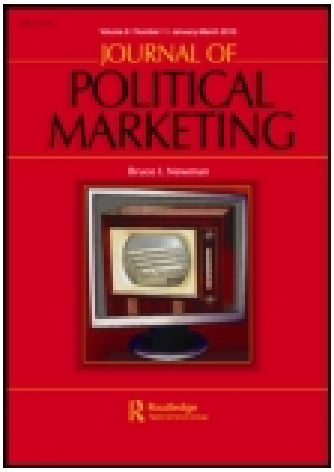

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Advances in the Study of Political Advertising

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Advances in the Study of Political Advertising

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One of the biggest recent advances in the study of political advertising has been the availability of systematic sources of data on when and where ads air—and their content. In this piece, we review the various data sources that scholars have used to study political advertising, focusing on their strengths and weaknesses. We then discuss recent studies that have employed data on political advertising to examine the effects of ad exposure on citizens' attitudes and political behaviors, how the content of advertising varies, and how ads have been targeted in recent political campaigns. We follow that with our own empirical contribution—an analysis of trends in advertising content, including negativity and policy focus—over the past 16 years.

KEYWORDS ad tone, campaign targeting, political advertising

The 2012 elections pulverized previous records for campaign advertising both in terms of sheer volume of ads on the air and dollars spent. Indeed, it is safe to say that understanding modern political campaigns in the United States requires an examination of televised political advertising. Fortunately, as both the volume of advertising and media attention to advertising have increased over the past decade, the study of televised political advertising

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has advanced considerably as well. While researchers have been employing new theories to guide their research, one of the most important advances since the mid-1990s is the increased availability of data on political advertising. The depth of information now available—not only on the content of advertising but on its placement as well—is quite staggering compared to what was available to the past generation of researchers. Our central argument is that the availability of new and better data sources on political advertising has reinvigorated the study of political advertising. Such data have allowed scholars to more completely address several important questions, including the effects of exposure to advertising, how the content of advertising varies, and how advertising is targeted in real-world campaigns.

Why study televised political advertising? First, advertising remains the primary means by which candidates, parties, and other ad sponsors communicate directly with voters. Indeed, the largest expense in a typical campaign for major office is political advertising (Brader 2006, p. 20). Second, the volume of ads aired continues to increase from election cycle to election cycle. Third, advertising has direct and indirect impacts on the electorate as well. We know, for instance, that political advertising can persuade voters (Huber and Arceneaux 2007; Ridout and Franz 2011) and can often provide valuable information on candidates' issue agendas (e.g., Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Zhao and Chaffee 1995). Ads also serve as signals for what elected officials will act on in subsequent legislative sessions (Sulkin 2011). Political ads can also drive news media coverage of a race (West 2009; Ridout and Smith 2008; Fowler and Ridout 2009). Moreover, ads are ubiquitous in campaigns, showing up not just on people's television screens but on YouTube and other websites as well. This latter trend is just beginning to receive scholarly attention.

In this essay, we begin with a discussion of the various data sources that scholars have used to study political advertising. We then discuss recent studies that have employed data on political advertising to examine the impacts of ad exposure on citizens' attitudes and political behaviors, how the content of advertising varies, and how ads have been targeted in recent political campaigns. We follow that with our own empirical contribution: an analysis of trends in advertising content—including negativity and policy focus—over the past decade. We end with some speculation about the questions about advertising and its effects that scholars will grapple with in the future.

SOURCES OF ADVERTISING DATA

The Kanter Political Commercial Archive, housed at the University of Oklahoma, has long been the primary source for access to videos of American political commercials. The archive, founded in 1985, has television commercials dating back to 1950 and radio commercials dating back to 1936.[1] The commercials range from the presidential level to local office. The archive is also large, with a

collection of some 90,000 ads. Though a valuable resource, there are some disadvantages of the archive as a research tool. First, it is unknown how comprehensive the archive is (Jamieson, Waldman, and Sherr 2000). In other words, in any particular race, we do not know how many ads are missing. Perhaps more concerning, we do not know whether the ads contained in the archive are systematically different from the ads that do not appear. Thus, it is not necessarily possible to use the archive to describe the universe of political advertising in a particular year or particular race. The collection is also not ideally suited for examining the effects of political advertising on the electorate, as information on the placement of ads (on which television stations they aired and on which days and times, which would provide the total number of times each spot aired) is also unavailable. This has been even more of an issue since the 1988 and 1992 elections, when presidential campaigns first began to place large numbers of their ads on local television stations as opposed to the national networks (Prior 2001; Ridout, Franz, Goldstein, and Feltus 2012).

