



The Internet's Role
 in **Political
Campaigns**

Utilization by 2006 United States Senatorial Candidates

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Prepared by The Bivings Group

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Executive Summary

The Bivings Group recently conducted a study in an effort to assess the current role of the Internet in the 2006 Senatorial campaigns. Similar to our 2002 report on Web use by Senate and House candidates, this report explores the Internet presence and efficacy of the campaign committees of 77 candidates: 30 Senate incumbents and 47 Senate challengers, including 37 Democrats and 40 Republicans. We also compared the use of the Internet in 11 key races to all Senatorial campaigns in general.

Key Findings:

- Use of the Internet for political campaigns has grown dramatically since 2002. **Currently, 97 percent of Senate candidates have live websites**, while only 55 percent had a Web presence in 2002.
- Despite all the publicity during the 2004 cycle about tools such as blogs and podcasts, only a small number of Senate campaigns are using these technologies. **Only five percent of campaigns are podcasting while 23 percent of campaigns include blogs.**
- **This study indicates a three-tiered pattern of Web use by political campaigns.**
 - The first tier consists of baseline tools such as *news, biography, contact information, online donations, and volunteer forms*. Between 80 and 94 percent of all websites provided this information.
 - The second tier consists of *multimedia, blogs, RSS, and downloads*, which were used by between 14 percent and 55 percent of candidates' websites.
 - The third tier includes more advanced technologies, such as *en español, fundraising campaigns, team tools, house parties, and podcasts*, which were only offered on between three percent and 12 percent of all websites.
- **Not only did a large majority of candidates use Tier 1 tools, but these tools were used at almost the same rate by both Democrats and Republicans.**
 - This shows that Tier 1 tools represent a core of features necessary to any campaign website.
 - The few websites that lacked these tools appeared incomplete and insufficient compared to other candidates' websites.
- **The most pronounced inter-party difference existed in the use of *en español*.**
 - While only 8 percent of Republican candidates offered a Spanish alternative to their website, 22 percent of Democratic sites used this feature.
 - The second most pronounced difference between Democrats and Republicans was in the use of *RSS*, where Democrats used this tool 24 percent of the time, compared to Republicans, who only used it 13 percent of the time.
 - Differences in all other categories between Democrats and Republicans were no more than six percent.
- **Challengers, regardless of party affiliation, tended to use most Web tools at a higher rate than incumbents.**
 - Tier 3 Web tools, including *blogs, podcasts, and RSS Feeds*:

- 32 percent of challengers used *blogs* compared to ten percent of incumbents;
 - No incumbents used *podcasts*, while nine percent of challengers offered this service;
 - 28 percent of challengers used *RSS Feeds* compared to three percent of incumbents.
 - Challengers used most Tier 1 Web tools, including *news*, *biography*, *contact information*, and *donations*, more often than their incumbent opponents. The following results were particularly pronounced:
 - 89 percent of challengers used *news* compared to 67 percent of incumbents;
 - 96 percent of challengers used *biography* compared to 80 percent of incumbents.
 - However, incumbents used three other tools more often than challengers:
 - 87 percent of incumbents used *volunteer forms* compared to 72 percent of challengers;
 - 20 percent of incumbents used *downloads* compared to 11 percent of challengers;
 - 57 percent of incumbents used *multimedia* compared to 53 percent of challengers.
- **The degree to which candidates used most Web tools was highly pronounced in states dubbed by the Washington Post as “Key Races”¹.**
 - Candidates in key races used Tier 1 tools (*news*, *biography*, *contact information*, *online donations*, and *volunteer forms*) 100% of the time in all cases except for *news* (93%).
 - The use of Tier 2 tools was more common in key races than in the combination of all races. The use of *multimedia* in key races was particularly pronounced, with 70 percent of key race campaign websites including some form of audio or video files, compared to just 55 percent in the combination of all races.
 - For Tier 3 tools, (*en español*, *fundraising campaigns*, *team tools*, *house parties*, and *podcasts*), the use of *en español* and *podcasts* was higher in the key races than in the combination of all races, but none of the candidates who used *house parties*, *team tools*, or *fundraising campaigns* were running in key races.

It is clear from these results that patterns among web use by political candidates do exist. But what do these patterns mean? Following are some speculative conclusions based on a review of the data:

- **Challengers are running more aggressive Internet campaigns than incumbents.** Incumbents often have a record of past success in the Senate upon which they can focus in order to maintain and build upon their current level of pre-existing support. They are also usually the favorites in these re-election campaigns. For this reason, incumbent websites tend to be safer and less creative than those of challengers. Challengers are more likely to take chances online in an effort to secure votes.
- **The only significant difference between the sites of Democrats and Republicans was in the use of *RSS* and *en español*.** Democrats tended to use these tactics at a

¹ According to the Washington Post, 11 states have key races for the 2006 Senate elections: Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington.

higher rate than Republicans. One could draw some small, obvious conclusions from this: that Democrats are more likely to see the value in RSS and are reaching out to Spanish speakers to a greater degree than Republicans. But the real story here is how similar the tactics used by Democrats and Republicans are. For most tools, the usage rates for Democrat and Republican campaigns were essentially identical.

- **Key race websites tended to use Tier 1 tools more often than candidates in non-key races.** This is not surprising, since candidates involved in key races would tend to run more aggressive campaigns overall than candidates in less contested races, and thus maintain more complete websites. For this reason, it would be expected for key race candidates to be more likely than general candidates to use sophisticated Web tools; however, this was not the case: no candidates in key races used *fundraising campaigns*, *team tools*, or *house parties* on their websites.
- **Not that many campaigns are blogging (23 percent).** Newspapers are full of stories about blogging by politicians. The success of Howard Dean's campaign blog was the big online story of the 2004 election cycle. Yet, in reality, not that many campaigns are using this technology.

First off, it is important to remember the demographics of the candidates running for office and the limitations of the campaigns' themselves. Candidates are extremely busy, and older Americans are unlikely to have the time or inclination to personally participate in the blogosphere. For many campaigns, having a blog just doesn't make strategic sense. Many campaigns also have extremely limited resources, and are hesitant to devote these resources to an activity like blogging.

Second, there is a perception among many political consultants and candidates that blogging is a risky strategy. Candidates worry that by fully participating in the blogosphere, they will be dragged further to the left or to the right. Bloggers are typically the most active and ideological of Americans, so there is a fear by some that reaching out to these groups may turn away moderate voters.

- **Tools such as *fundraising campaigns*, *team tools*, *house parties*, and *podcasts* were barely used at all by Senate campaigns.** While these tools were used by many of the 2004 Presidential candidates and the national committees, they are simply not being used widely by 2006 Senate candidates. These tools are more emerging technologies than proven tactics, and as such Senate campaigns haven't fully embraced them. Also, *fundraising campaigns*, *team tools* and *house parties* are most effective on sites that generate high traffic levels on a daily basis (like a committee or Presidential candidate site). It may be that campaigns don't feel their website attract the critical mass of users necessary for these tools to work. The campaigns are most likely waiting for proof that these kinds of tools can work for a Senate campaign before implementing.
- **Multimedia is used by 55 percent of campaigns.** During the 2004 campaign cycle, both candidates from both parties published audio and television commercials on their websites, in many cases creating humorous multimedia pieces about their opponents. Senate candidates are embracing this technology to a greater extent than blogs and podcasts. Why? Multimedia on websites is an extension of more traditional broadcast media tactics that campaigns are well versed in, and thus have become common

features of campaign websites.

Introduction

The Internet represents an effective and affordable means for politicians to reach their constituencies, address their concerns, and raise the funds necessary to win an election. The Internet is an excellent medium for politicians to present their positions, develop an identity, and “brand” themselves. The Web enables them to engage interested parties, provide them with in-depth background information on the issues, and seek support.

In light of this, The Bivings Group conducted this study in an effort to assess the current role of the Internet in the 2006 Senatorial Campaign. This report explores the Internet presence and efficacy of the campaign committees 77 Senatorial candidates: 30 Senate Incumbents and 47 Senate Challengers, including 36 Democrats and 41 Republicans.

The data was collected between May 8 and May 16, 2006, and therefore represents a snapshot of a dynamic situation, as the campaign committees for candidates continue to mobilize. As websites are constantly changing to keep up with new technologies, it is likely that these figures will remain in flux as the campaigns continue to evolve throughout the remainder of the 2006 election cycle.

In the name of full disclosure, The Bivings Group currently does work for a variety of Republican organizations and a few Republican candidates for office.

Methodology

The data was collected over a period of eight days (between May 8 and May 16) for 77 Senatorial candidates running for election in 2006. Of these candidates, 36 are Democrats, and 41 are Republicans; 30 are incumbents, and 47 are challengers.

The data collected for each candidate's campaign committee includes the following:

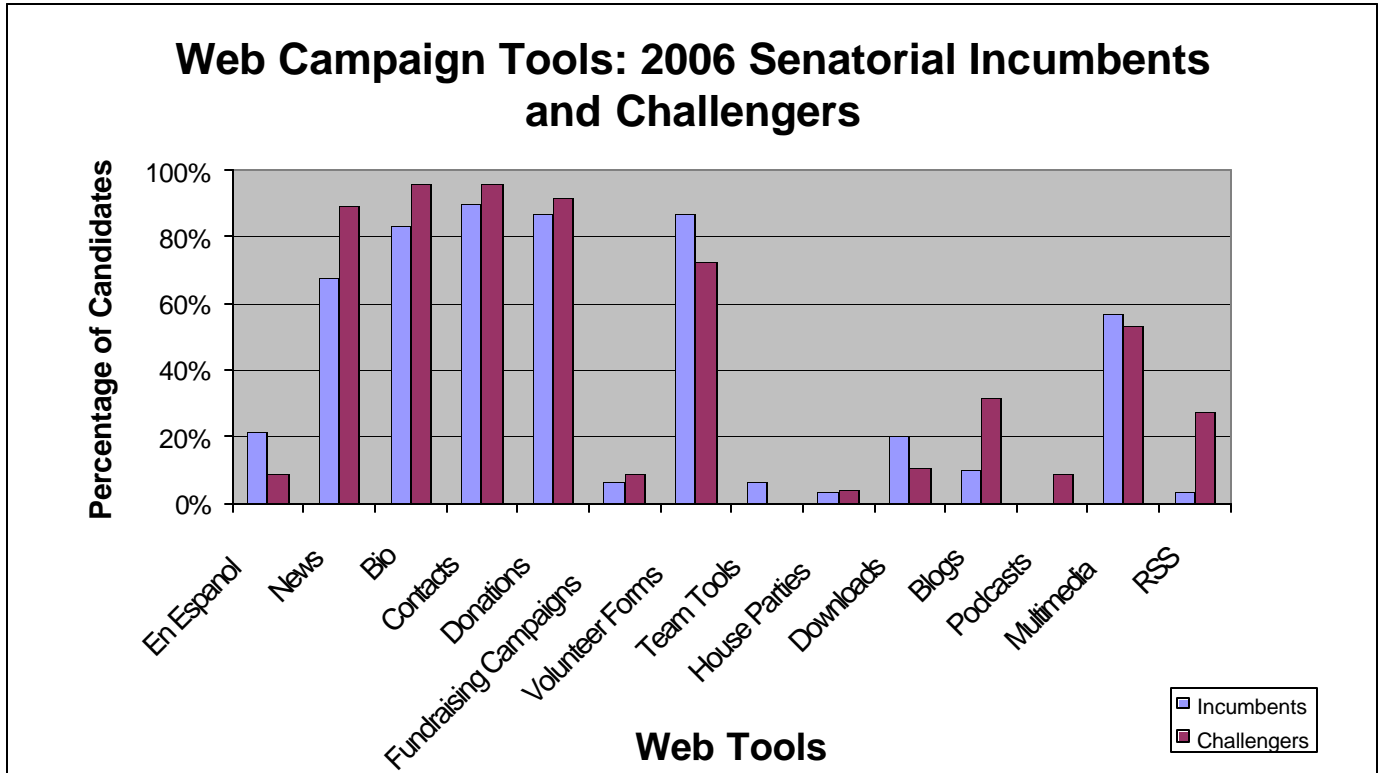
- *En Español*: Does the website provide a Spanish version?
- *News*: Does the website provide news and press releases?
- *Bio*: Does the website provide a biography of the candidate?
- *Contacts*: Does the website provide adequate contact information?
- *Donations*: Does the website provide the ability to make donations online?
- *Fundraising Campaigns*: Does the website provide the ability for voters to organize their own fundraising campaigns?
- *Volunteer Forms*: Does the website provide a volunteer sign-up form?
- *Team Tools*: Does the website provide the ability for volunteers to organize and track activity?
- *House Parties*: Does the website help volunteers set up house parties?
- *Downloads*: Does the website provide downloadable fliers, web stickers, or other campaign materials?
- *Blogs*: Does the website offer a blog?
- *Podcasts*: Does the website offer podcasts?
- *Multimedia*: Does the website offer audio or video files?
- *RSS*: Does the website offer an RSS feed?

Websites were located by searching Google for "candidate's name", "candidate's name campaign", and "candidate's name Senate". If these searches were unsuccessful, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (dsc.org) and the National Republican Senatorial Committee (nrsc.org) were consulted. These websites were also used to identify each state's candidates.

