FAQ: Congressional Primaries Project

What is the Knight Lab doing to help online publishers enhance their coverage of Illinois' congressional primaries?

We're providing a series of tools that illuminate aspects of the races and provide more information about the candidates. We've designed applications primarily to be included in existing web sites.

Which races and which candidates are covered?

In the 18 congressional districts in Illinois there are a total of 25 races in either the Democratic or Republican parties. We include at least some information about any candidate with an online presence such as a web site, a Facebook page or a Twitter account. There are only a handful of candidates who are on the ballot but don't have an online presence—and we are continually monitoring the web for new accounts.

Why are you focusing on congressional candidates?

The "wave" elections of 2006, 2008 and 2010 brought into office many relatively unfamiliar candidates, some of whom are now running hard to either hold onto their seats or trying to get them back. As it does every 10 years, the state legislature drew new district boundaries this year. The redistricting process put many voters in unfamiliar districts. Many of the districts are irregularly shaped and do not conform to traditional media markets, which makes covering a race effectively difficult for any one news organization.

How are you using social media?

We are capturing information from every candidate's Facebook account to provide the basis for a candidate profile. We're also monitoring each candidate's Twitter account as well as the tweets of their followers. We're categorizing the candidate and follower tweets to look for patterns in what they're tweeting about and, presumably, what their priorities are.

How are you using campaign contribution data?

We're focusing on the geography of contributions. How much is coming from in-state sources compared with the amount coming from the DC-Maryland-Virginia region? Which communities are the in-state contributions coming from? We list some of the data and show the highest contributing in-state zip codes on a map.

What are you doing to facilitate inclusion of more coverage by local sites?

We have created an aggregation tool that captures links to articles from all over the web about each race.

What are partner-branded pages?

These are full pages that contain all of our content about each race and each candidate. We enable partner sites to put their own branding, advertising and navigation on top of these pages, which are served by the Lab.

How do widgets help partners?

Some sites may find using segments of our content an attractive way to enhance their own pages. The Lab makes widgets available for inclusion on pages that partners serve on their own sites.

Is there a charge to use the Knight Lab's partner-branded pages or widgets?

No.

What content is at the congressionalprimaries.org site?

All of the same information available through partner-branded pages will also be available at congressionalprimaries.org. This site, operated by Northwestern, will also host blog posts about the project as well as technologies still under development.

What happens after the March 20 primaries?

The Knight Lab plans to further develop the tools used in this project and make them accessible to more partners and for more uses. We anticipate expanding on this initiative in the November 2012 elections.