Although the Kanter archive does not provide information on the placement of political ads, there are other ways to obtain it. Namely, one could visit local television stations and examine their public files, which contain information on the candidates, parties, or interest groups purchasing ads, in what amount, and when they aired. This was the strategy used by Prior (2001) to examine the 1996 presidential campaign in Columbus, Ohio. The chief drawback of this approach, however, is the time involved, making it nearly impossible to employ in more than a few of the country's 210 media markets, nearly all of which contain more than three television stations. In 2012, the FCC mandated that broadcast stations in the 50 largest media markets put their public files online, and beginning in July 2014 that mandate was extended to all stations in all media markets. This may make it easier in the future to collect data on ad frequency, but there is no requirement that stations or markets provide the information in standardized format. This will continue to make it hard for scholars to use these data effectively.

Another approach to gathering information on the advertising aired during a race is to obtain a source within a campaign who is willing to share that information. Shaw (1999), for instance, was able to obtain data on gross ratings points purchased by the two major presidential campaigns in each state in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections. This approach to studying ad effects, however, may not be as effective anymore given the large numbers of third parties who have joined in the air war. Where campaigns of the past may have controlled most of their advertising, they rarely do so today, Obama's 2008 presidential campaign being a notable exception. As a consequence, even if one is lucky enough to know a campaign manager who is willing to release information on a campaign's ad purchases, one may still be missing a lot of the advertising that took place.

More recently, scholars have turned to another source of data on televised political advertising: commercial ad tracking data. The most

well-known are data collected by the Campaign Media Analysis Group and purchased and made publicly available by the Wisconsin Advertising Project. Detailed ad data from each federal election from 1998 to 2008 (with the exception of 2006) are archived by the Wisconsin project and are available to any interested scholar. In 2010, the Wesleyan Media Project took over this effort. The data are at the level of the ad airing, meaning that one can know that a particular ad sponsored by a particular candidate (e.g., Mitt Romney) aired on a particular television station in a particular media market (e.g., KCCI in Des Moines, Iowa) on a particular date and time (e.g., January 4, 2008, at 4:34 p.m.) during a particular program (e.g., *Jeopardy*). Not only are the ad placement data available but researchers at the Wisconsin and Wesleyan projects have coded each of the ads on a variety of factors, including their tone (positive or negative), whether they mention certain items (such as a telephone number or specific policy issues), and whether they are policy- or candidate-focused. These archives cover presidential, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and gubernatorial campaigns. Thus, for the past 16 years, researchers have had a wealth of data on the characteristics and placement of political advertising in the United States.

These more detailed data on political advertising have found widespread use in the field of political marketing. In fact, a cursory look for published research using the Wisconsin data archive finds at least five manuscripts and over four dozen peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that have been published in the last 10 years.[2]

A FLOURISHING FIELD OF STUDY

What kinds of questions are scholars who employ these data trying to answer? One important area of ad research focuses on the effects of exposure to advertising. Does it make people less or more likely to vote? Does it make them cynical? Does it help them with their voting decisions or just muddy the waters? Collectively, we are now better able to measure people's real-world exposure to political advertising, which has been a boon to the study of political communication effects. This is largely due to the availability of detailed ad tracking data that pinpoint when and where specific ads were aired. Notably, Freedman and Goldstein (1999) matched survey data on the television programs that people reported watching with tracking data on the ads aired in each respondent's media market during the programs that were viewed. The result was a detailed measure of relative exposure to political advertising, which allowed them and others to examine the real-world effects of ads. Scholars have examined the impact of exposure to advertising on voter choice (Huber and Arceneaux 2007), political participation and voter turnout (Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004), and attitudes toward the political system (Jackson, Mondak, and Huckfeldt 2009).