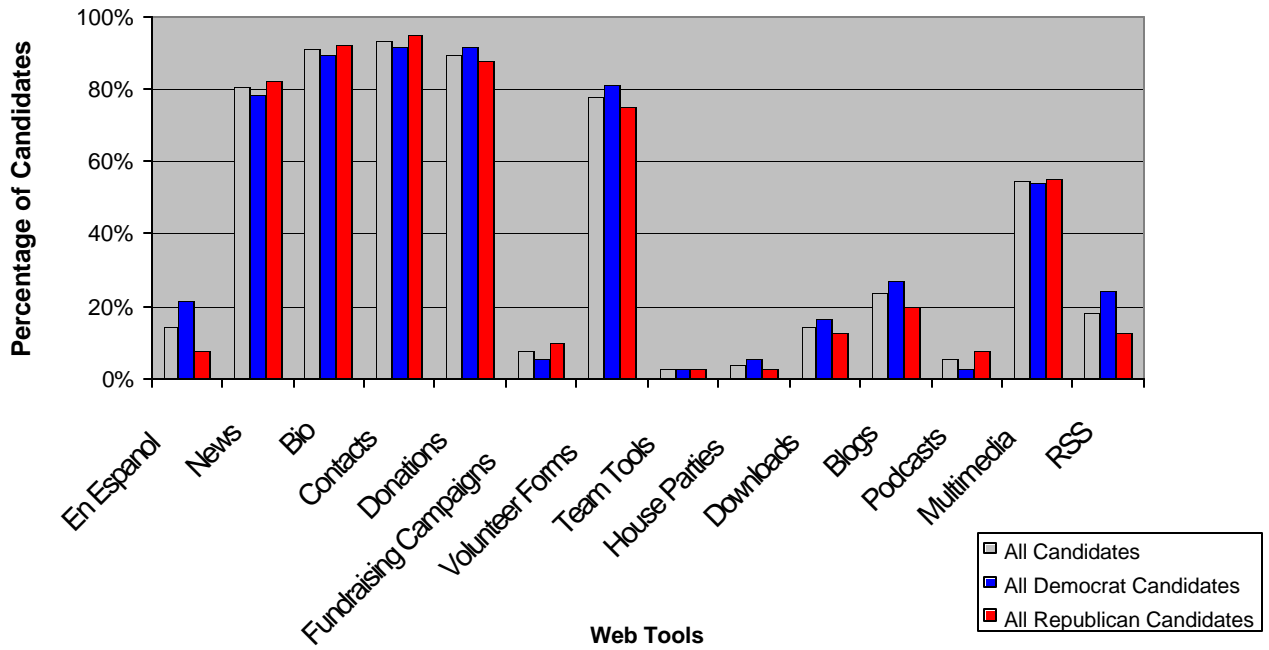
Findings

The following series of graphs provide a summary of the data collected and provides answers to the questions posed during this study. Additional analysis can be found in the executive summary above.

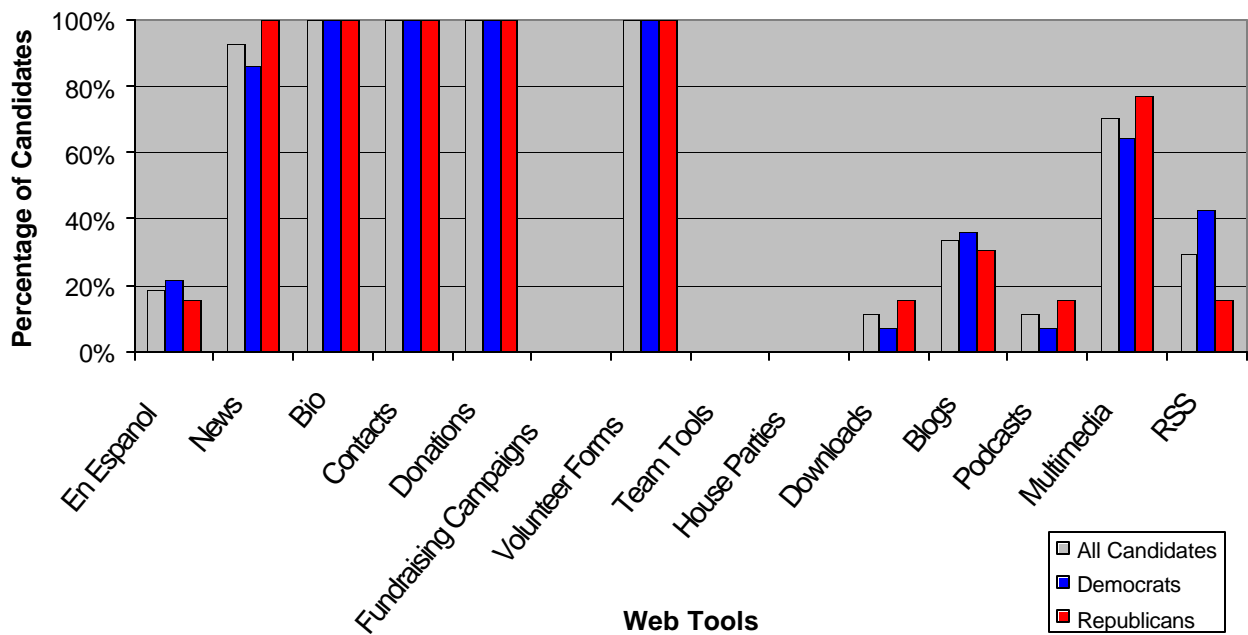
Summary Graphs



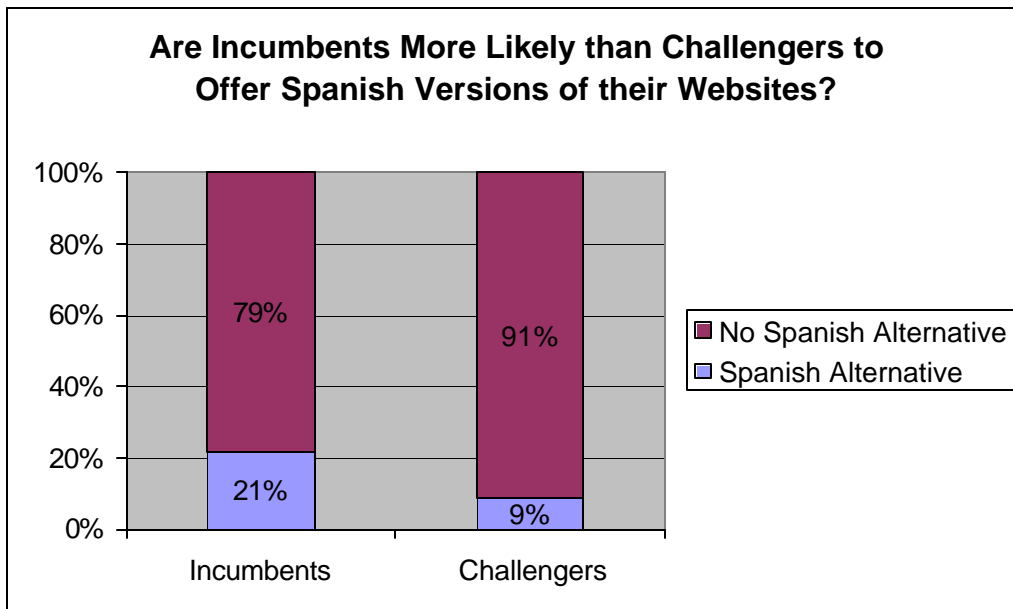
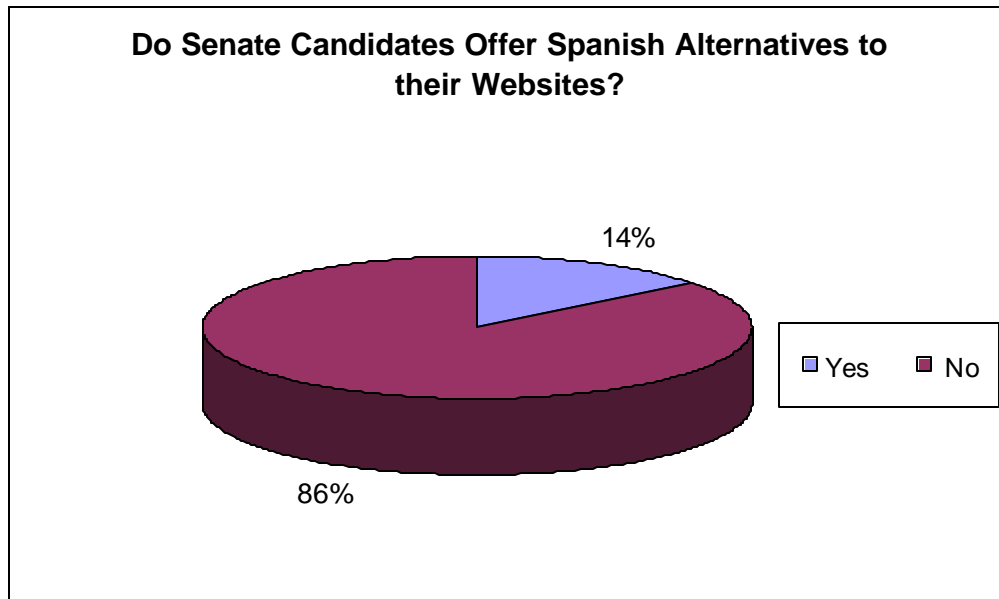
Web Campaign Tools: 2006 Democrats and Republicans



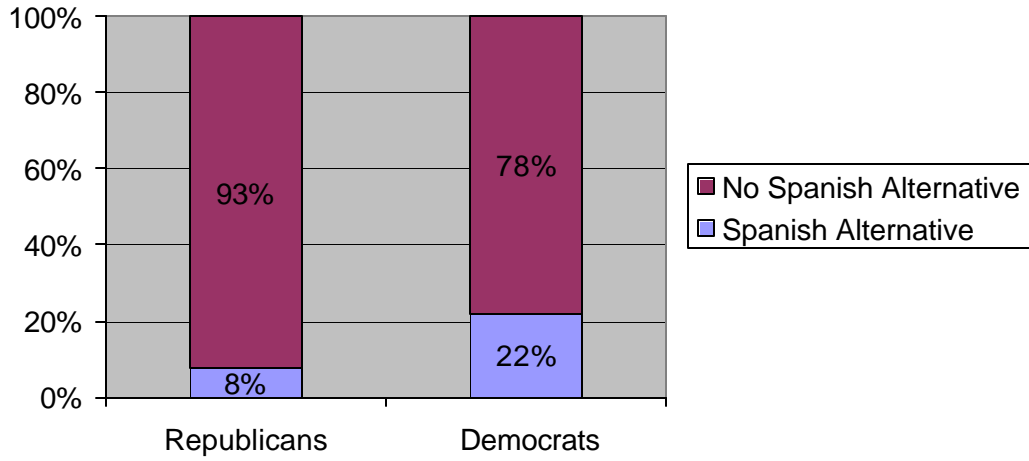
Campaign Web Tools: Key Races



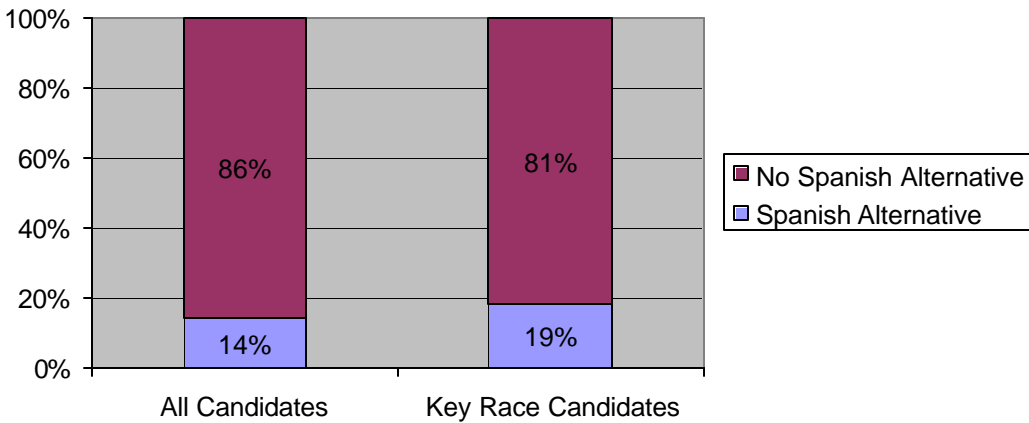
En Español



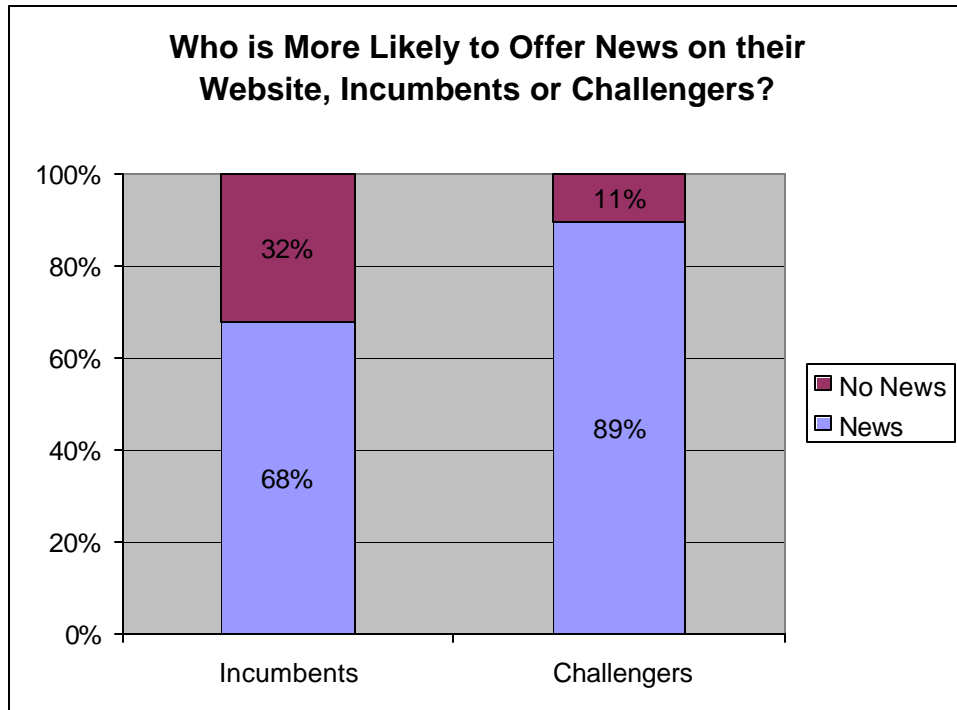
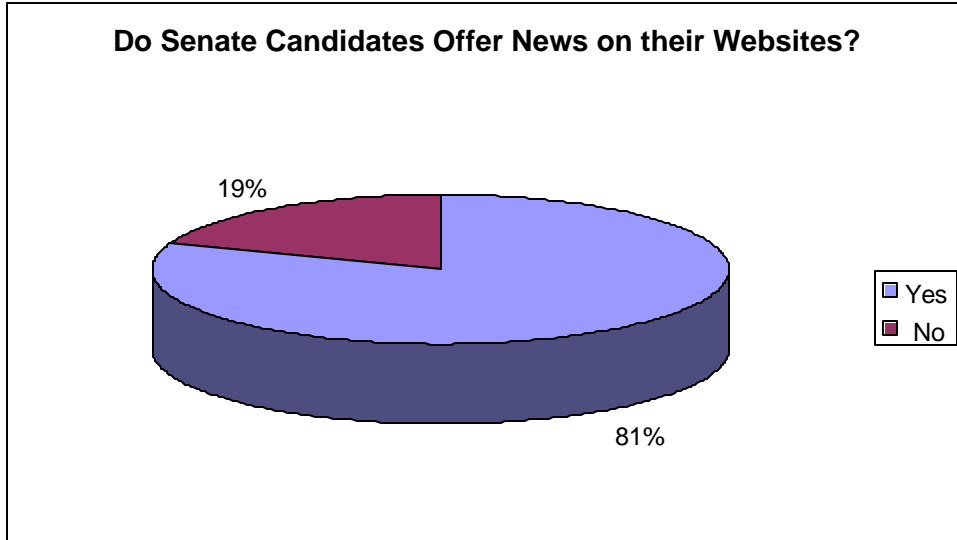
Are Republicans More Likely Than Democrats to Offer Spanish Versions of their Websites?



