted.
- 12% of adults used their cell phones to keep up with news about the election or politics. That amounts to 15% of cell-phone owners.
- 10% of adults sent text messages relating to the election to friends, family members and others. That means that 18% of those who use text messaging sent texts for these purposes.
- 6% of adults used their cells to let others know about conditions at their local voting stations on election day, including insights about delays, long lines, low turnout, or other issues. That means 10% of the cell owners who voted in the election used their mobile phones that way.
- 4% of adults used their phones to monitor results of the election as they occurred. That is 5% of cell owners.
- 3% of adults used their cells to shoot and share photos or videos related to the election. That is 4% of cell owners.
- 2% of adults used a cell-phone app that provided updates from a candidate or group about election news.
- 1% of adults contributed money by text message to a candidate or group connected to the election like a party or interest group.

The mobile political user group is more male than female, young than old, better off financially than less well-off, and better educated than less well-educated. African-Americans are also more likely than whites or Hispanics to be in this group – see the table below.

### Demographics of mobile political users

*% of all adults in each group who used their cell phones for political activities during the 2010 election*

<b>Total</b>	<b>26%</b>
Men	29
Women	24
<b>Age</b>	
18-29	39
30-49	30
50-64	23
65+	9
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White, non-Hispanic	25
Black, non-Hispanic	36
Hispanic	25
<b>Household Income</b>	
Less than \$30,000	23
\$30,000-\$49,999	29
\$50,000-\$74,999	30
\$75,000+	38
<b>Education level</b>	
Less than High School	15
High School Diploma	19
Some College	33
College+	35

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=2,257 adults 18 and older; n=535 based on those who used their cell phones for connecting to the 2010 elections.

Those who used their cell phones for political purposes are a high-tech, high-activity group when it comes to using the internet: 92% of them have broadband at home vs. 60% of all adults; 72% own laptops vs. 53% of all adults; 66% own iPods or other MP3 players vs. 43% of all adults; 55% own gaming consoles vs. 38% of all adults; 9% own e-book readers; and 10% own iPads or another tablet computer. When it comes to general internet use, 81% of these mobile political users say they go online daily vs. 72% of all internet users; 72% of the mobile group use social networking sites like Facebook vs. 61% of

all internet users; and 14% use Twitter vs. 8% of all internet users. They are also heavy users of all other functions on their cell phones such as getting email, sending texts and instant messages, and accessing the internet.

## Mobile connectivity for politics is particularly popular among younger adults

As in many other domains for mobile connectivity, the use of cell phones for politics is particularly appealing to younger adults.

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### Young adults and mobile politics

% of cell owners who used their phones to...	Ages 18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Keep up with news related to the election or politics	24%	16%	12%	6%
Let others know about conditions/problems at your voting location	14%	13%	8%	4%
Monitor results on election night	8%	7%	3%	1%
Share photos or videos related to election campaigns	6%	3%	2%	1%
Inform others that you voted (among cell users who voted)	58%	30%	19%	10%
Send text messages related to the election (among text users)	23%	17%	13%	11%

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. N=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews; n=1,918 cell phone users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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## The partisan story

The wireless political user cohort does not tilt in a clear partisan direction. Republicans, Democrats and independents are equally likely to own cell phones and to be part of the mobile political user population. Some 44% of those in the mobile political user group voted for the Republican congressional candidate in the 2010 election; 44% voted for the Democratic candidate. Asked about their general partisan preference, 27% the wireless political user group say they are Republican; 35% say they are Democrats; and 32% describe themselves as independent. Those are roughly the same proportions as the overall population.

Ideologically, they also look much like the general population in this survey: 9% of wireless political users describe themselves as very conservative; 36% as conservative; 32% as moderate; 16% as liberal; and 4% as very liberal. Those percentages closely match the ideological distribution of the overall population.

The mobile political user group had divided views about the Tea Party movement: 34% said they agreed or strongly agreed with the Tea Party movement and 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the Tea

Party movement. The rest had no opinion either way. These numbers are somewhat different from those in the general population. Among all adults, 30% strongly agreed or agreed with the Tea Party movement and 25% strongly disagreed or disagreed.

The mobile political users who disagreed with the Tea Party were more likely to use their cell phones to keep up with political news during the election season: 27% of the cell phone users who disagreed with the Tea Party used their cell phones to get campaign news, compared with 18% of the cell owners who agreed with the Tea Party. And on election night, 10% of cell owners who disagreed with the Tea Party used their phone to learn about election results; compared with 6% of those who agreed with the Tea Party.

Perhaps because Democratic partisans are somewhat younger as a group than Republican partisans there are a few areas in which those who voted for Democrats in the congressional elections in 2010 were more likely to use their cell phones for campaign-related activities. For instance, 26% of those who voted for congressional Democrats who are also text messagers said they sent texts about the election to others, compared with 19% of those who backed Republican congressional candidates who did that. In addition, 36% of the cell owners who supported Democrats said they used their cells to inform others that they had voted, compared with 24% of the Republican-supporters who used their cells that way.

