

# WHITEHOUSE.GOV USABILITY REPORT

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This documents is a usability report of the website [whitehouse.gov](#), following referred as “the site” or “the website”. The website analyzed represent the US government, it’s focused on the person of the President and delivers high grained information about him and Administration’s activities.

## 2 NAME AND DOMAIN

The website’s name is the same of the institutions that represents, its meaning is unambiguous all around the world, so it’s enough well-known to be clear and immediate. The domain is [.gov](#), clearly represents an official government website, so its choice is appropriate. Others domains, like [.com/.org/.it](#), don’t redirect to [whitehouse.gov](#) and seems to be not related to the government. Since the website is a sensible target, i would expect that at least the [.com](#) redirects to the main one, simply to avoid possible attacks like website cloning.

## 3 HOMEPAGE

The first view of the homepage (Figure 1) has a scanning time enough low to shows the 6w’s<sup>1</sup> by the limit time<sup>2</sup>.

- **Where:** where are we?

The blurb isn’t so descriptive but the words *whitehouse* and *President Barack Obama* together clarify where we are. The breadcrumb lack doesn’t tell us where we are inside the website, this create user’s disorientation;

- **Who:** who represents the site?

In the top-left, a blurb explaining that the whitehouse’s representative is the President Barack Obama; that’s an image and not plain text, this doesn’t respect the common web rules, invalidating text advantages. The whitehouse logo is in the top-center and includes a graphical text mentioning, another time, the white house. It correctly links to the homepage but a negative note is about the size: text is too small and image size doesn’t respect the *target size rule*<sup>3</sup>; I believe that the whitehouse logo is enough important (also as homepage link) to deserve a bigger size;

- **Why:** why should i remain in this website?

This isn’t a commercial website so we are interested in public domain infos about the white house. There’re daily updates about relevant political facts, usually located in the central slide-show and in below sections;

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<sup>1</sup> included “How”, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five\\_Ws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ws)

<sup>2</sup> 30 seconds

<sup>3</sup> the more important a button is, the bigger it should be.

**1**

**2**

**3**

The White House | President Barack Obama | ★★★★★ | THE WHITE HOUSE | the ADMINISTRATION | the WHITE HOUSE | our GOVERNMENT

Your Weekly Address  
American Operations in Iraq  
[LEARN MORE](#)

Get Email Updates | Contact Us

BLOG PHOTOS & VIDEO BRIEFING ROOM ISSUES

the WHITE HOUSE

Your Weekly Address  
American Operations in Iraq  
[LEARN MORE](#)

0:00 / 3:17

What are you looking for?

POPULAR TOPICS

**Wildfires**  
Learn how climate change is making America's wildfires more dangerous and why we must act now.

**My Front Porch**  
Americans across the country are sharing how their days look. Tell us your story.

**Year of Action**  
President Obama is taking action to help ensure opportunity for all Americans.

TOP NEWS

August 7, 10:40pm  
President Obama Makes a Statement on the Crisis in Iraq

August 7, 1:44pm  
President Obama Signs Bill to Give the VA the Resources It Needs

August 6, 9:50pm  
President Obama Engages with African Leaders on Final Day of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit

@WHITEHOUSE

Happening now: President Obama delivers a statement on the situation in Iraq from the South Lawn → <http://t.co/b4tqL3000v>

PHOTO OF THE DAY

LET'S MOVE!

JOINING FORCES

Support for Our Heroes  
Joining Forces is dedicated to connecting our servicemen and women, veterans and military spouses with the resources they need to find jobs at home.  
[Learn More](#)

Let's Move!  
America's movement to raise a healthier generation of kids. Everyone has a role to play in reducing childhood obesity.  
[Let's Move Together](#)

View More Galleries

WHITE HOUSE DAILY SCHEDULE

The President's Schedule  
The Vice President's Schedule  
The Full White House Schedule

Home  
The White House Blog  
Photos & Videos  
Photo Galleries  
Video  
Performances  
Live Streams  
Podcasts  
Shareables

Briefing Room  
Your Weekly Address  
Speeches & Remarks  
Press Briefings  
Statements & Releases  
White House Schedule  
Presidential Actions  
Legislation  
Nominations & Appointments  
Disclosures