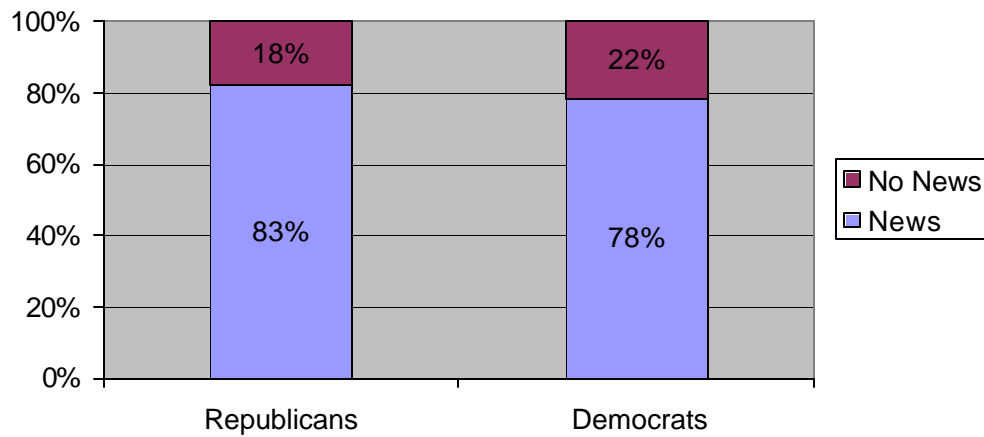
Are Candidates in Key Races More Likely than All Combined Candidates to Offer a Spanish Alternative to their Websites?



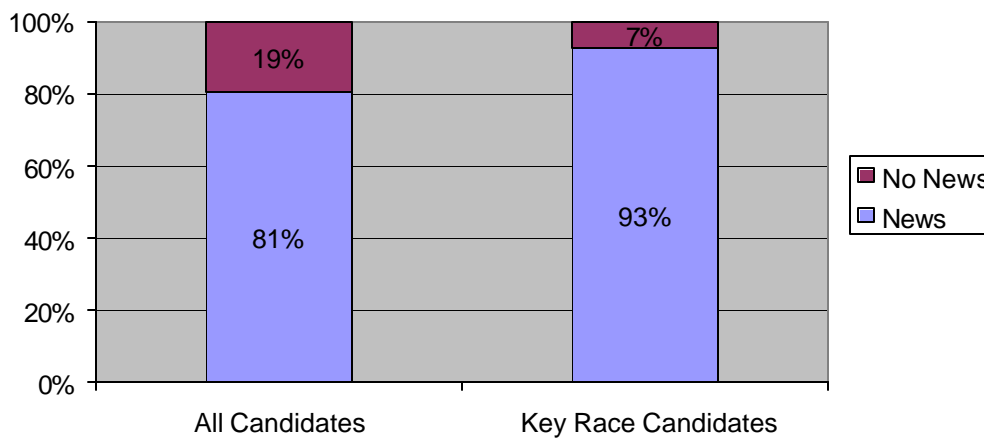
News



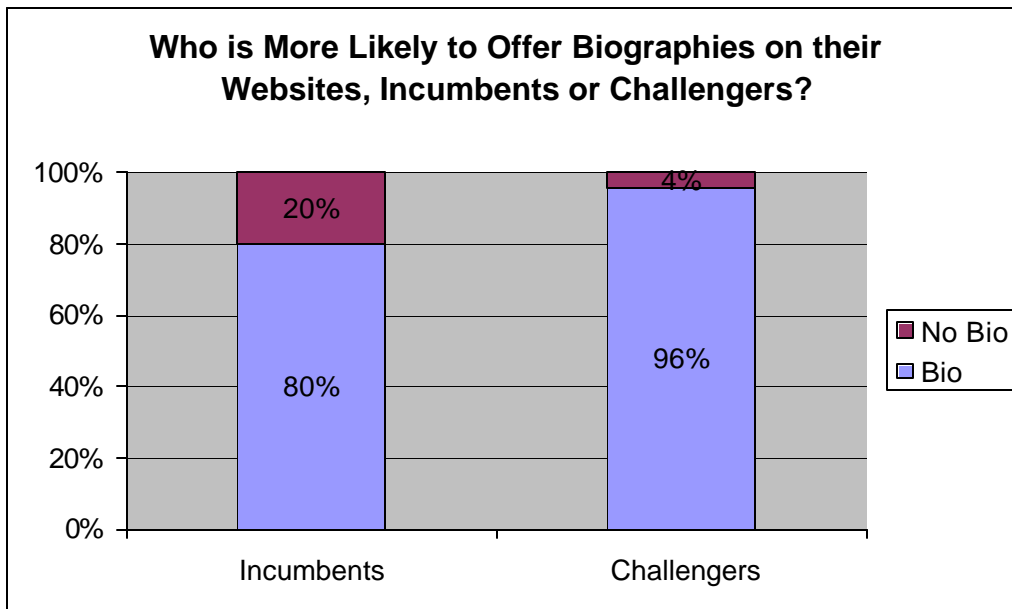
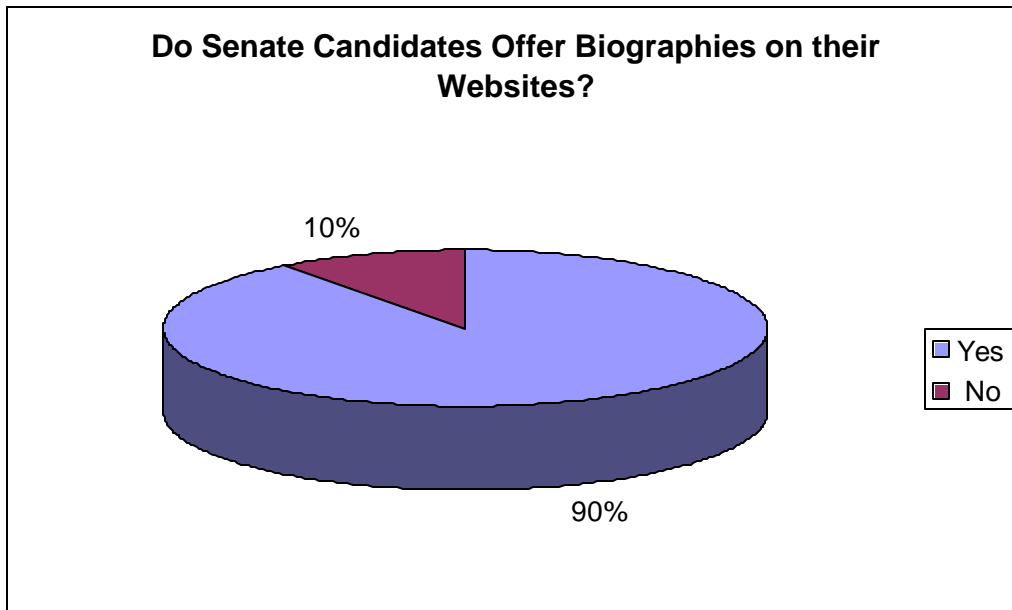
Who is More Likely to Offer News on their Websites, Democrats or Republicans?



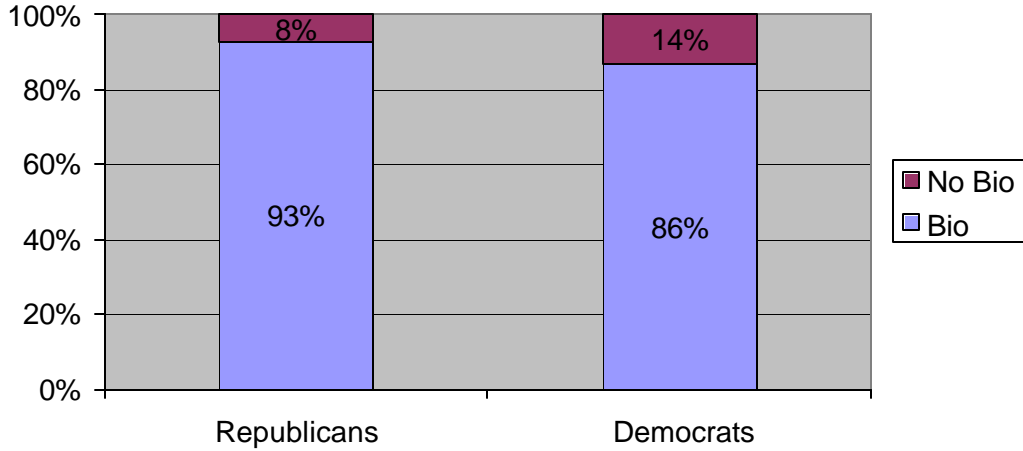
Who is More Likely to Offer News on their Websites, Key Race Candidates or All Combined Candidates?



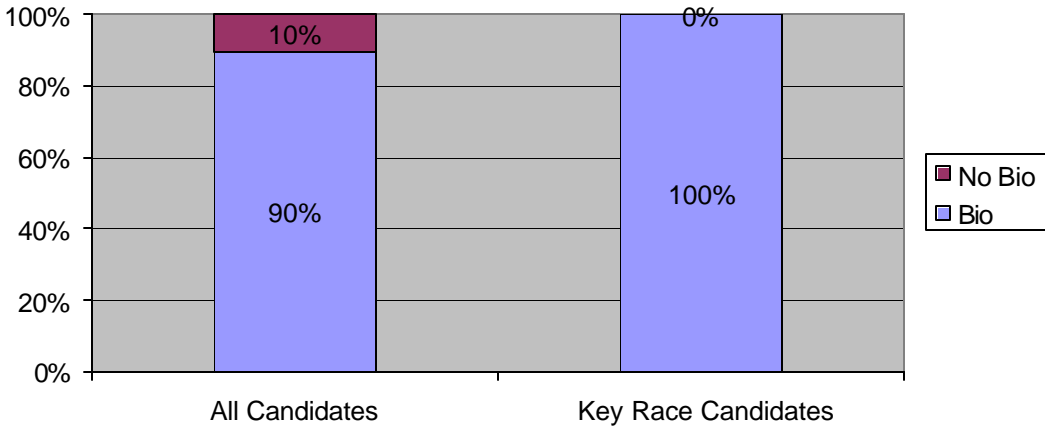
Biography



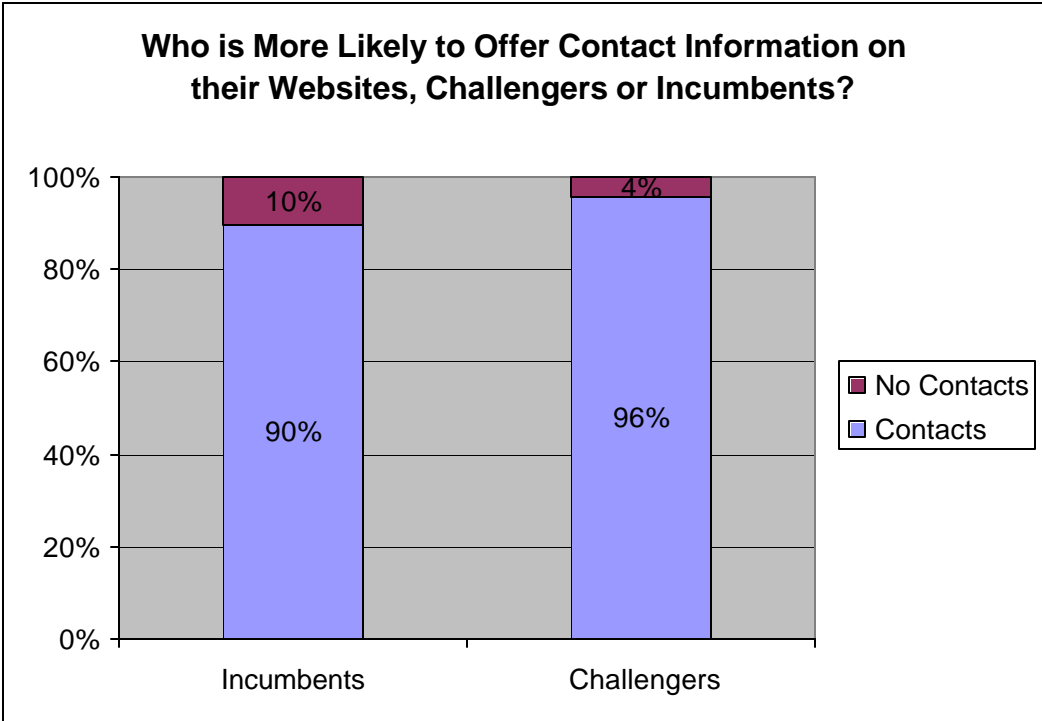
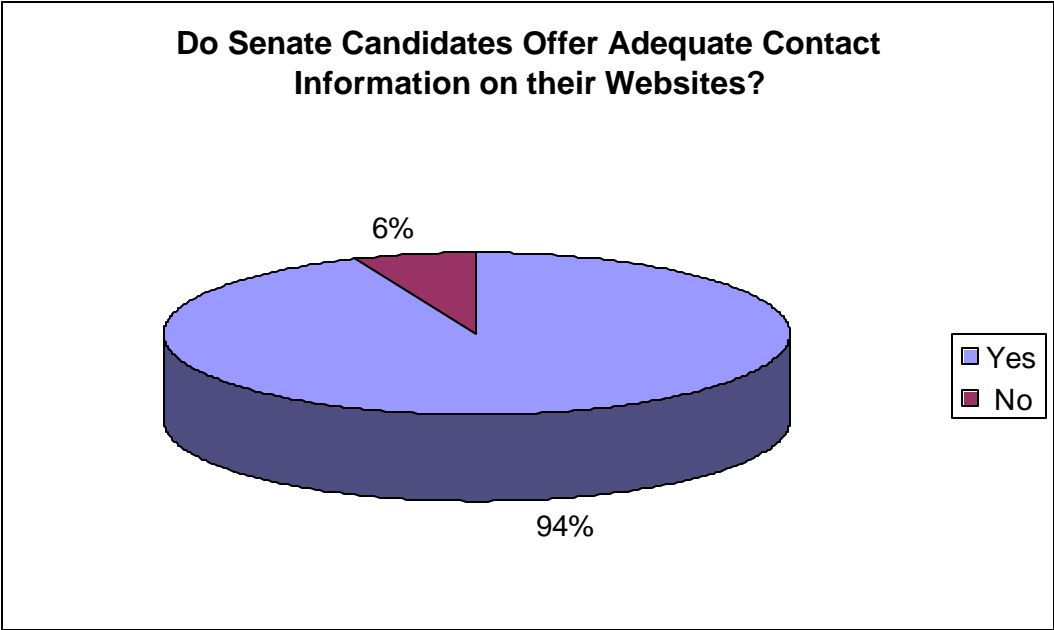
Who is More Likely to Offer Biographies on their Websites, Republicans or Democrats?