Somewhat surprisingly, 21% of those who used their cell phones to learn about or participate in politics did not end up voting in the election. Some 35% of those in the survey said they did not vote, so the wireless political cohort went to the polls in greater numbers than the general population.

## Survey questions

### Post-Election Tracking Survey 2010

Final Topline

11/30/10

Data for November 3–24, 2010

Princeton Survey Research Associates International  
for the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

Sample: n= 2,257 national adults, age 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews  
Interviewing dates: 11.03.10 – 11.24.10

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,257]  
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,628]  
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone users [n=1,918]  
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on registered voters [n=1,833]  
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on online political users [n=1,167]

**Q10** As I read the following list of items, please tell me if you happen to have each one, or not. Do you have... [INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]?

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. A cell phone or a Blackberry or iPhone or other device that is also a cell phone <sup>1</sup>				
Current	82	18	0	*
September 2010	85	15	*	*
May 2010	82	18	*	0
January 2010	80	20	0	*
December 2009	83	17	0	*
September 2009	84	15	*	*
April 2009	85	15	*	*
Dec 2008	84	16	*	*
July 2008	82	18	*	--
May 2008	78	22	*	0
April 2008	78	22	*	--
January 2008	77	22	*	--
Dec 2007	75	25	*	--
Sept 2007	78	22	*	--
April 2006	73	27	*	--

<sup>1</sup> Question was asked of landline sample only. Results shown here have been recalculated to include cell phone sample in the "Yes" percentage. In past polls, question was sometimes asked as an independent question and sometimes as an item in a series. In January 2010, question wording was "Do you have...a cell phone or a Blackberry or iPhone or other handheld device that is also a cell phone." In Dec 2008, Nov 2008, May 2008, January 2008 and Nov 23-30 2004, question wording was "Do you happen to have a cell phone?" In August 2008, July 2008 and January 2008, question wording was "Do you have a cell phone, or a Blackberry or other device that is also a cell phone?" In April 2008, Dec 2007, Sept 2007 and April 2006, question wording was "Do you have a cell phone?" Beginning December 2007, question/item was not asked of the cell phone sample, but results shown here reflect Total combined Landline and cell phone sample.

January 2005	66	34	*	--
November 23-30, 2004	65	35	*	--

**Q14** We're interested in how people used their cell phones during the recent political campaign, in addition to talking to others on your phone. Again thinking about just your cell phone, in the months leading up to the election, did you use your cell phone to [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE], or did you not do this?

Based on cell phone users [N=1,918]

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Keep up with news related to the election or politics	15	85	0	*
<i>Items B and C: Based on those who text [N=1,215]</i>				
b. Send text messages related to the election campaigns to friends, family members or others	18	82	*	*
c. Contribute money by text message to a candidate running for public office, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group	1	99	*	*
d. Share photos or videos related to the election campaigns	4	96	*	*
e. Download or use any software applications or "apps" that provide updates from a candidate or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group	2	98	0	*

**Q15** Again thinking about just your cell phone, on the day you voted, did you use your cell phone to [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE], or did you not do this?

Based on cell phone users who voted in the 2010 elections [N=1,257]

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Inform others that you voted	27	73	*	0
b. Let others know about conditions at your voting location, such as delays, long lines, low turnout or other problems	10	90	*	*

**Q16** And on the day of the election - that is, November 2nd - did you happen to use your cell phone to monitor the results of the election as they occurred, or did you not do this?

Based on cell phone users [N=1,918]

CURRENT		
%	5	Yes, used cell phone to do this
	95	No, did not use cell phone to do this
	0	Don't know
	*	Refused



## Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from November 3-24, 2010, among a sample of 2,257 adults, age 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,628), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.8 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.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, half of the time interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult male currently at home. If no male was at home at the time of the call, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult female. For the other half of the contacts interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult female currently at home. If no female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male at home. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced by form to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2009 National Health Interview Survey.<sup>2</sup>

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

**Table 1: Sample Disposition**

Landline	Cell	
29342	14599	Total Numbers Dialed
1391	310	Non-residential
1454	38	Computer/Fax
15	0	Cell phone
13307	5782	Other not working
1648	175	Additional projected not working
11527	8294	Working numbers
39.3%	56.8%	Working Rate
549	58	No Answer / Busy
2578	2370	Voice Mail
90	14	Other Non-Contact
8310	5852	Contacted numbers
72.1%	70.6%	Contact Rate
482	751	Callback
6213	3817	Refusal
1615	1284	Cooperating numbers
19.4%	21.9%	Cooperation Rate
75	44	Language Barrier
0	462	Child's cell phone
1540	778	Eligible numbers
95.4%	60.6%	Eligibility Rate
38	23	Break-off
1502	755	Completes
97.5%	97.0%	Completion Rate

<sup>2</sup> Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, July-December, 2009. National Center for Health Statistics. May 2010.

13.7% 15.0% Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- **Contact rate** – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- **Cooperation rate** – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- **Completion rate** – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 13.7 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 15.0 percent.