Issues  
Civil Rights  
Defense  
Disabilities  
Economy  
Education  
Energy & Environment  
Ethics  
Equal Pay  
Foreign Policy  
Health Care  
Homeland Security  
Immigration  
Refinancing  
Rural  
Service  
Seniors & Social Security  
Snapshots  
Taxes  
Technology  
Urban and Economic Mobility  
Veterans and Military Families  
Violence Prevention  
Women

The Administration  
President Barack Obama  
Vice President Joe Biden  
First Lady Michelle Obama  
Dr. Jill Biden  
The Cabinet  
White House Staff  
Executive Office of the President  
Other Advisory Boards

About the White House  
Inside the White House  
Presidents  
First Ladies  
The Oval Office  
The Vice President's Residence & Office  
Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
Camp David  
Air Force One  
White House Fellows  
White House Internships  
Tours & Events  
Mobile Apps  
Tools You'll Use

Our Government  
The Executive Branch  
The Legislative Branch  
The Judicial Branch  
The Constitution  
Federal Agencies & Commissions  
Elections & Voting  
State & Local Government  
Resources

WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV

En español | Accessibility | Copyright Information | Privacy Policy | Contact  
USA.gov | Developers | Apply for a Job

Figure 1: Homepage of [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov). 1 header, 2 body, 3 footer.

- **What:** what offers the site?  
This site offers information for citizens, from the President's activity to issues like economy, taxes, defense and political reports;
- **When:** this is about temporal references contained into the site.  
The "top news" section contains frequently updated news and the central slide-show offers last facts updates, often supplied with media (e.g., picture, video);
- **How:** how can we move across the website?  
The menu is top centered and has a good centered and wide sub-menus. There's also a search bar at the bottom of the central slide-show.

Homepage can be divided in the following sections as in Figure 1:

1. **Header:** logo and website's blurb are well located in the "hot" top-left area, they correctly links to the homepage. Contacts buttons (i.e. get email updates, contact us) are properly colored as link and the link area includes the icons.  
US flags located in the left menu confuse users, indeed it redirects to the homepage while flags are often (wrongly<sup>4</sup>) associated with language selector.  
Submenus're wide and don't unexpectedly disappears when user interacts with them, a bit bothersome are those advertisement-like columns, they've images so distract users in sub-menu scanning;
2. **Body:** top body has wide area with some text and media, the button is correctly non-graphical and video length variance is very high, depends on day, but generally there're videos longer than 3 minutes. This is allowed for a .gov site but it has to be said that propose a 32mins<sup>5</sup> video in homepage couldn't be a wise choice. Search toolbar is discussed in 5.5.  
Popular topics section lacks in title link color and the buttons to navigate across topics are too small and require precise mouse pointing, not very comfortable for users. It's correct that images are links and slightly brighten up on the mouse over. Below there's a tab selector, tabs navigation is clear, images are all clickable but sometimes too small.  
Top news section hasn't any colored links and lacks on the same issue, mentioned above, on news navigation. Curious are the icons ↗ ↘ in the social area, for a non-twitter users is difficult to understand their meaning also because they lead to the same splash screen (discussed in 5.7). Another note goes to the photo of the day section icons 📸 +, indeed while the plus button enlarge the photo, the info icon isn't a button, it overlays textual infos over the picture but isn't clickable, so user is confused and ends to click on it multiple times, browser selects it and result is unaesthetic;
3. **Footer:** on the top there're social icons dominated by the seal of the President icon; while socials are clickable the latter isn't so we have different behavior of near icons, this confuse users. Footer height is over-sized due to the *issue* column that's higher than the average. The

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<sup>4</sup> <http://flagsarenotlanguages.com>

<sup>5</sup> in date 2014-08-08

bottom image [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) is just an image and doesn't links to the cited website, furthermore the bottom word's font is too small, 9px, against a lower-bound limit allowed of 10px.