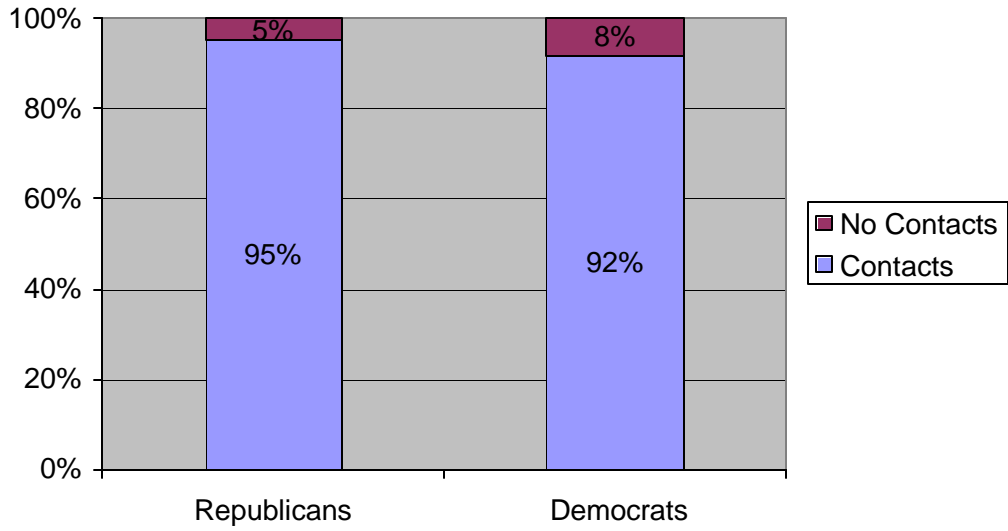
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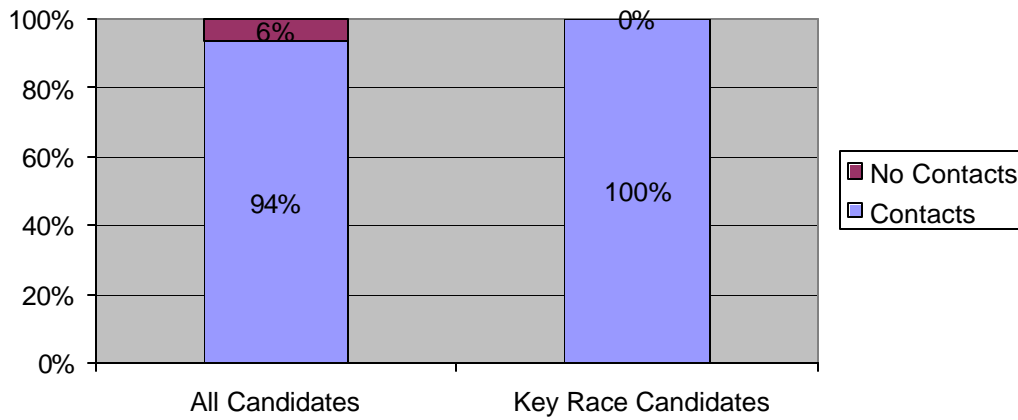
Contacts



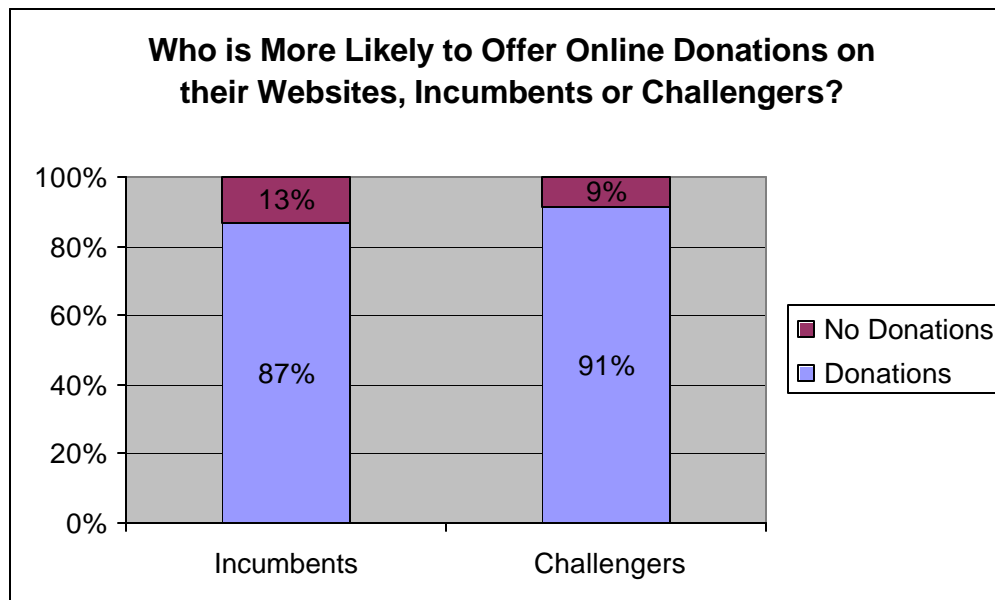
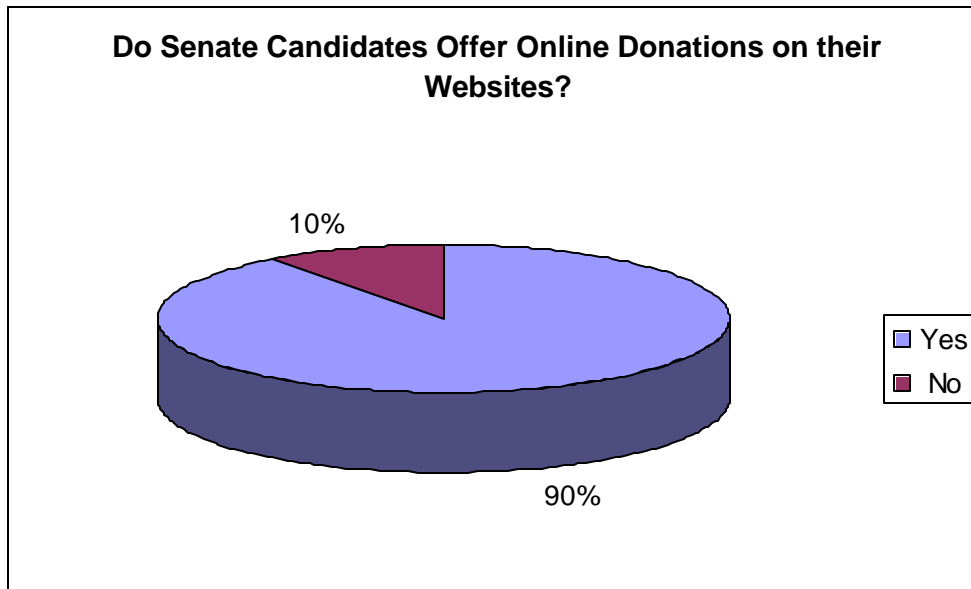
Who is More Likely to Offer Contact Information on their Websites, Democrats or Republicans?



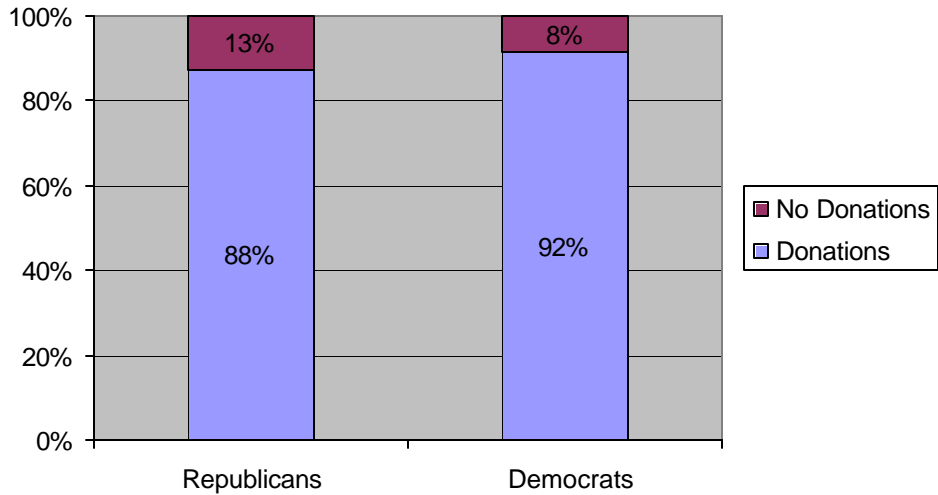
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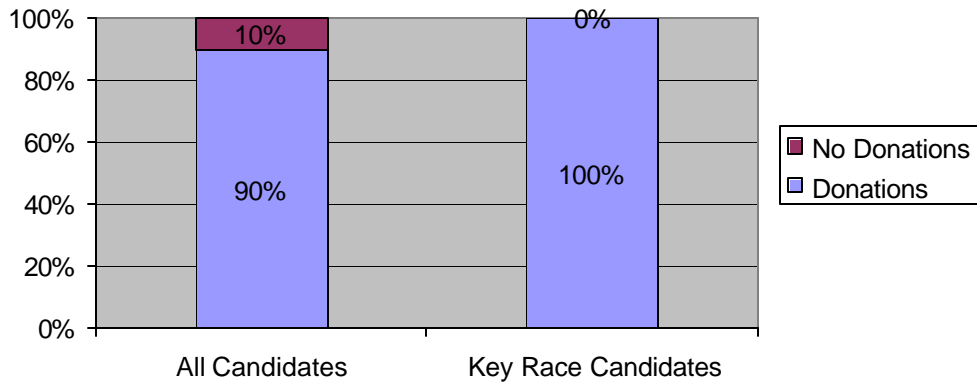
Donations



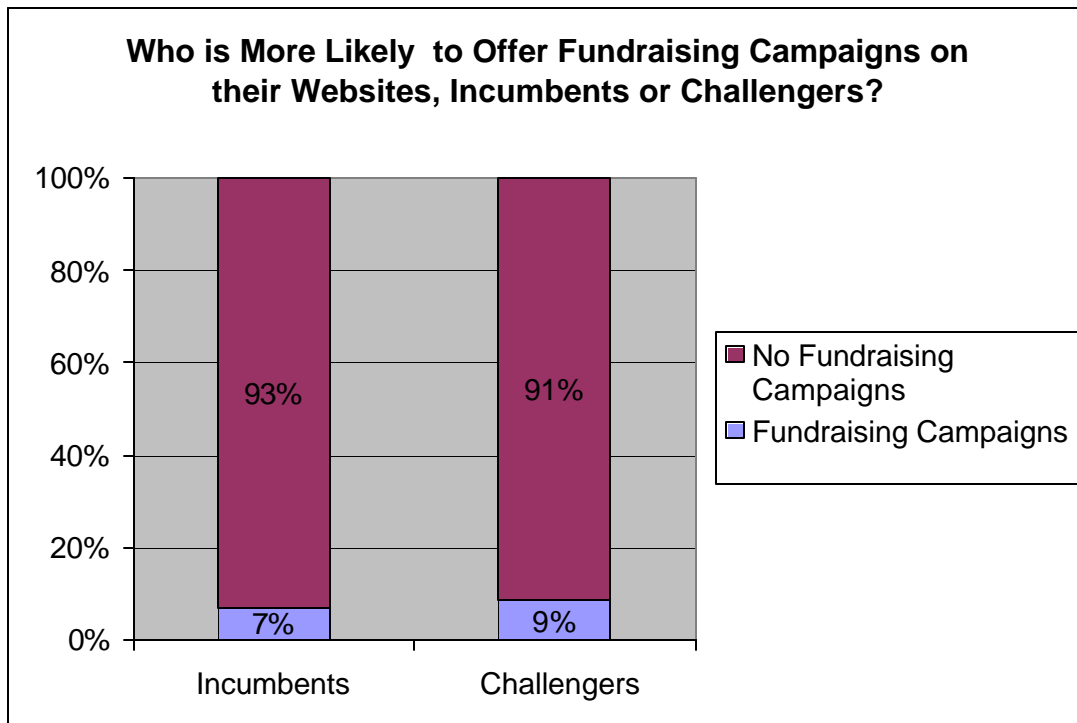
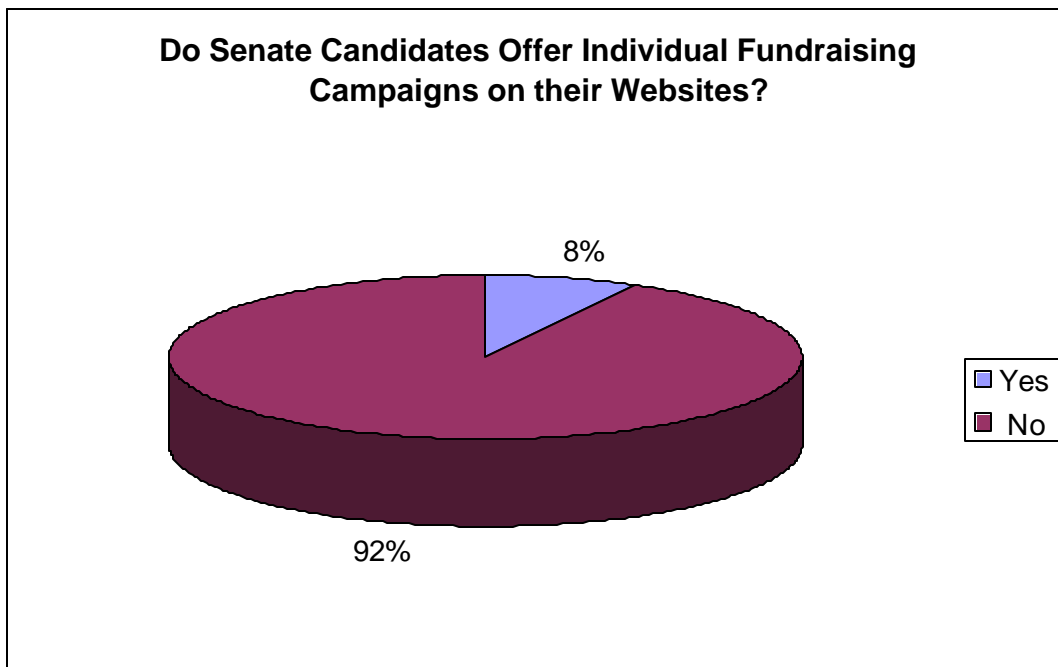
Who is More Likely to Offer Online Donations on their Websites, Democrats or Republicans?