Another set of questions concerns the content of political advertising. How negative are American campaigns, and has that changed over time? When are certain issues mentioned, and when are they ignored? What types of emotional appeals are made, and how does that vary with the political context? Our ability to answer such questions had improved in the past decade, again thanks to the more systematic collection of data. To be sure, the Kanter archive at Oklahoma has afforded researchers the opportunity to watch the videos and thus code ads on a variety of factors, something Geer (2006) did with much success. But the requirement to travel to the archive site (the data are not yet accessible online) made this infeasible for most researchers in addition to the caveats noted above about generalizing from the archive to the entirety of the information environment in a campaign. In contrast, the more detailed data available nowadays have made it possible to quickly analyze thousands of different ads and to examine more than just presidential races. Thus, we can now say what issues U.S. Senate candidates were focused on in 2004 or whether Democrats or Republicans are more likely to employ an American flag in their advertising. For example, in the 2002 elections, the data show that Republican House, Senate, and gubernatorial candidates used the American flag in 29 percent of their airings, compared to 21 percent for Democratic candidates. In 2008, by contrast, the numbers were 26 percent for Democrats and 20 percent for Republicans. Of course, one could examine the question in multiple ways, looking, for instance, at the use of flags by the competitiveness of the race or the tone of the ad.

One other consequence of access to more detailed data over the past decade is a focus on the targeting decisions of campaigns—where to air certain messages so that certain types of voters are exposed to them. This is something that was possible only at an abstract or case-by-case level previously. We now know which issues certain candidates are raising—and where they are deploying those messages. Is the economy mentioned more in certain states? Is education mentioned more during television programs with a large number of women? Do Republicans and Democrats employ different strategies in an effort to reach their own base of voters? Certainly, one could always have asked campaign strategists to answer these questions—and they may even have answered truthfully—but we now have the data that allows us to test these propositions systematically and across a wide variety of electoral contexts. This has spawned a growing literature on campaign dialogue and issue convergence—the extent to which competing candidates discuss the same issues (e.g., Sides 2006).

DATA

To showcase how these data can be used to understand trends in campaign tactics, we examine changes over time in the tone of advertising, changes in

issue content, and changes in targeting strategies at both the level of the media market and television program. For our analyses of the years 2006, 2010, and 2012, we employ ad tracking data from the Wesleyan Media Project.[3] For all other years, data come from the Wisconsin Advertising Project.[4] All analyses examine federal races from the September 1 to Election Day period, which is the heart of the political campaign. We examine all ads during this time period, regardless of whether the sponsor is a candidate's campaign, a political party, or an independent group airing ads on behalf of a candidate.

Coders classified each ad on several characteristics, including its tone. Coders labeled an ad positive if it mentioned only a sponsor or favored candidate, negative if it mentioned only the opponent, and contrast if it mentioned both. They also marked whether each ad concerned policy issues, the characteristics of the candidates (i.e., fitness for office, family background), or both. Moreover, they detailed the issue content of each ad, noting each issue mention (from a master coding sheet of more than 50).[5]

ADVERTISING CONTENT

One oft-heard claim is that campaigns are getting nastier, and every year there is a pundit who declares the current campaign the nastiest year ever. Yet we can address these claims empirically with the ad tracking data. Figure 1 shows the tone of ads (across all ad airings post–September 1) in the presidential races of 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. Although the data points are limited to four elections, the evidence suggests that negativity has been

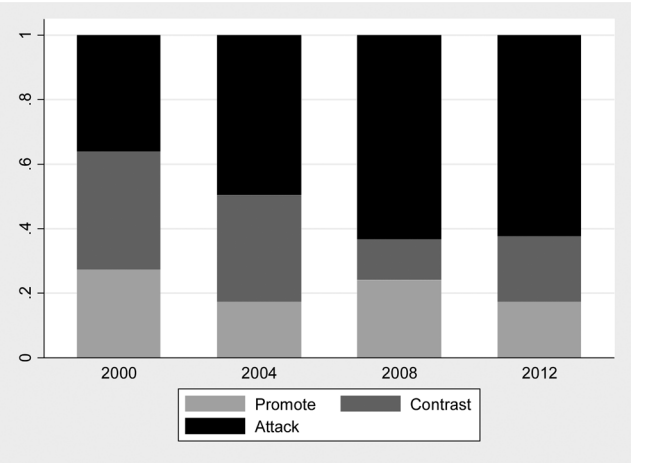

FIGURE 1 Ad tone by year (presidential races).
Data are for the September 1 to Election Day time period in the top 75 media markets.