## 4 INTERNAL PAGES

Most of internal pages are structured in base of the sub-level: 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> levels have their own layout. All sub-levels, except homepage, have a *location breadcrumb* located at the bottom of the menu: it shows your position relative to the homepage. Inline with the breadcrumb there's the search bar, the textbox allows 25 chars before to run into the *guillotine effect*<sup>6</sup>; furthermore the search tool shows a clear *search* button instead to require a click on the hand lens. Every page seems to be reachable from the homepage in most 3 clicks, that's why the menu is complete and well done. Internal pages are reachable from different pages than the home (*deep linking*) so they have to propose again the compulsory informative axis: *who/what/where*, the website correctly respects this requirement. Below there're the analysis of three subpages.

### 4.1 /briefing-room

The briefing room page (Figure 2) ([whitehouse.gov/briefing-room](http://whitehouse.gov/briefing-room)) provides information about the President's activity, latest events and public statements. The page has a top-central image that immediately recalls a President's public speech. A text subtitle explain what kind of page is, that's good because accomplishes the *where* compulsory axis meanwhile permits the *common text operations*<sup>7</sup>, furthermore a set of social icons are well visible to share contents.

The page content is divided in three columns, that's make user scanning effort more demanding but maybe authors wanted to put on the same footing those contents (media, policy, additional infos). Images are a bit short in height (304x125px) but sufficiently big to show their contents, they aren't links so click over doesn't produce any effects, this is undesirable since images appeals clicks.

Text content is well separated in short and titled blocks, that's very good, furthermore every title is a colored link. The overall height and structure is enough compact to ensure a rapid scan.

A three columns bottom-content frame is located at the bottom page. Columns are *recent video*, *latest* and *featured policy*. The first one shows a clickable thumbnail and a blurb, the image is 274x153px, clearly too small to be exhaustive. The second one presents a list of news with a precise temporal reference. The last one has always a 311x272px clickable image, big enough.

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<sup>6</sup> when textbox are too small so users are forced to use scrollbars to show up the content.

<sup>7</sup> select, copy, paste.

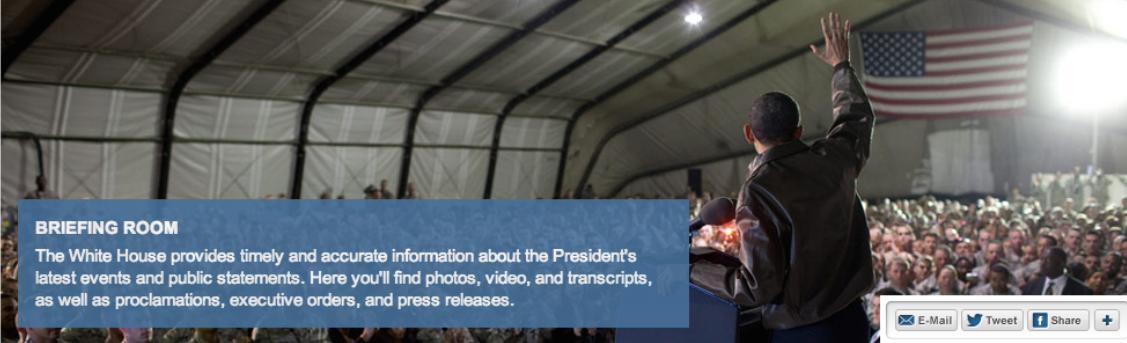
**the WHITE HOUSE PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**



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[BLOG](#) [PHOTOS & VIDEO](#) [BRIEFING ROOM](#) [ISSUES](#) [the ADMINISTRATION](#) [the WHITE HOUSE](#) [our GOVERNMENT](#)

[Home](#) • [Briefing Room](#)

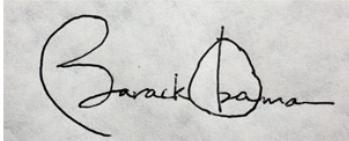


**BRIEFING ROOM**

The White House provides timely and accurate information about the President's latest events and public statements. Here you'll find photos, video, and transcripts, as well as proclamations, executive orders, and press releases.