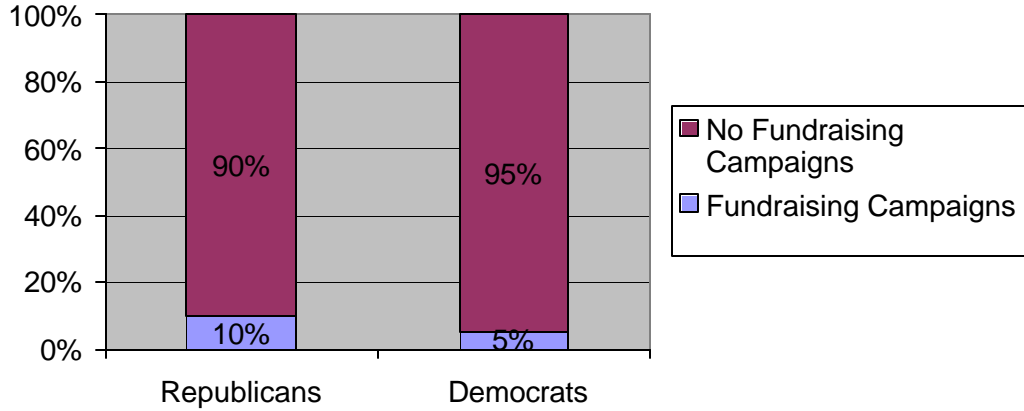
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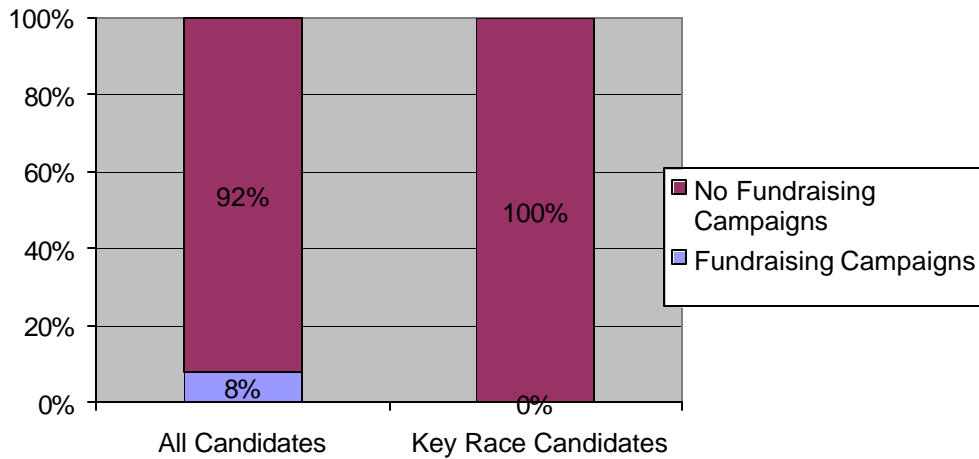
Fundraising Campaigns



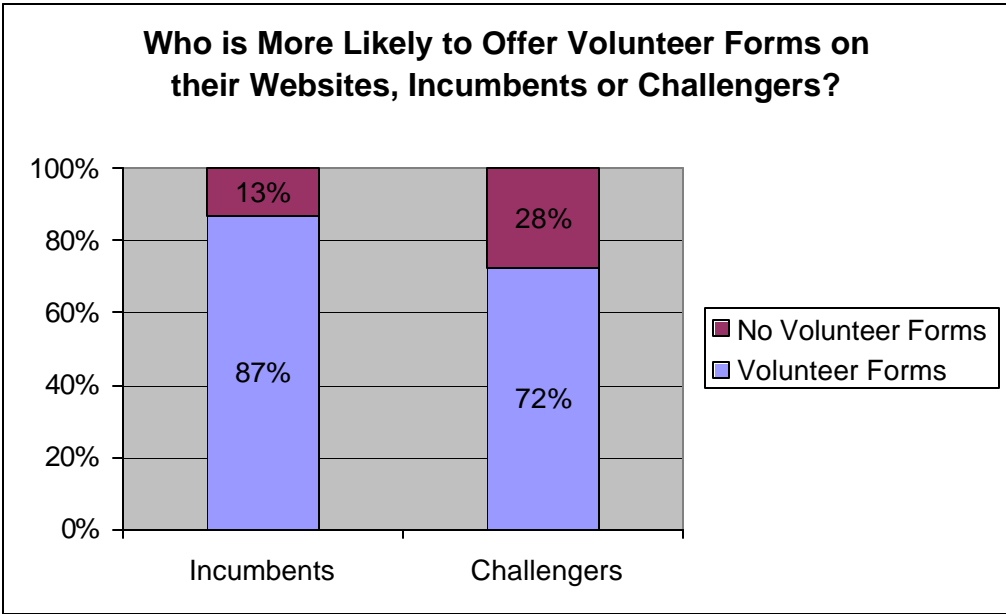
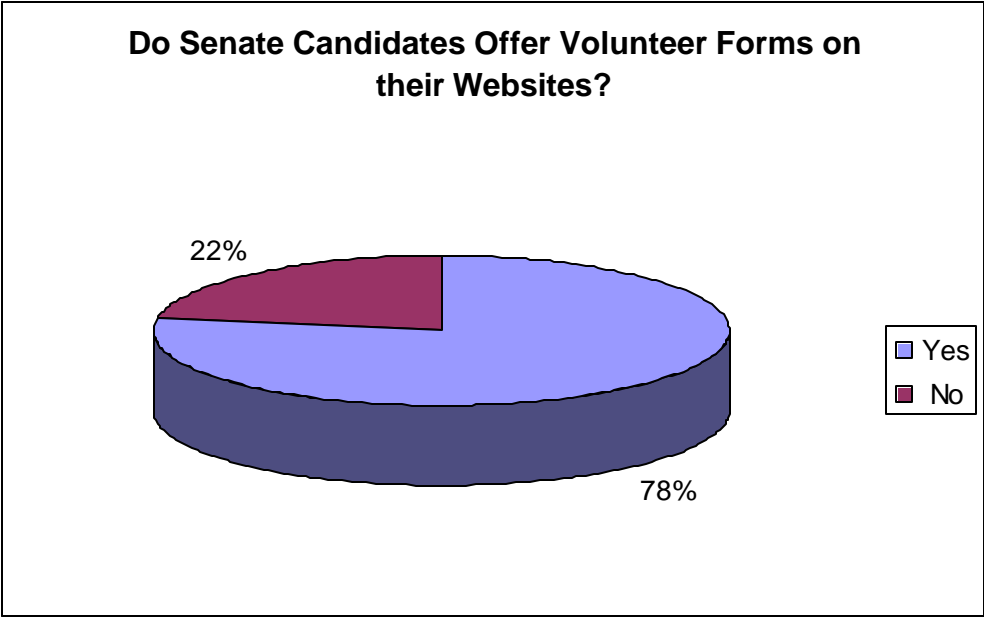
Who is More Likely than to Offer Fundraising Campaigns on their Websites, Democrats or Republicans?



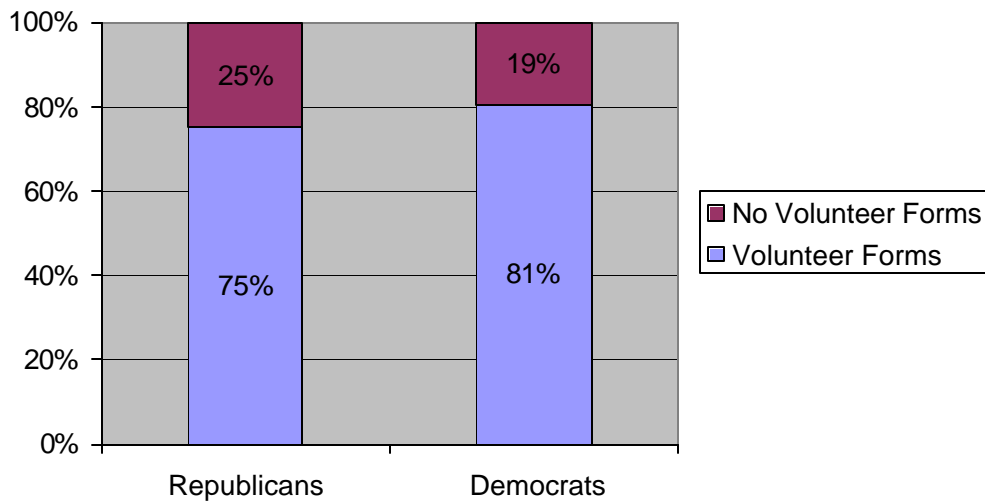
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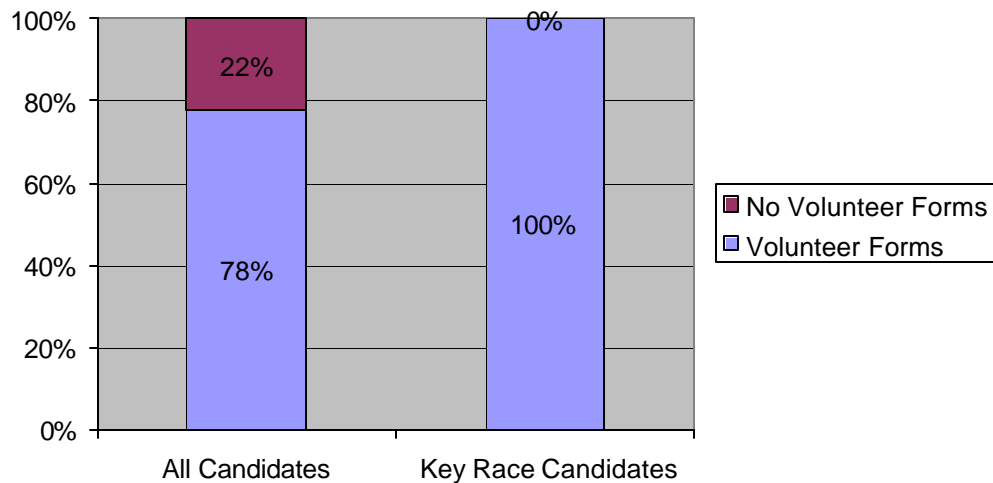
Volunteer Forms



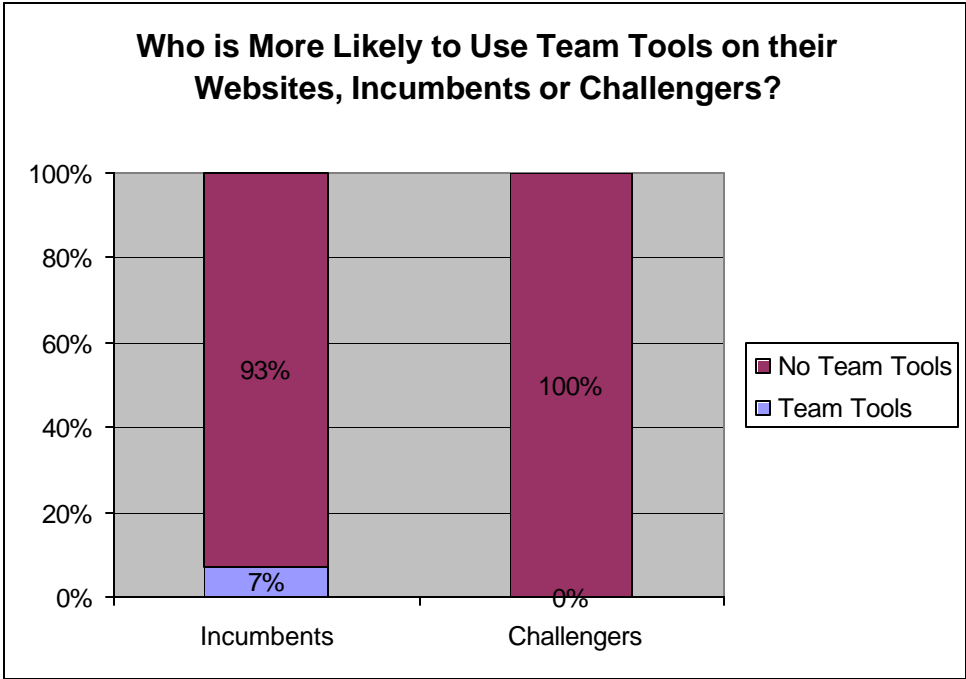
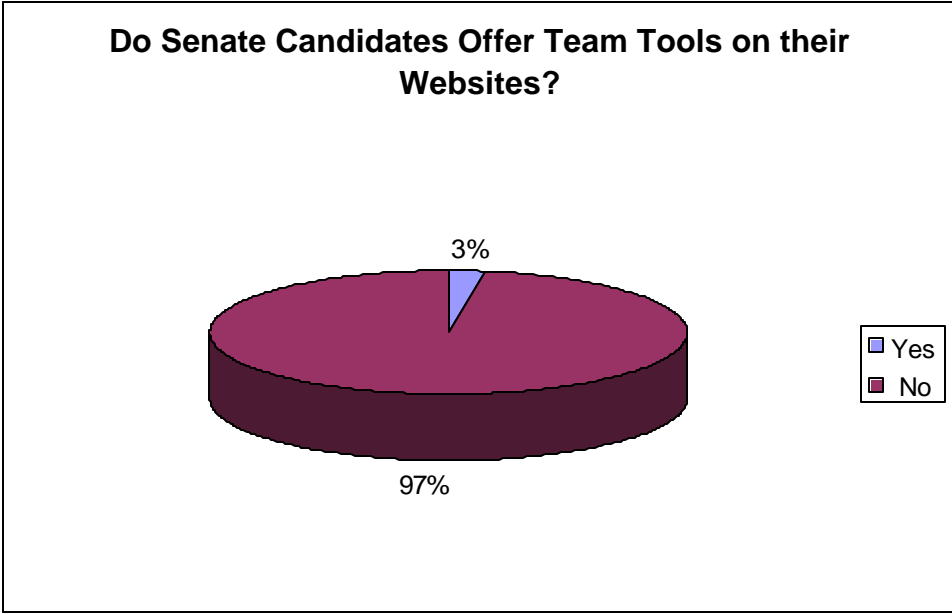
Who is More Likely to Offer Volunteer Forms on their Websites, Republicans or Democrats?



