

POLICY PERSPECTIVE

A Comparison of the Technology Policies of Barack Obama and John McCain

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This comparison is drawn from and adheres closely to statements on the presidential candidates' websites.¹ Both websites list technology among the issues most important to their campaigns. The comparison summarizes the candidates' views on key issues and highlights important similarities and differences.

Both candidates share the goals of strengthening American science, technology and innovation; developing a skilled workforce; enhancing intellectual property protection; and encouraging a modern communications infrastructure. Some of their policy approaches are quite different however. For example, they differ sharply in emphasizing increased federal spending vs. tax incentives to achieve policy goals and in their positions on network neutrality.

INVESTMENT

McCain emphasizes private investment and promoting conditions favorable to investment, particularly tax incentives:

- He would keep capital gains taxes low, reform and make permanent the R&D tax credit at 10 percent of wages spent on R&D, lower the corporate tax rate to 25 percent, and allow first-year expensing of new equipment and technology.
- He opposes new state and local taxes and fees on wireless services.

Obama emphasizes federal investment in the sciences:

- He would double federal funding for basic research over ten years and expand federal funding of research at colleges and universities.
- He would provide \$150 billion in federal funding over the next 10 years to advance biofuels and fuel infrastructure, and to begin the transition to a digital electricity grid.
- He would provide \$10 billion over the next five years for electronic health information systems, including electronic health records.
- He would make the R&D tax credit permanent.

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¹ <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/technology> and <http://www.johnmccain.com/informing/issues> click on technology.

SKILLED WORKFORCE

McCain has several proposals to improve math and science skills of children and job skills of adults and would expand the number of H-1B visas:

- He would fully fund the America Competes Act to increase the number of college students who obtain degrees in math or science, especially computer science.
- He supports federal grants for instruction in digital and wireless technologies.
- He would help retrain displaced workers through the educational system.
- He would address current shortages of skilled workers by expanding the number of H-1B visas for highly trained workers, many of whom hold degrees from U.S. graduate schools; would set H-1B visa levels according to market conditions.

Obama has several proposals to strengthen math and science skills of children and the job skills of adults and would expand trade adjustment assistance:

- He would provide federal funding to school districts to reduce school dropouts, pinpoint college aid for math and science students, increase federal support to community colleges and lifelong learning initiatives, and strengthen and prioritize science assessments.
- He would expand the trade adjustment assistance program to include workers harmed by changing trade patterns and would create education accounts for worker retraining.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

McCain supports open world trade and better international protections for U.S. intellectual property:

- He would increase resources for the Patent and Trademark Office
- He supports alternative approaches to litigation for resolving patent challenges.
- He would strengthen efforts to reduce piracy of intellectual property.

Obama supports improved American competitiveness in world markets and better international protections for U.S. intellectual property:

- He would increase resources for the Patent and Trademark Office.
- He would reform the patent system to reduce litigation.
- He would strengthen enforcement of U.S. copyrights and trademarks and promote greater international cooperation on standards.

INTERNET COMPETITION

McCain strongly opposes network neutrality and other prescriptive regulation.

Obama strongly supports the principle of network neutrality.

INTERNET ABUSE AND PRIVACY

McCain emphasizes consumer choice and improved technology to deter Internet abuse and to enhance privacy:

- He supports consumer choices to deter unfair practices.
- He supports private development of more secure technologies and effective self-regulation.
- He supported laws that penalize fraudulent marketing practices, protect children from harmful Internet content, increase consumer privacy, and minimize spam.

Obama emphasizes legislative protections against Internet abuse and to enhance privacy:

- He supports stringent penalties and enforcement of laws against abuse of the Internet to exploit children.
- He would provide parents with tools to control what children see on the Internet and television.
- He would strengthen protections to hold businesses and government accountable for violations of personal privacy.

INTERNET ACCESS

McCain would broaden Internet access in several ways.

- He would encourage private investment in infrastructure build-out.
- He would allow local governments to build infrastructure when private industry is unable to do so.
- He would support local private/public partnerships with federal loan incentives.
- He would have the federal government auction inefficiently-used spectrum.
- He would keep the Internet free of taxation and reduce tax liabilities of companies that offer high-speed Internet access to low income customers.

Obama would increase Internet access in several ways.

- He would reform of the Universal Service Fund.
- He supports better use of the wireless spectrum.
- He supports promotion of next generation technologies.
- He would provide new federal tax and loan incentives.

GOVERNMENTAL LEADERSHIP

McCain would place a priority on science and technology experience in choosing appointees to his administration.

- He would establish an Office of Electronic Government and make government services available online through technologies including videoconferencing and collaborative networks.
- He would deploy a nationwide public safety network to support local, state, and federal first responders within four years.

Obama would use new technology to increase government transparency, accountability, and network security:

- He would make information on federal grants, contracts, earmarks, and loans accessible to the public.
- He would appoint a Chief Technology Officer to oversee appropriate infrastructure and policies.
- He would modernize public safety networks and promote their interoperability to improve communications among first responders and emergency systems.

DIVERSITY

McCain would give priority to removing access barriers to the disabled in using communications technology such as closed captioning and video description:

- He would target grants for instruction in digital and wireless technologies to minorities and low-income students.

Obama would encourage diversity of media ownership, promote the development of media outlets for expression of diverse viewpoints, and clarify the public interest obligations of broadcasters:

- He would increase the representation of women and minorities in science and technology.