[E-Mail](#) [Tweet](#) [Share](#) [+](#)

**MEDIA**  

**POLICY** 

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** 

**Your Weekly Address** ▾  
Text and video of President Obama's Saturday morning addresses to the nation

**Speeches & Remarks** ▾  
Text and video of speeches and remarks by President Obama, the First Lady, and members of the administration

**Press Briefings** ▾  
Transcripts of press briefings and statements from the White House Press Secretary

**Statements & Releases** ▾  
Announcements from the White House Press Office

**Presidential Actions** ▾  
Executive Orders, Memoranda, and Proclamations

- Executive Orders
- Presidential Memoranda
- Proclamations

**Legislation** ▾  
Bills that the President has signed into law, declined to sign, or that he may sign in the coming days

- Pending Legislation
- Signed Legislation
- Vetoed Legislation

**White House Schedule** ▾  
The daily events planned for the President and Vice President

- President's Schedule
- Vice President's Schedule

**Nominations & Appointments** ▾  
A listing of the President's nominees for positions in federal government agencies, as well as judicial nominees

**Disclosures** ▾  
Information and data sets providing government transparency

- Visitor Access Records
- Financial Disclosures
- 2011 Annual Report to Congress
- Ethics Pledge Waivers

**RECENT VIDEO** 

Climate Change & Wildfires Explained in Less Than Three Minutes

[SEE ALL VIDEOS](#) ▾

**LATEST**

August 8, 2014 at 9:07 AM  
Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Iraq

August 7, 2014 at 9:43 PM  
Readout of Vice President Biden's Call with Iraqi Kurdistan Regional President Masoud Barzani

[SEE ALL](#) ▾

**FEATURED POLICY**



LEARN ABOUT PRESIDENT OBAMA'S PLAN FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM

Figure 2: First internal page: /briefing-room.

**BRIEFING ROOM**

- Your Weekly Address
- Speeches & Remarks
- Press Briefings
- Statements & Releases
- White House Schedule
- Presidential Actions
  - Executive Orders
  - Presidential Memoranda
  - Proclamations
- Legislation
  - Pending Legislation
  - Signed Legislation
  - Vetoed Legislation
- Nominations & Appointments
- Disclosures
  - Visitor Access Records
  - Financial Disclosures
  - 2014 Annual Report to Congress
  - 2013 Annual Report to Congress
  - 2012 Annual Report to Congress
  - 2011 Annual Report to Congress
  - 2010 Annual Report to Congress on White House Staff
  - 2009 Annual Report to

**Legislation**

In this section, you can find links to:

**Pending Legislation**  
These are bills that the President may sign in the coming days, posted for your evaluation and comment.

**Signed Legislation**  
This is the full list of legislation the President has signed into law.

**Vetoed Legislation**  
These are bills that the President declined to sign into law.

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[Twitter](#) [Vimeo](#)  
[Flickr](#) [iTunes](#)  
[Google+](#) [LinkedIn](#)

**STAY CONNECTED with EMAIL ALERTS**

[Sign Up](#)

**WHITE HOUSE PHOTO GALLERY**

[View the Gallery](#)

**ARCHIVES**

August 2014  
July 2014  
June 2014

Figure 3: Second internal page: /briefing-room/legislation.

#### 4.2 /briefing-room/legislation

The legislation page (Figure 3) ([whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation](http://whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation)) is a 3<sup>rd</sup> sublevel page. This page shows links to three kind of legislation (pending, signed, voted). There's no top images. Layout has three columns structure, this isn't a good practice because users can't easily scan it. In the left side there's a menu (1) for the whole *briefing room* section showing every section sublevels. Its height is suited for nowadays content but the voice *Disclosures* contains annuals reports so it's expected to grow every year; this could produce user dissatisfaction so it's clear that there's an early design lack. Another bad note is colored links absence.

The central column shows a good design, with a clear main title, short blurb and a compact list of minor titles with short description.

The right side column is a bit problematic. First, there are three frame containing graphical text. Second, the *Archives* section (2) is an example of *lorem ipsum damnation*: probably in design time it was filled with a short example content (e.g., lorem ipsum), then with the passing of the time it grew up a lot; this is an early design defect that'll cause trouble to users, what about within ten years?

### 4.3 /issues/technology

The technology page (Figure 4) ([whitehouse.gov/issues/technology](http://whitehouse.gov/issues/technology)) is a 3<sup>rd</sup> sublevel page. This page is an article about President's view of technology and explains the whitehouse's guideline principles. There's no top images; three column layout. In the left side there's a menu showing only the first level of *issues*'s section. This choice is different between the previous page (4.2), maybe because it'd be so high. Another time, links aren't colored, this could confuse users.

