

Briefing note with respect to selection criteria, scope and content and access for General Election 2011 web-archiving project

Background

After a short research period, an internal consultation procedure and consultation with the Internet Memory Foundation (IM) the parameters of this project were defined as follows:

1. A focused/ thematic web crawl.
2. 100 sites.
3. Combination of election candidate sites, political party sites, political commentary sites and government sites.

Selection

The selection process was carried out by Della Murphy and Maria O'Shea.

General Selection Criteria

1. Website presence. Websites were evaluated on the basis of use. Only those sites that received regular and recent updates were included. Token websites were in the main excluded.
2. Technical reasons. Websites that were 'clunky' or that contained substantial moving image (YouTube) or flash were more likely to be excluded as there was no certainty around final capture.
3. Cut-off date. Sites had to be selected by the 7 February which meant that some sites may not have been up and running in a meaningful way by that time and were therefore not included.
4. Women Candidates. Much has been made of the dearth of women candidates in this election. We consciously tried to include women candidates and have 9 out of 51 candidates, slightly higher than the national average at 17.6%.
5. Twitter is being captured by the Library of Congress (USA) so where decisions between sites for inclusion were tight our preference was for the non-Twitter sites.

Political Party and Political Candidates

1. Cross-party representation.
2. Cross-country representation.
3. The balance of candidates was tipped in favour of candidates who were likely to succeed. This was important due to the pre- and post- election crawl nature of the project.
4. Automatic inclusions were granted to some candidates even where they did not fit criteria 1-3. These candidates would have included high-profile outgoing candidates e.g. John Gormley. Also included were high-profile

independent candidates who, because they did not have a party machine behind them, were much more likely to have a substantive web presence.

- 5 Political party website inclusion was important for two reasons. As part of the crawl process it should be possible to obtain access to candidate information on the website. This is important as we were limited in the number individual candidate sites which we could capture. Also smaller 'parties' such as New Vision were less likely to be captured elsewhere. It became obvious as part of the selection process that some parties did not seem to encourage individual candidate websites (e.g. Sinn Féin) and also that the Fine Gael party site for example would mitigate against candidate selection capture due to its 'clunkiness'.

Political Commentary Websites

1. A number of academics with a known interest in this field were contacted with a view to supplying websites of interest. The response rate was immediate and very high.
2. An Irish language academic was also consulted in relation potential Irish language blog websites.
3. The Irish blog awards website was consulted.
4. The view from Northern Ireland was also included.
5. Staff of the National Library were also asked to contribute potential sites for inclusion.
6. Some notable sites were excluded due to a strict interpretation of inclusion criteria of the General Election and the broader topic of Irish Politics. Specifically in relation to media websites e.g. Politico.ie only sites with an easily accessible link to General Election 2011 were included. These links may not have been present at the time of the selection process.
7. Some of the sites were selected because they specifically complement our paper-based political ephemera and newspaper collections, eg upstart.ie and electionleaflets.mygov.ie

Official Government Websites

1. With a view to presenting as complete a picture as possible it was decided to include a minimal number of official government websites.
2. Technically these sites fall within the remit of the National Archives of Ireland.

Scope and Content

The collection includes election candidate sites (party and independent candidates, especially those tipped for winning or those with a high profile), political party sites (including smaller parties such as New Vision), political blogs and a small number of official government sites.

The collection is digital in content and some of its potential uses include;

1. To enable researchers to compare online content before and after the election using pre- and post- election sites for comparison.
2. To facilitate research into how 'online' this election was.
3. To assess the impact of technological developments such as social media and web 2.0 in relation to the communication of campaign information.
4. To act as a record of campaign information.

The websites themselves were chosen to present a rounded picture of activity at election time with more formal information communicated on the official government and candidate websites and more reactive comment on the blogs/ commentary websites.