increasing since 2000, with a little over a third (36 percent) of ads pure attacks in the Bush-Gore races, half (50 percent) pure attacks in 2004, and over 60 percent pure attacks in 2008 and 2012. Negative ads are also more common in House and Senate races in more recent years than before (Figure 2). In 1998, 32 percent of ads were attacks, with that percentage staying steady in 2000 and 2002. The percentage of pure attacks then climbs each year, rising to almost 49 percent in 2008 and reaching 53 percent in 2010 (2012 was only slightly less negative, at 51 percent). Clearly, if one looks at the percentage of ads in a race that solely mentions the opponent, then negative advertising has generally been on the rise for the past decade, a finding that is consistent with Geer's (2006) claim that negativity in presidential elections has been on the increase for several decades.

If one considers contrast ads to contain attacks, then our story is a bit less stark. Certainly, in the presidential race of 2008, although negative ads rose in popularity, contrast ads declined, leaving the proportion of ads that were purely positive a little bit lower than in 2000 but higher than in 2004. In the House and Senate races, however, the increase in negativity was largely at the expense of positive ads.

Another complaint about modern campaigns is that they lack substance. Certainly, much evidence has documented the media's focus on the "horse race" at the expense of discussions of policy (Brady and Johnston 1987; Patterson 1993). This neglect of policy, however, does not appear to have extended to the candidates' own advertising (Patterson and McClure 1976; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Geer 2006). Still, one wonders whether non-policy discussion has been rising over recent years. To answer this question, we calculated the percentage of ad airings in each year that were

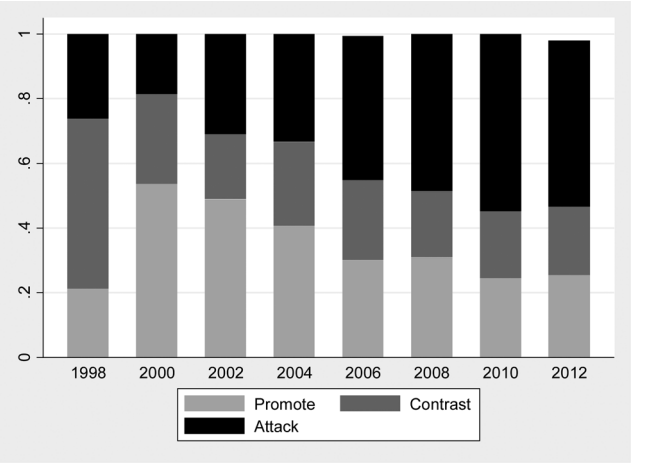

FIGURE 2 Ad tone by year (House and Senate races).
Data are for the September 1 to Election Day time period in the top 75 media markets. Data from 2006 are unavailable.

about policy issues, the candidates' personalities, or both. Figure 3 and Figure 4, which show the distribution of mentions of policy issues versus the candidates for the presidential and congressional races, reveal that candidate advertising is, by and large, focused on policy. The majority of political ads that were aired in each election were concerned solely with policy issues. (The one exception to this is 2002, a year in which 49.7 percent of ad airings were focused on policy.) Moreover, there are comparatively few ad airings that are solely concerned with the candidates' personal characteristics. Indeed, this percentage ranges from about 6 percent in ads aired during the 2000 presidential race to just about 16 percent in the 2004 congressional races.

There is also very little to suggest that campaigns have become more centered on the candidates' characteristics (as opposed to policy issues) over the past 16 years. While discussion of candidates in the presidential campaigns did peak in 2008, the percentage of candidate-focused ads in congressional races in 2010 was essentially unchanged from 1998. Thus, while advertisers may be talking more about their opponents these days (see again Figures 1 and 2), by and large they are talking about their opponents' issue stands rather than slinging mud about their personal lives.