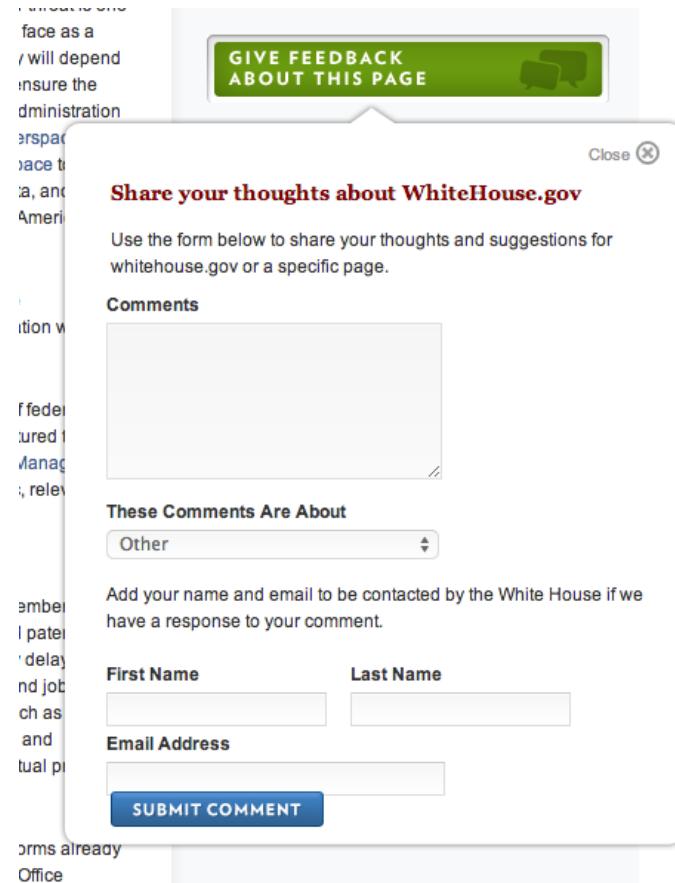
Figure 4: Third internal page: /issues/technology.

The central column has a clear title but a too long subtitle; a video with no clear title come first text, it's length is very long (32 mins). Text content isn't well organized: long text blocks<sup>8</sup> with small titles, it could be divided in more than one pages. Text block is so long so at the bottom page there's a link to jump to the top. Social sharing icons are located at the end of the content, it'll take some time to spot it, this's undesirable in the web 2.0 era where a fast content sharing is required.

The right column shows a 272x238px img with a fake button inside that isn't so intuitive for users. About the image size is ok. Then there're some

<sup>8</sup> total 3790 words, reading takes 15-25 min.

related blog posts well presented, with colored links title and temporal reference. Next, related videos section take the place, thumbnails are too small (274x153px) and, in conflict with the previous section, titles are placed below the video thumbnail.



The screenshot shows a feedback form overlaid on a web page. The form has a green header bar with the text "GIVE FEEDBACK ABOUT THIS PAGE" and two speech bubble icons. A "Close" button is in the top right corner. The main content area has a heading "Share your thoughts about WhiteHouse.gov" and a sub-instruction "Use the form below to share your thoughts and suggestions for whitehouse.gov or a specific page." Below this is a large text input field labeled "Comments". Underneath it is a dropdown menu labeled "These Comments Are About" with the option "Other". There is also a note asking for name and email for responses. At the bottom are fields for "First Name" and "Last Name", an "Email Address" field, and a "SUBMIT COMMENT" button.

Figure 5: feedback-form included in every 3<sup>rd</sup> sublevel page.

A black mark goes to the feedback-form shown in Figure 5, although it has a clear usage and has a limited number of inputs, its design is a bit strange. The comments text-box cannot be enlarged even though there's some empty space on the right. The way of escape is clear, a *close* text button in upper right corner, however users would expect to close this form by clicking outside it, but it doesn't work in that way. Furthermore, the feedback-form behavior is confusing: clicking the green *give feedback about this page* button (another time, an img button with non-text inside) to show up the form, users have to wait a too long delay before the form shows up; this happens also when user wants to close the form by clicking the green button.