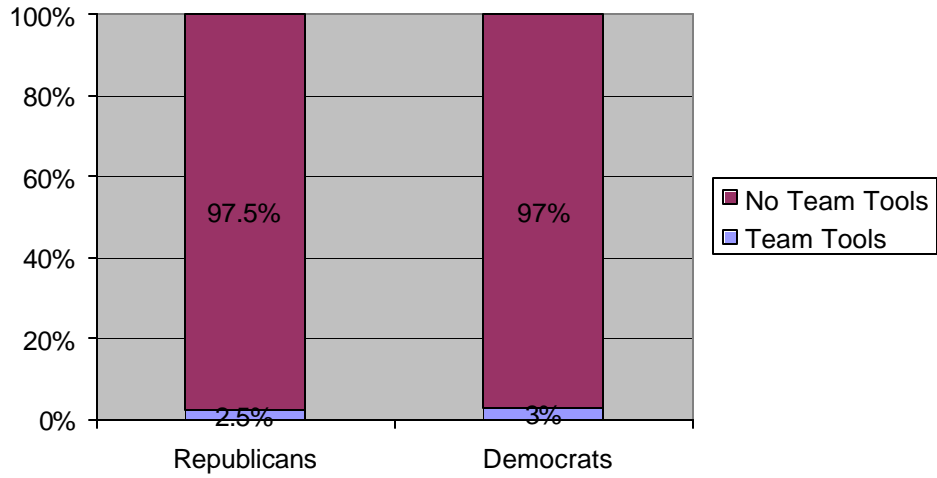
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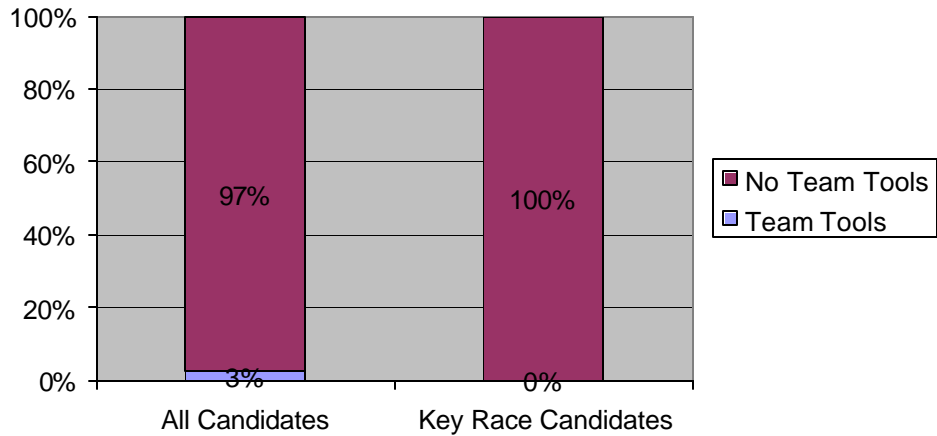
Team Tools



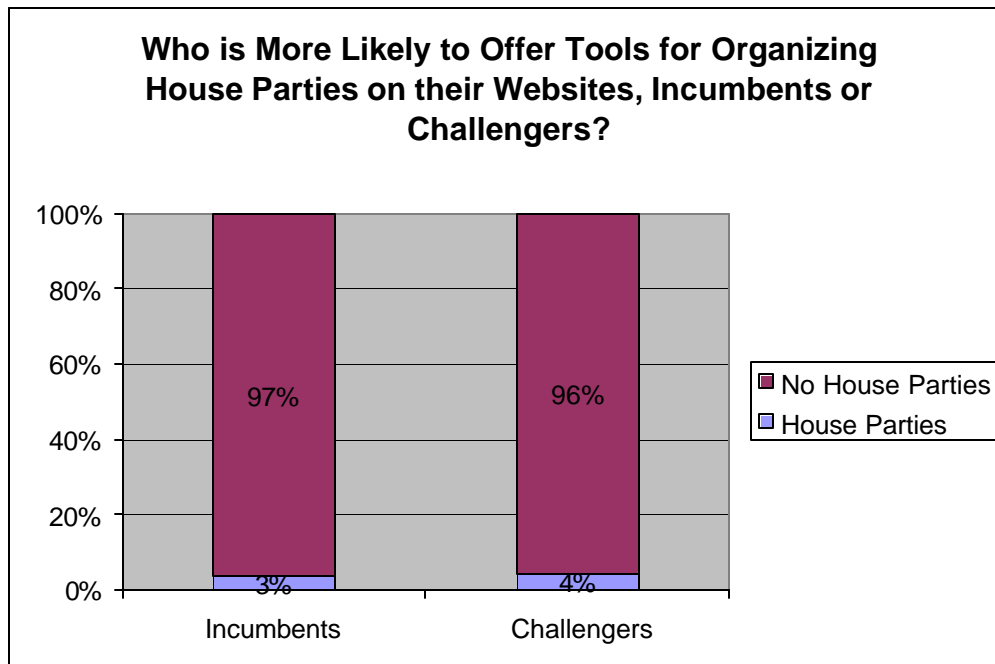
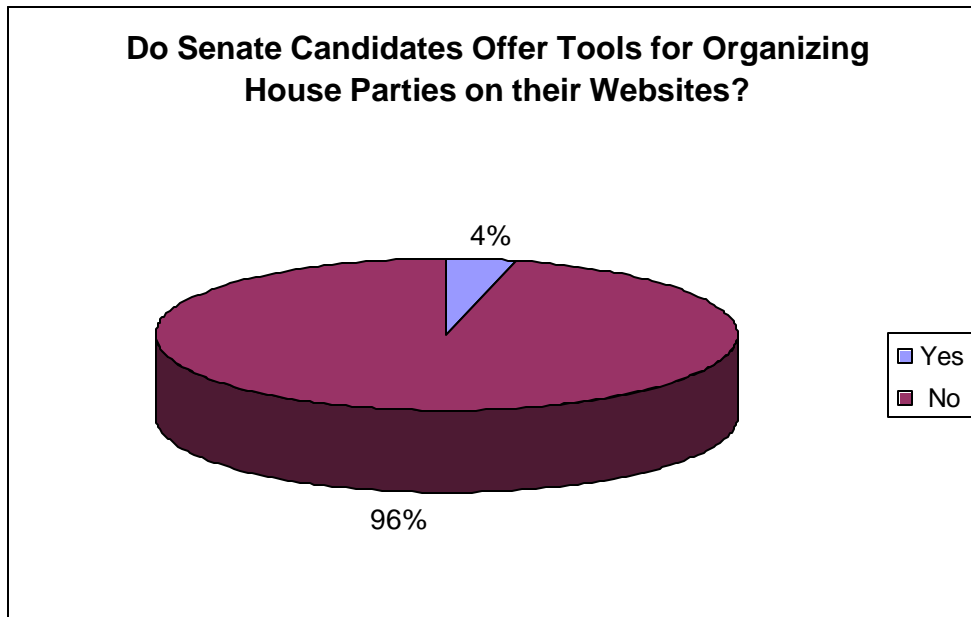
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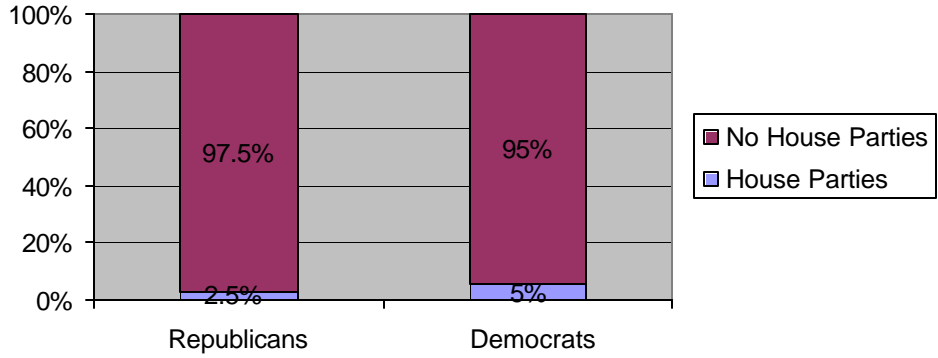
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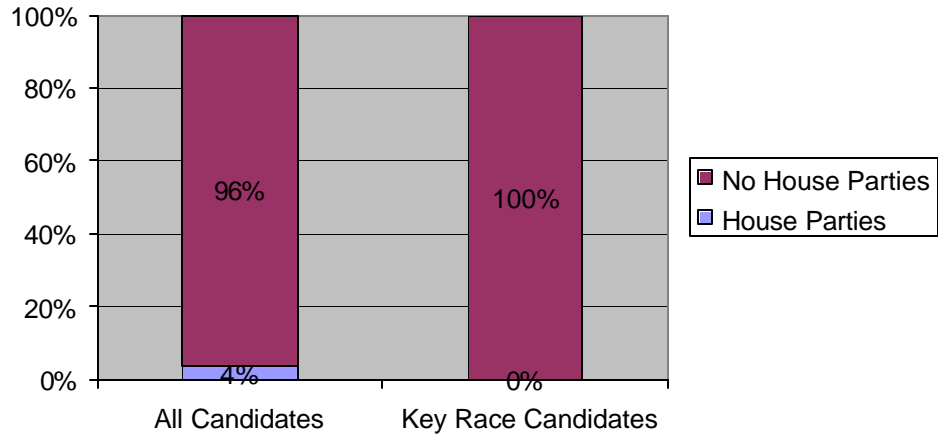
House Parties



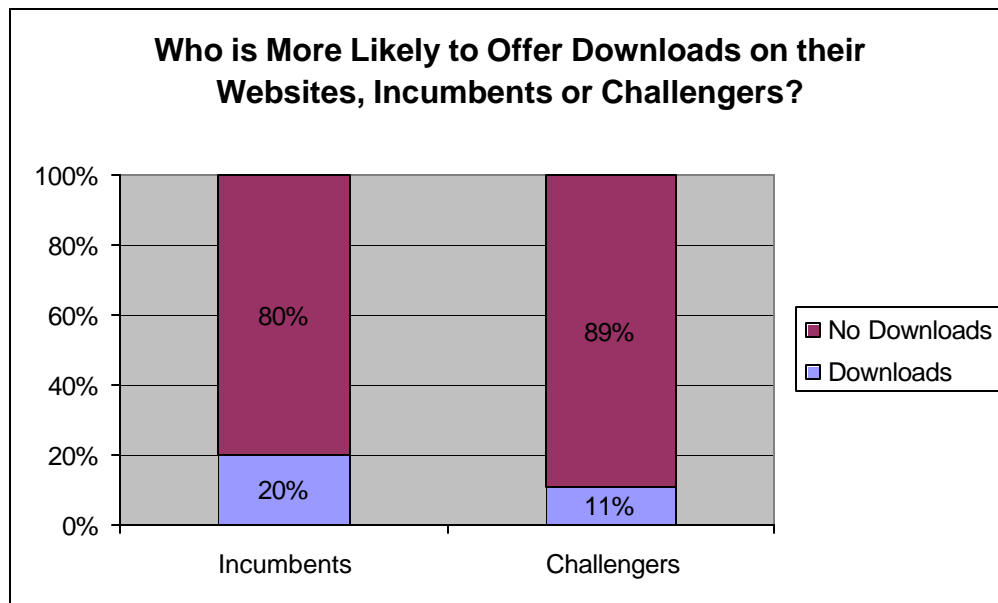
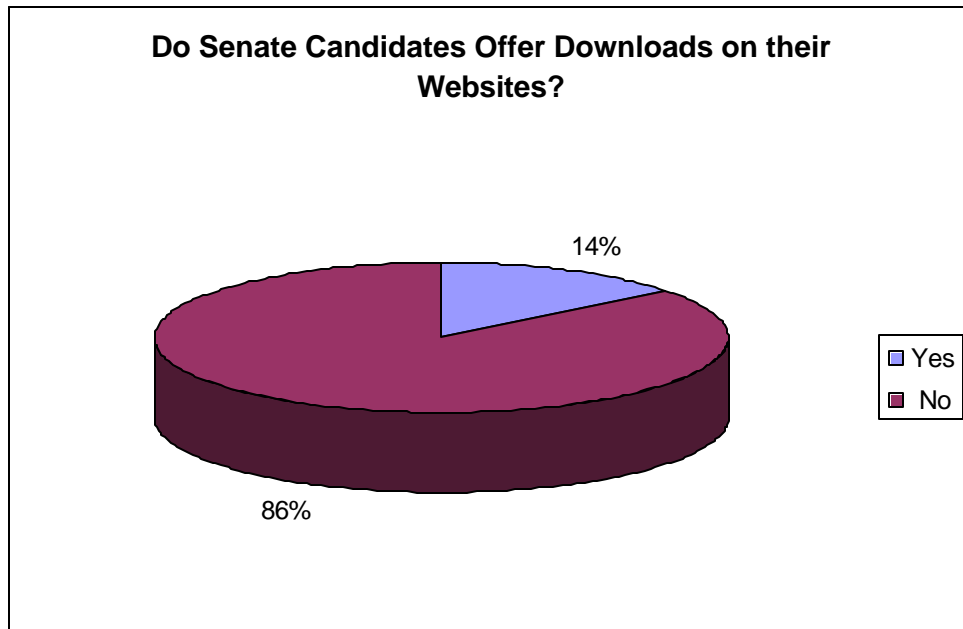
Who is More Likely to Offer Tools for Organizing House Parties on their Websites, Republicans or Democrats?