One other thing that the ad tracking data allow us to do is to get a sense of the issue agenda each year—and how it changes over time. To illustrate this, we calculated the percentage of ad airings each year (again post–September 1) that concerned domestic versus foreign issues. Admittedly, characterizing an issue as strictly domestic or foreign can be tricky because many issues, such as a poor economy, have both domestic and international causes and implications. Moreover, sometimes new issues did appear on the political agenda (e.g., war in Afghanistan) and thus entered into the coding

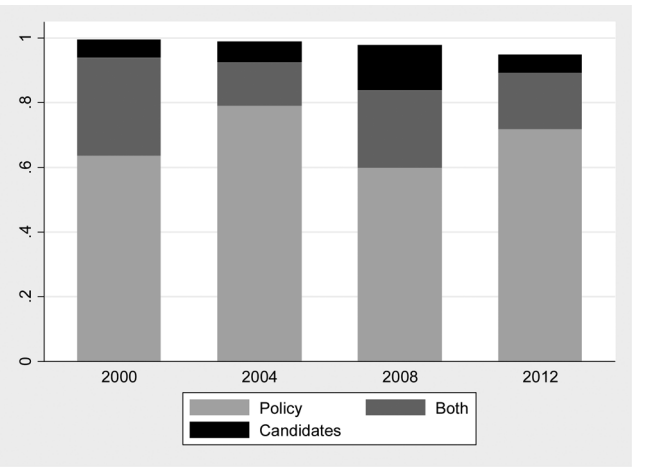

FIGURE 3 Discussion of policy versus candidates by year (presidential races).
Data are for the September 1 to Election Day time period in the top 75 media markets.

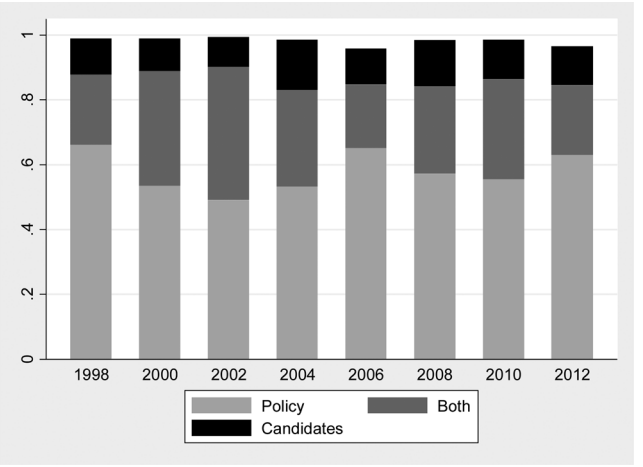

FIGURE 4 Discussion of policy versus candidates by year (House and Senate races). Data are for the September 1 to Election Day time period in the top 75 media markets. Data from 2006 are unavailable.

scheme; other times, the reverse occurred (e.g., conflict in Bosnia). Table 1 provides a full list of the issues that we considered foreign policy issues in each year.

Table 2 shows how the issue agenda has changed over time. Clearly, U.S. federal elections are primarily about domestic issues, although the degree to which domestic issues dominate does wax and wane. In 1998 and 2000, discussion of foreign affairs occurred rarely, topping 1 percent in only the

TABLE 1 Issues Classified as Foreign Policy by Year

	1998/2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010/2012
Veterans	x	x	x	x	x	x
Other defense/foreign policy issues	x	x				
Defense/military	x	x	x	x	x	x
Foreign Policy	x	x	x	x	x	x
Missile defense/Star Wars	x	x	x			
Bosnia	x		x			
China	x	x	x	x	x	x
Terrorism		x	x	x		x
September 11th		x	x	x		x
Middle East		x	x	x	x	x
Afghanistan		x	x	x	x	x
Foreign Aid		x	x	x	x	x
Int'l trade/globalization/NAFTA	x	x	x		x	x
Nuclear proliferation				x	x	x
Iran				x	x	x
Global Warming				x	x	x
Iraq/War in Iraq				x		x
Israel				x		x

TABLE 2 Percentage of Issue Mentions on Foreign Policy Topics

	Presidential	Congressional
1998		1.0
2000	0.0	1.6
2002		6.0
2004	22.7	13.5
2006		17.8
2008	10.9	11.8
2010		10.2
2012	7.5	7.0

Note: Entries are the percentage of all issue mentions in all ads.