## 5 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

### 5.1 Images

The majority of images can be clicked but there are pages (e.g., [4.1](#)) with no clickable images. This disorientate users, especially in this site where the most part if images are clickable, indeed user have to understand by the context if he can click over an image. Image sizing is generally small, around or below the 210x230px limit, but important images are always big enough to be understood.

### 5.2 Texts

Text is visible, clear, big enough, always well contrasted relative to the background. There aren't no sizing buttons and there're too many fonts, sometimes more than 4 (e.g., [4.3](#)). There's an abuse of images containing texts and buttons, this cause user's dissatisfaction. There're upper-case sentences, sometimes used as subtitles, but those number is not noteworthy. No keywords highlighted in bold.

### 5.3 Links

Links aren't always colored and visited links doesn't change color. This goes against web conventions and increase the user effort during navigation.

### 5.4 Scroll

Page's height is well sized for the high level pages (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) but going in deep reveals pages too high. Let's compare the homepage height with a 3<sup>rd</sup> level page ([4.3](#)).

Entire homepage is shown in Figure 6, the whole content fits in the first two screens, considering that the 3<sup>rd</sup> screen is due to the *issues* column, this is acceptable. A bad mark goes to the 3<sup>rd</sup> level page ([4.3](#)) which is 9752px high: with a 1440x900px monitor, users needs to scroll 11 entire screens; unacceptable, it'd better to separate content in different tabs.

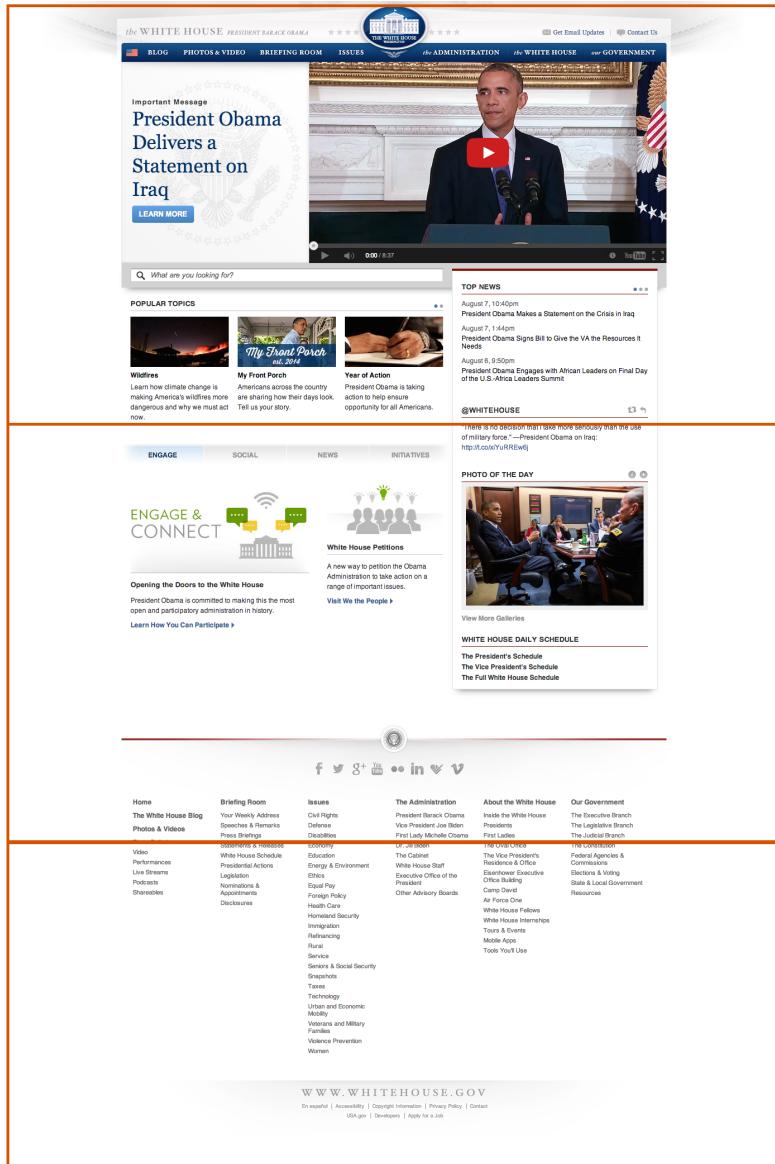


Figure 6: Entire Homepage divided by 900px height screen.