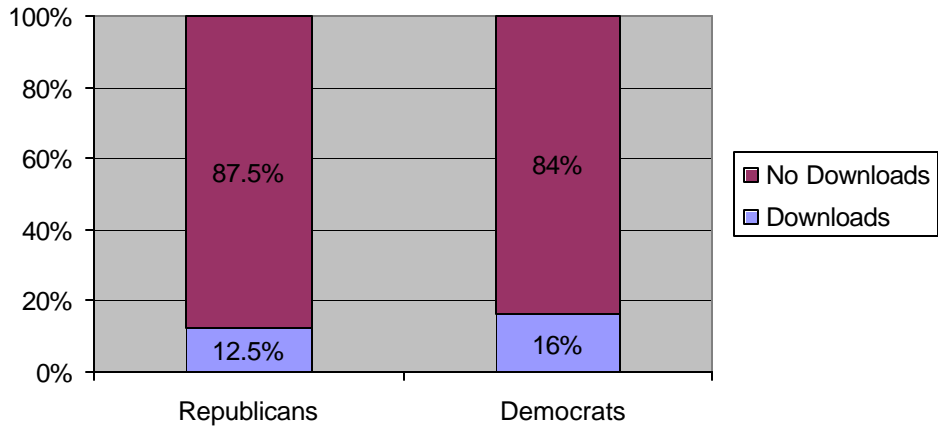
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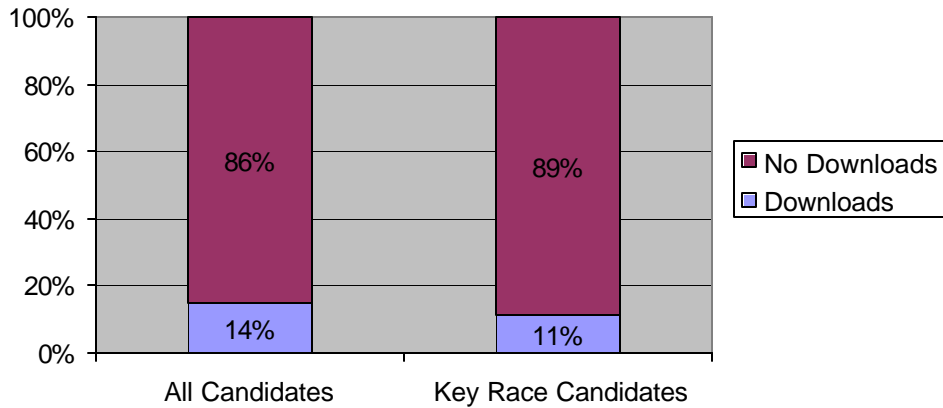
Downloads



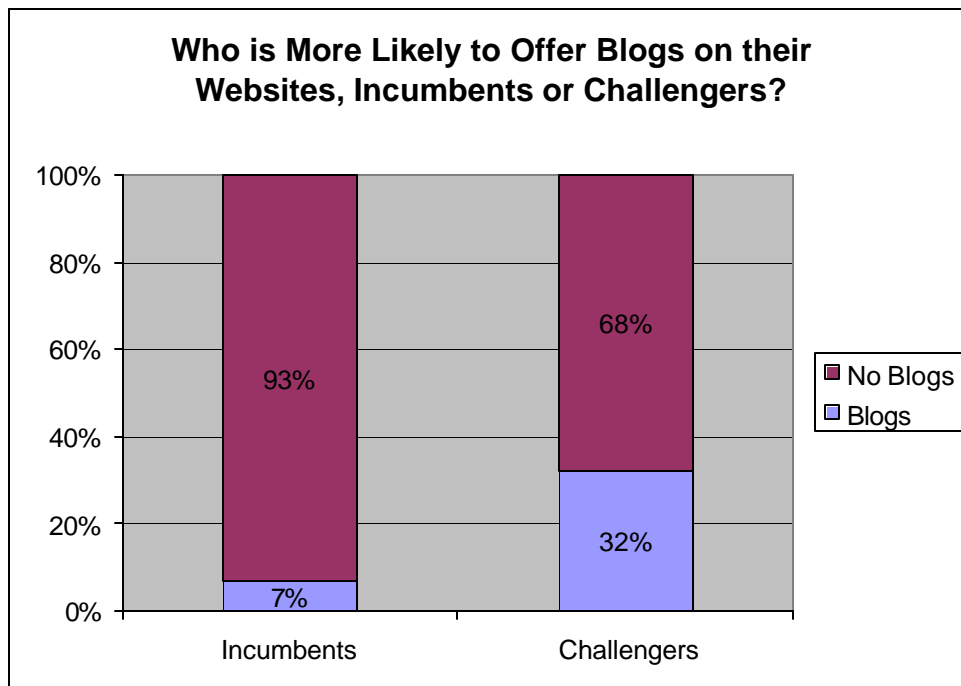
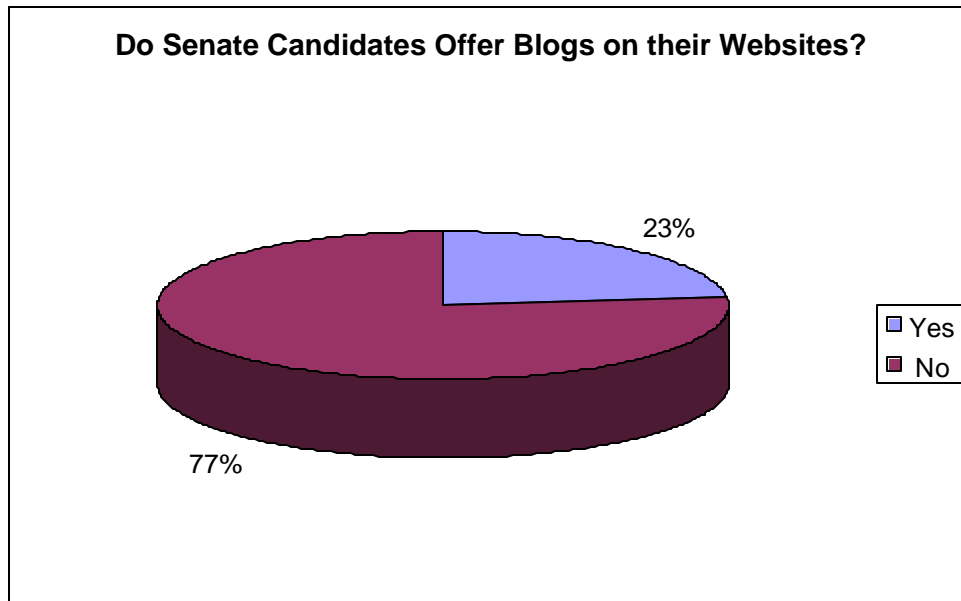
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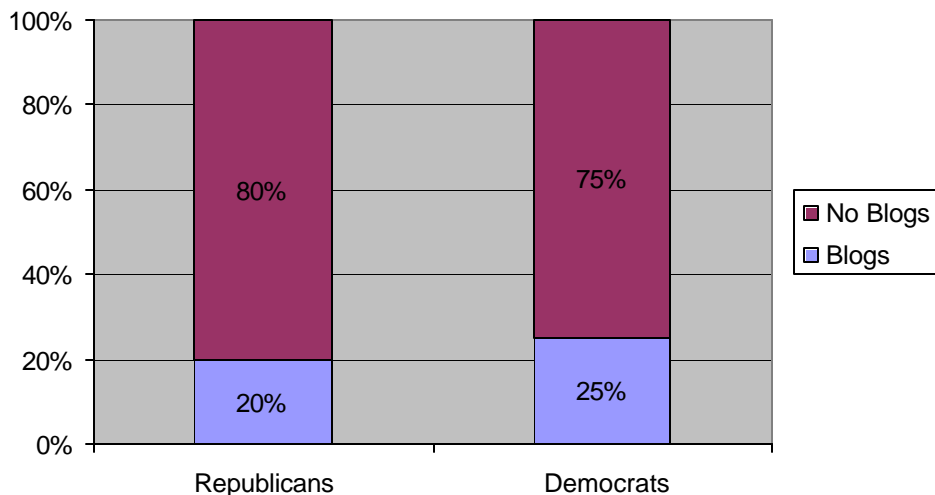
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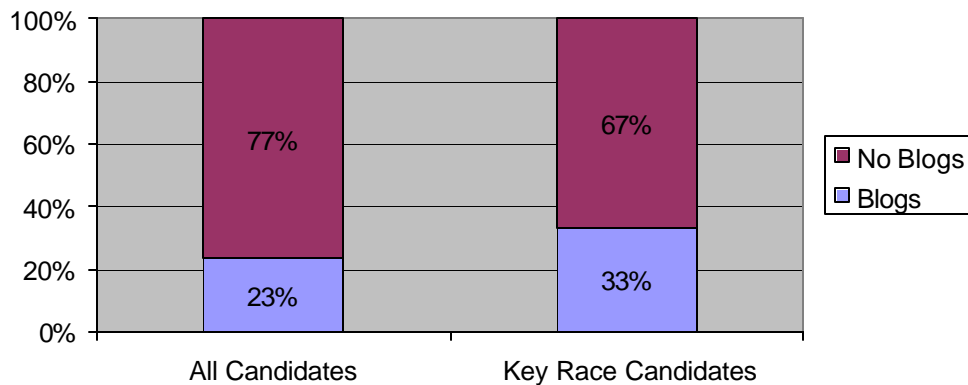
Blogs



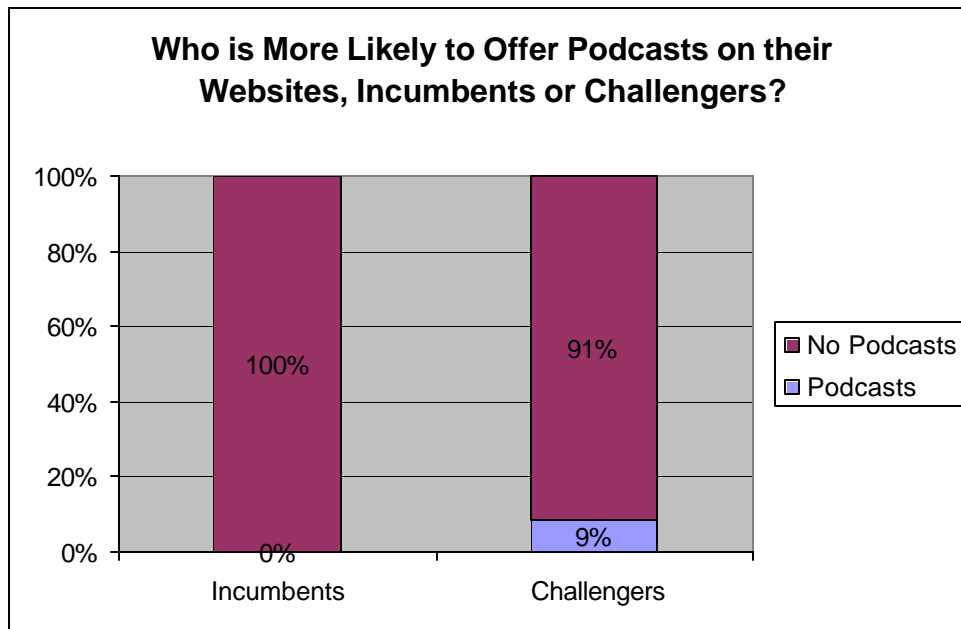
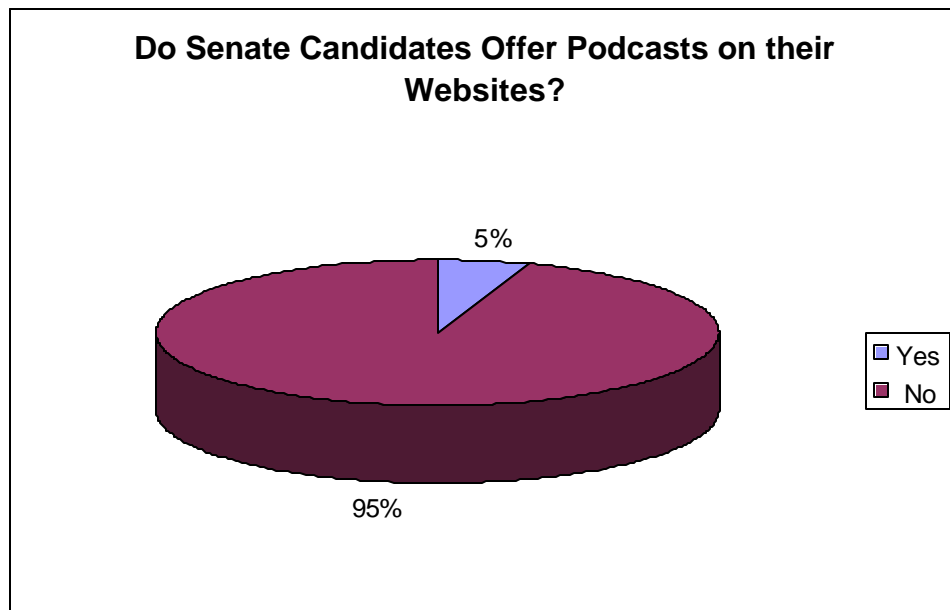
Who is More Likely to Offer Blogs on their Websites, Republicans or Democrats?