congressional races of 2000. This began to change in 2002, where the discussion of foreign policy rose to 6 percent in the congressional races that year. The likely impetus was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Indeed, national defense and terrorism were the top two non-domestic issues that year, although the overall percentage of ads discussing foreign policy in the first election following the attacks was not as high as some might have expected. However, the 2004 campaign—the year after the American invasion of Iraq—was much more focused on foreign policy. Just under 23 percent of the issue mentions in the presidential campaign were foreign policy mentions, with national defense and terrorism again at the top of the list. Discussion of foreign policy was less prominent in House and Senate races in 2004 but still made up a substantial proportion of all issue mentions: 13.5 percent. Foreign policy issues receded from the campaign agendas of 2008 and 2010 but only to a small degree. They still constituted more than 10 percent of issue mentions in advertising, a much greater proportion than in 1998 and 2000. The presidential and congressional elections of 2012 saw further reductions, to about 7 percent. Notably, the foreign policy being discussed the most in these recent elections were no longer national defense and terrorism. Instead, as the economy entered recession, candidates increasingly talked about trade and globalization—and the threat posed by China. Indeed, in 2010, almost one in four ads that mentioned foreign policy mentioned China. Mentions of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Israel were meager in comparison.

By contrast, there has been much stability in the policy focus of advertising on domestic issues. For instance, in the 2000 presidential campaign, advertising on behalf of Bush and Gore was focused on education, health care, and taxes—the top three issues mentioned in that year. In the 2004 presidential campaign, the most mentioned issue was taxes, which was followed by job creation and health care, with education dropping to fourth on the list. In the 2008 presidential, taxation again topped the list of domestic issues, followed by job creation and health care. The economy was the fourth most mentioned issue in 2008.

In sum, an analysis of the content of political advertising allows one to address in an empirical fashion some of the claims made about the usefulness of advertising. And it allows one to trace the campaigns' issue agendas over time, giving insight into how the issue battleground changes across years.

TARGETING ADVERTISING

An examination of the content of political advertising provides important insights about the tenor of campaigns—how it is changing over time, for example—and the battle over the issue agenda that is being fought. But the study of political advertising is also useful for digging deeper into campaign strategy. Which types of voters do the campaigns believe are key to winning elections, and how are they trying to reach them?

To set the stage, we take a look at the media markets (among the top 75) in which the presidential campaigns (and their party and independent group allies) were airing the most ads. In 2000 (see Table 2), a lot of states were battlegrounds, with media markets in New Mexico, Oregon, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Washington, Missouri, and Florida all receiving between 5700 and 7200 ad airings. But by 2004, a smaller number of states received saturation levels of advertising. Having learned their lesson from the closeness of Florida in 2000, the Sunshine State was at the top of the list. The Miami media market saw more than 15,000 ad airings in the post–September 1 period, more than double seen in the top media market in 2000. The campaigns in 2004 were also active in New Mexico, Wisconsin, Florida, Nevada, and Ohio. The Buckeye State was, many thought, going to be the Florida of 2004. The high volume of advertising seen in 2004 was repeated in 2008, with two media markets, Las Vegas and Denver, seeing more than 16,000 ad airings in the last couple of months of the campaign. The heavy advertising in Denver also signified a changing electoral battleground, with Colorado up for grabs in 2008 in a way it was not in 2000 and 2004. The top markets in 2012 saw double the advertising volumes of 2004 and 2008. Remarkably, since the election of 2000 the volume of ads in the top market has risen from 7,215 to 31,055. And this comparison is clean, as we are comparing only local broadcast buys from September 1 to Election Day in each year.

These tables are instructive in showing us how the geographic targeting of advertising has changed over time, but there are other ways in which advertising can be targeted as well. One is targeting certain types of voters on the basis of the programs they watch. Table 3 shows the programs during which the most spots aired during the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 presidential campaigns—and the percentage of all ads in that year that aired during each program.[6] Heading the list in all years is local news broadcasts. One reason for this is the ubiquity of such programs. Many stations air two to three hours each

TABLE 3 Media Markets with Most Presidential Ad Airings (2000–2012)