## 5.5 Search tools

Due to the website size, a search tool is present. The site uses Bing<sup>9</sup> as search engine, but the research seems to be personalized for White House requirements. We can consider it as local search, indeed there's no redirects to the search engine page. The only reference to the external search engine is at the bottom page, an unclickable logo says: “*results by Bing*”.

Search toolbar in pages is different from homepage (3) and subpages (4.1, 4.2, 4.3). The first one is located below the central wide image, the search button is an hand lens icon (bad); subpages has search bar above the central image, this time with the proper *Search* button. Either search leads to the same results page (Figure 7). In case of an unsuccessful search, website correctly warns users with a message (Figure 8).

<sup>9</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bing>

The screenshot shows the official website of the White House under President Barack Obama. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'BLOG', 'PHOTOS & VIDEO', 'BRIEFING ROOM', 'ISSUES', 'the ADMINISTRATION', 'the WHITE HOUSE', and 'our GOVERNMENT'. The main content area has a search bar containing 'obama', with a result count of 'About 113,000 results'. Below the search bar is a link to 'Advanced Search'. On the left, a sidebar titled 'Everything' lists 'Blog Posts', 'Press Articles', 'Videos', and 'Photo Gallery'. The main content area displays several news items. One item is a 'Policy Snapshot' titled 'SNAPSHOTS YOUR POLICY OVERVIEW' from 'The White House'. Another item is a link to 'The White House' with a sub-link to 'President Barack Obama | The White House'. Other items include 'President Obama Signs Bill to Give the VA the Resources It Needs', 'President Obama Makes a Statement on the Crisis in Iraq', and 'President Obama Engages with African Leaders on Final Day of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit'. Each news item includes a timestamp ('1 day ago' or '2 days ago') and a brief description.

Figure 7: Simple search results page.

Advanced search (Figure 9) is reachable from a simple search result page (Figure 7), this makes advanced search optional and is a positive mark. Notable is the restricted number of selection filters, but an unexplained *safe search* make hard to understand what exactly means. Search button instead of the hand lens icon is considered good.



Figure 8: No results search results page.