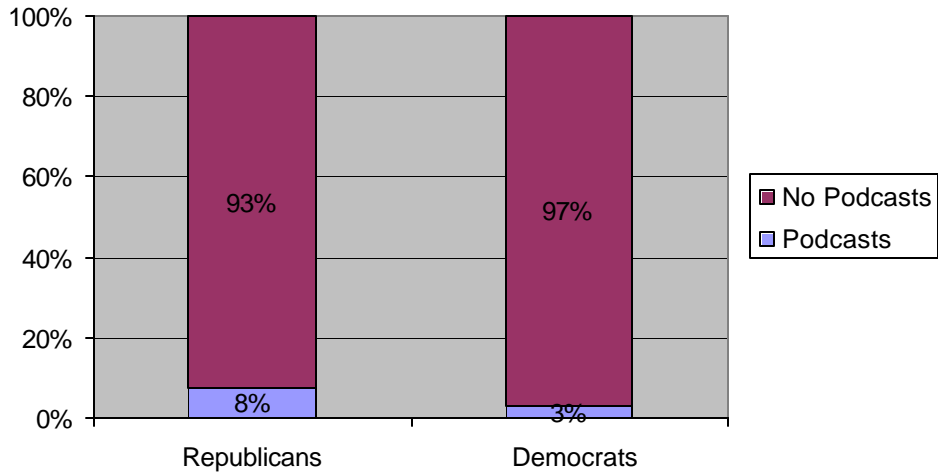
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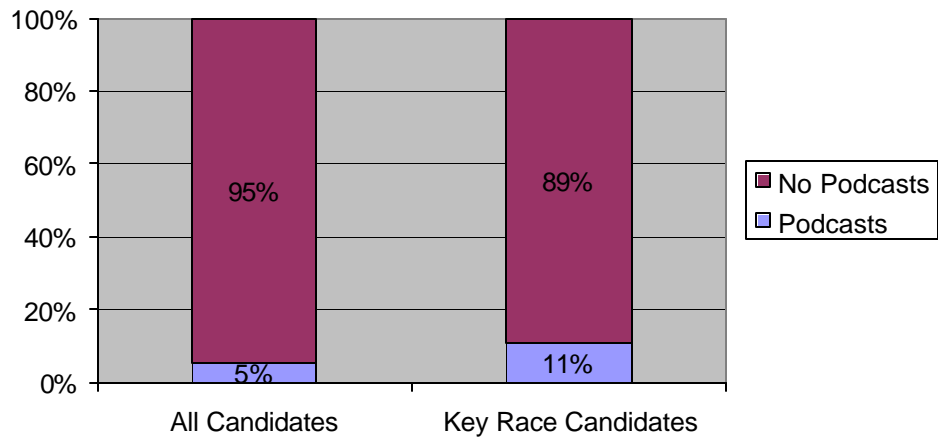
Podcasts



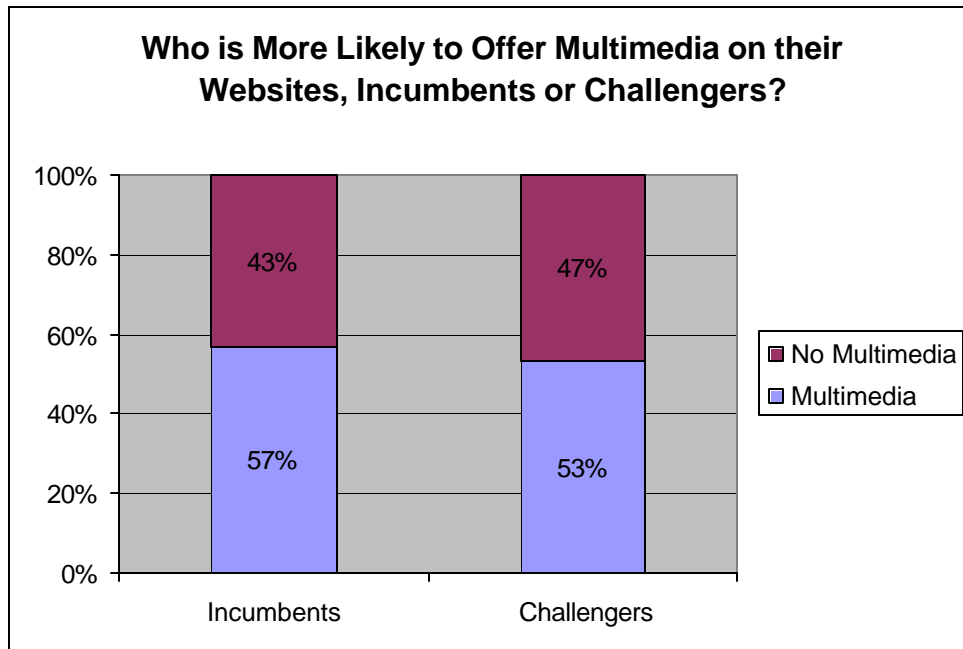
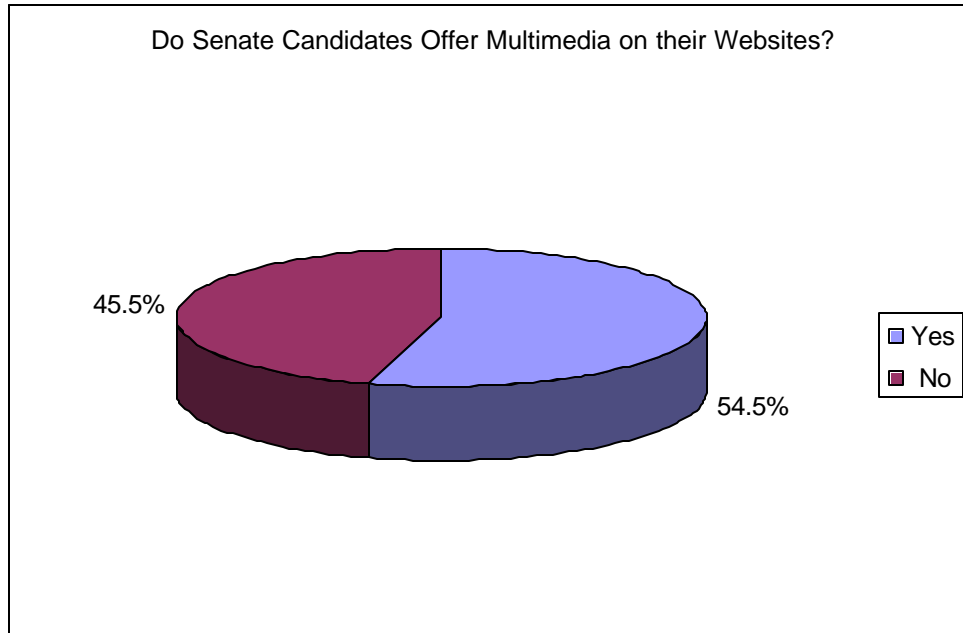
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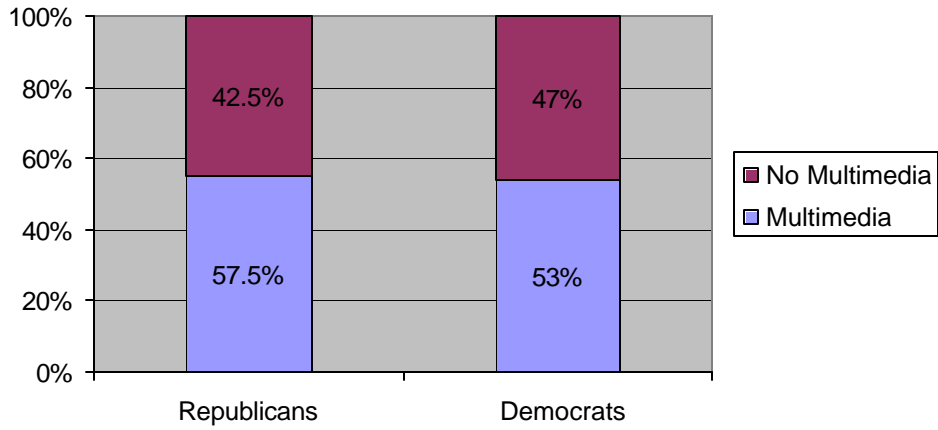
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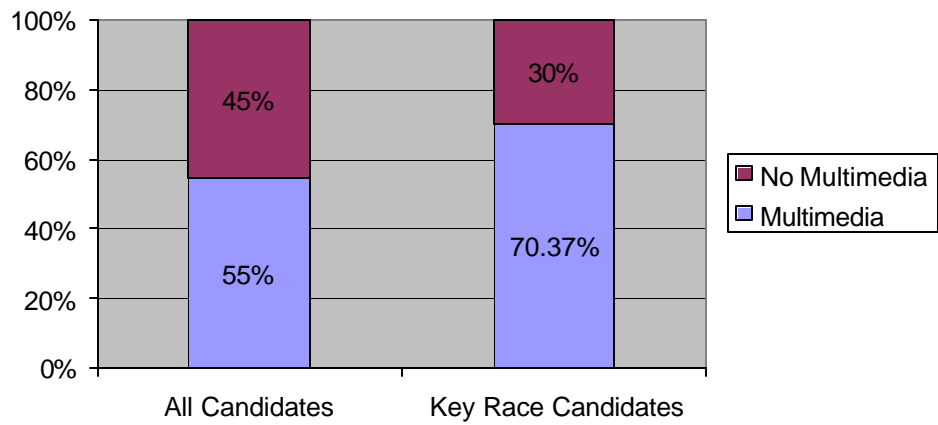
Multimedia



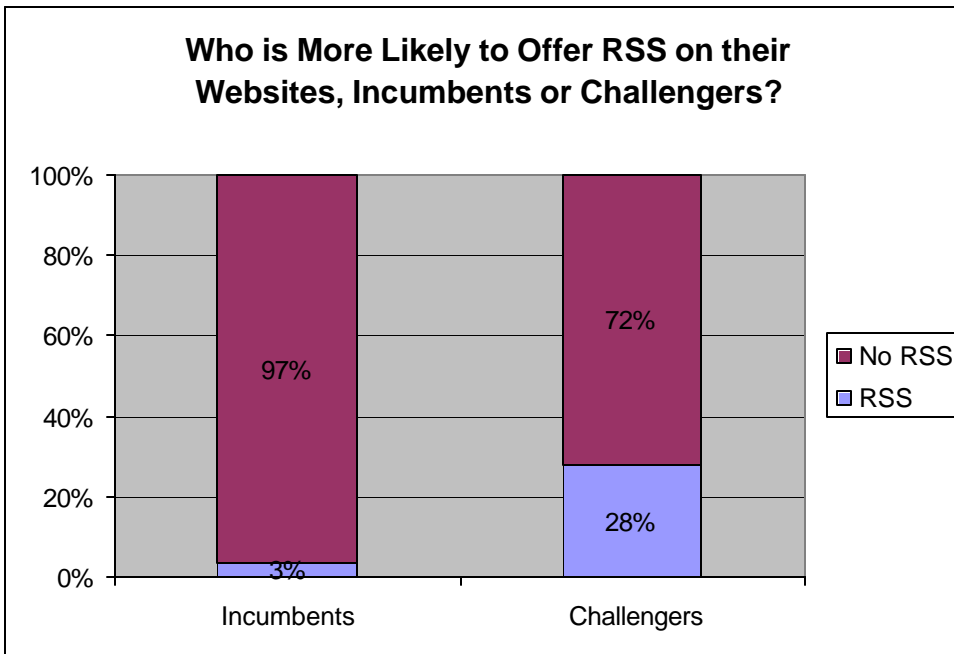
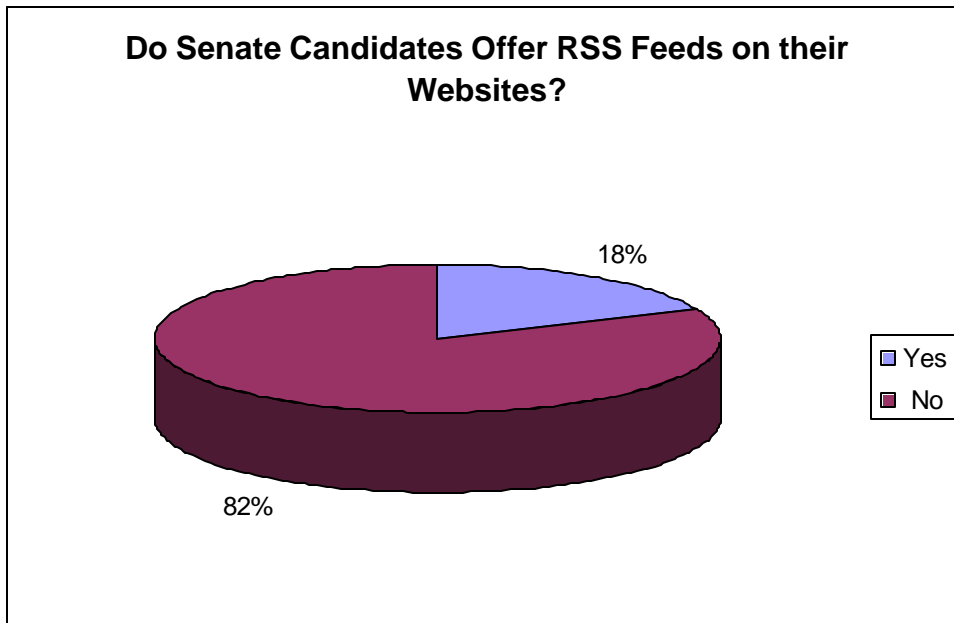
Who is More Likely to Offer Multimedia on their Websites, Democrats or Republicans?



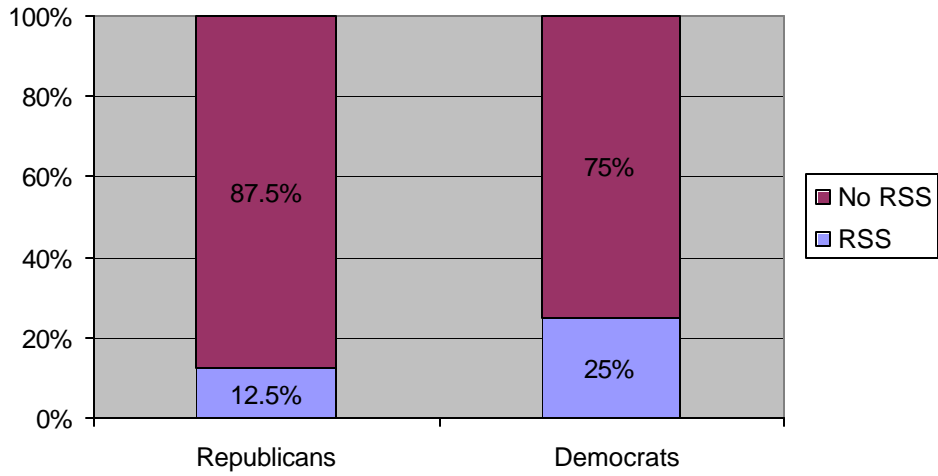
Who is More Likely to Offer Multimedia on their Websites, Key Race Candidates or All Combined Candidates?



RSS



Who is More Likely to Offer RSS Feeds on their Websites, Republicans or Democrats?



Who is More Likely to Offer RSS Feeds on their Websites, Key Race Candidates or All Combined Candidates?