State	Media Market	Ad Airings
	2000	
NM	Albuquerque-Santa Fe	7,215
OR	Portland	7,045
MI	Detroit	6,565
PA	Philadelphia	6,245
MI	Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo-Battle Creek	6,063
WI	Green Bay-Appleton	6,041
WA	Seattle-Tacoma	5,970
MO	Kansas City	5,779
FL	Miami-Ft. Lauderdale	5,772
WI	Milwaukee	5,719
	2004	
FL	Miami-Ft. Lauderdale	15,312
FL	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota	15,105
NM	Albuquerque-Santa Fe	13,001
WI	Green Bay-Appleton	12,624
FL	Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne	12,457
WI	Milwaukee	12,150
NV	Las Vegas	11,438
OH	Cleveland	11,390
OH	Toledo	10,778
OH	Columbus	10,503
	2008	
NV	Las Vegas	16,734
CO	Denver	16,420
FL	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota	14,376
FL	Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne	12,798
OH	Cleveland	11,872
WI	Green Bay-Appleton	11,666
NM	Albuquerque-Santa Fe	11,536
PA	Philadelphia	11,530
PA	Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York	11,068
WI	Milwaukee	10,430
	2012	
CO	Denver	31,055
NV	Las Vegas	26,575
OH	Cleveland	23,917
FL	Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne	23,301
FL	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota	22,789
VA	Washington DC	22,259
OH	Columbus, OH	20,039
OH	Cincinnati	19,076
VA	Norfolk	18,565
FL	Miami-Ft. Lauderdale	17,684

day of locally produced newscasts. Another reason local news attracts such advertising is because that is where swing voters are found. David Plouffe (2009), Obama's campaign manager, wrote of the 2008 campaign: "What really mattered—and our research was clear as a bell on this—was the local news. True swing voters watched their local TV station and read their regional paper" (p. 315). The Pew Center's biannual media consumption surveys

consistently show that the partisan breakdown of local television news viewers, in contrast to many news programs, most closely matches the partisan distribution of the country. Perhaps more importantly, local television news is also the only source that draws a majority of both self-identified Republicans and Democrats and a near majority of independents.[7]

Next on the list in all four elections are the networks' morning programs: *Today, Good Morning America*, and *The Early Show*. Talk shows, such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show, Live! With Regis and Kelly*, and *Dr. Phil*, also make the top 10, as do game shows such as *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*. The late night news program *Nightline* made the top 10 in 2000, as did *The Tonight Show* in 2004. One situation comedy, *Two and a Half Men*, also saw substantial advertising during 2008'', as did *The Big Bang Theory* in 2012. By and large, the types of programs during which the campaigns were advertising were quite similar across years, although it does appear that advertising during the news became a bit less common in more recent presidential campaigns.

We know, however, that the major parties have increasingly targeted different types of voters with their messages, especially since 2004 (Ridout et al. 2012). Therefore, we computed the percentage of ads aired during a few different programs and program types that favored Democratic as opposed to Republican candidates for president (Table 5). Several things are clear. First, Democrats were heavy advertisers during ''African-American comedies,'' which we defined as 30-minute comedy programs with a

TABLE 4 Television Programs with Most Presidential Advertising (2000–2012)

2000		2004	
Local News	43.5%	Local News	37.9%
Today	4.7%	Today	3.7%
Good Morning Am.	4.1%	Good Morning Am.	2.8%
Early Show	2.6%	Early Show	1.9%
Wheel Of Fortune	2.0%	Dr. Phil	1.6%
Oprah Winfrey	1.8%	Regis & Kelly	1.5%
Jeopardy	1.8%	Oprah Winfrey	1.5%
Judge Judy	1.6%	Jeopardy	1.4%
Live With Regis	1.6%	Tonight Show	1.3%
Nightline	1.3%	Wheel Of Fortune	1.3%
2008		**2012**	
Local News	35.1%	Local news	36.1%
Good Morning Am.	2.3%	Good Morning Am.	2.1%
Today Show	2.1%	Today Show	1.9%
Early Show	1.9%	CBS This Morning	1.7%
Oprah Winfrey	1.4%	Judge Judy	1.5%
Dr. Phil	1.3%	Kelly & Michael	1.4%
Regis & Kelly	1.3%	Dr. Oz Show	1.4%
Two & A Half Men	1.2%	Jeopardy	1.3%
Jeopardy	1.2%	Dr. Phil	1.2%
Rachael Ray	1.1%	Big Bang Theory	1.2%