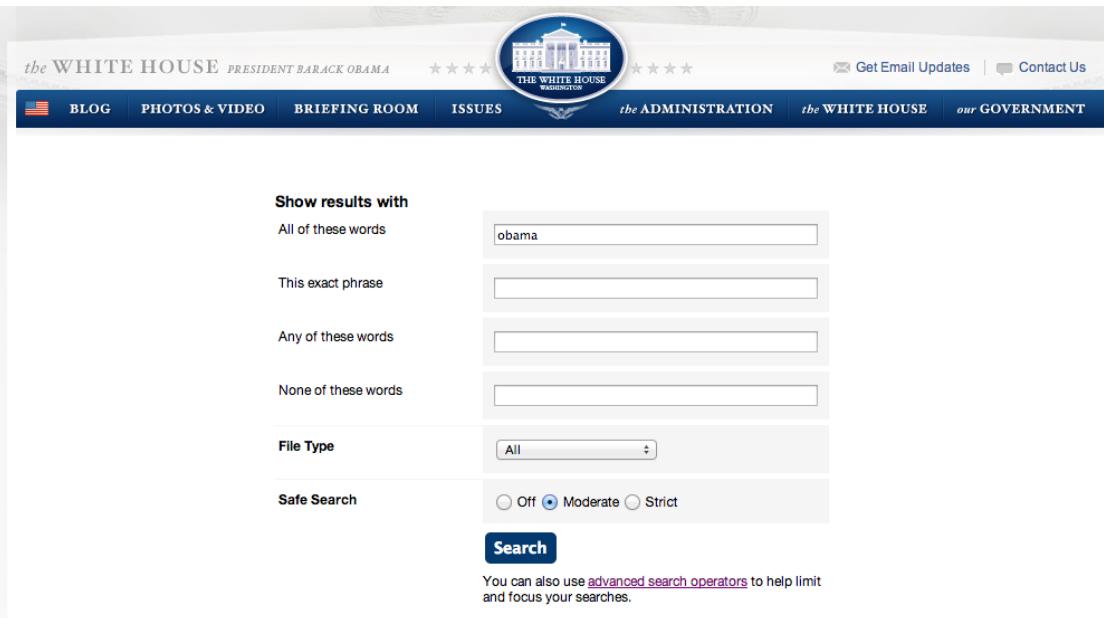


Figure 9: Advanced search page

## 5.6 Back button

Back button works as expected in every page, never opens previous pages in a detached window.

## 5.7 Splash page

At the first visit there aren't any splash screens or registration form, nevertheless a splash screen (Figure 10) appears when user click on an external link, in this case a message warns user that is leaving the [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov) web server. This message is very annoying and it goes against the web conventions.

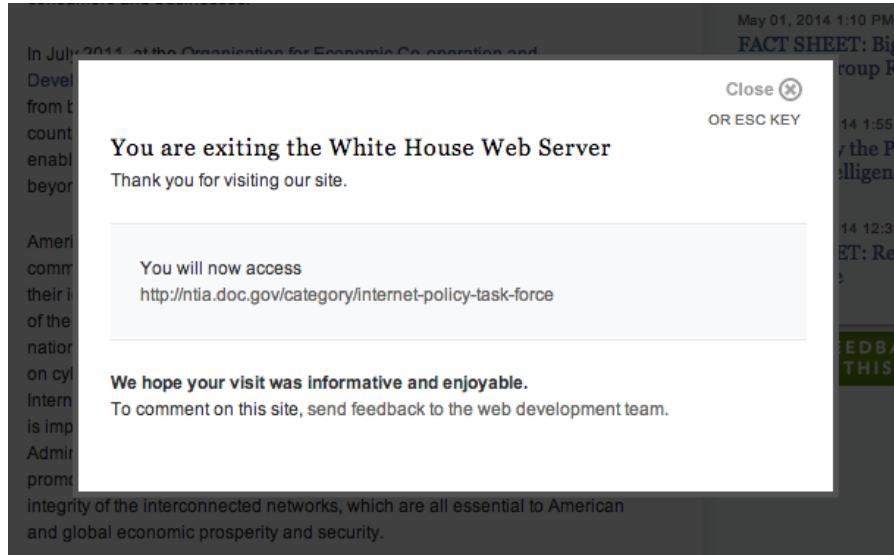


Figure 10: Splash screen appears when leaving [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov).

## 5.8 Ads

This isn't a commercial website, nevertheless the site has some ads to specific themes (e.g., join military forces, taxes calculator). Ads are correctly located in the right column and gracefully integrates the site look. Although there aren't awful effects like blinking, rotating or on the move texts, it has to be said that sometimes whole ads images are clickable, sometimes only a portion. This clearly confuse users that usually try to click over images.

## 5.9 404

Inserting an invalid url the website correctly shows an error message (Figure 11). This scenario happens when a user follows a broken link, the site properly invites to return to the homepage by a link.



Figure 11: Error 404: not found page message.

## 6 SUMMARY

# grade: 7.5/10

Considering the huge size of the site, the few defects identified and the complexity and variety of content delivered by [whitehouse.gov](#), i consider it as a well designed website. Except the excessive height of some pages, defects detected are not so heavy to spoil navigation.

## 7 LIST OF FIGURES WITH FILE REFERENCES

Table below associate url's with image files used in this document:

Figure	File name	URL
Homepage	homepage-entire-sections.png	<a href="#">link</a>
First internal page: /briefing-room	1-internal-page-entire.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Second internal page: /briefing-room/legislation	2-internal-page-visible.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Third internal page: /issues/technology	3-internal-page-visible.png	<a href="#">link</a>
feedback-form	3-internal-page-detail.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Screen divided homepage	homepage-entire-screen.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Simple search results page	search-simple.png	<a href="#">link</a>
No results search results page	search-no-results.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Advanced search page	search-advanced.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Splash screen	splash-screen.png	<a href="#">link</a>
Not found page	404.png	<a href="#">link</a>