TABLE 5 Percentage of Spots Favoring Democrats by Program Type

	2000	2004	2008	2012
Total Spots	47%	56%	59%	53%
Black comedies	79%	81%	91%	96%
Sports	41%	39%	58%	49%
Religion	50%	53%	58%	41%
Oprah Winfrey	56%	64%	58%	n/a
Ellen DeGeneres Show				55%
Spanish-language	60%	56%	65%	n/a

predominantly black cast. Presumably, this is a good place to speak to African Americans who make up an important part of the Democratic party's base. The Democratic share of advertising during these programs rose from 79 percent in 2000 (disproportionately greater than their overall share of advertising that year—see the top row of the table) to 81 percent in 2004 and 96 percent in 2012.

The audience for sporting events, by contrast, tends to be more Republican-leaning (Ridout et al. 2012), and indeed we found relatively more Republican than Democratic ads airing during these events, although the difference was very small in 2008, when the Democratic share of ads during sporting events (58 percent) was just one percentage point less than Democrats' total ad share. One might think that Republican advertising would dominate during religious programming given Republican ties to the religious right, but that is not the case (but for 2012), as the distribution of advertising during religious programs was very similar to the overall distribution of ad airings.

One group that both parties have been trying to attract in recent elections is Latino voters, and it is likely that one would find such voters watching Telemundo and Univision, two Spanish-language networks. Table 5 shows that in recent presidential campaigns, ads favoring the Democratic nominee have outnumbered ads favoring the Republican nominee on Telemundo and Univision. Just over 60 percent of the ads aired on those networks favored Gore in 2000, and 56 percent favored Kerry in 2004. The Democratic advantage increased to 65 to 35 by 2008. That said, the Democrats' share of ads on Spanish-language television was only 6 percentage points greater than their total share of ads in that year. Republicans, at least in terms of making ad appeals to a Spanish-language audience, have not given up Latino voters to the Democratic party.

In addition to Latinos as potential swing voters, we have heard much about the "soccer mom" and her successors, the "security mom" and the "hockey mom." These middle-aged mothers with children have been a coveted voter demographic. One place to find these voters might be watching *The Oprah Winfrey Show* whose audience was between 75 and 80 percent female.[8] We thus examined the proportion of ads aired during the program that were sponsored by Democrats and Republicans. In each year, Democrats aired slightly more ads during the Oprah Winfrey Show than Republicans. In 2000, pro-Gore

ads made up about 56 percent of the ad airings during the program and pro-Kerry ads made up 64 percent of the ad airings in 2004. But that advantage for the Democratic nominee declined a bit in 2008 when pro-Obama ads were 58 percent of the total. Indeed, that percentage was one percentage point less than the overall 59 percent of ad airings favoring the Democratic candidate. Because Oprah's show went off the air in 2011, we compared ad airings on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* in 2012. Obama had only a slightly larger advantage on that show than in his overall ad totals.

To sum up, our examination of the television programs targeted by the parties and candidates with their campaign advertising reveals some important insights about the particular audiences to which they want to speak—and reveals how the most-sought-after audiences and groups may change from election to election.

THE FUTURE

The data we have examined in this piece really only give a small taste of what can be done with the data that are now available about televised political advertising. The future study of televised political advertising looks bright, and there are several areas that are ripe for innovative research.

One of these areas is more in-depth study of the content of political advertising. With some exceptions, most of those who have studied political advertising have treated most political ads alike or have divided them into a few different groups, such as positive, negative, or contrast. By and large, the discipline has neglected a deeper study of how ads are put together and, in general, lacks an understanding of what makes some ads more influential than others. But that is changing. For instance, a spate of recent research has focused on the emotional appeals contained within political advertisements (Brader 2006; Ridout and Franz 2011). Such research moves beyond mere tone to suggest a more fine-grained approach to determine how content may factor into influence.

Coding emotional appeals—fear, enthusiasm, anger, or sadness, for example—also encourages one to move beyond just what is said in the ad and to examine things like the visual images (dark or bright?), the music (sober or uplifting?) and the voiceover (is it a deep voice?).[9] One can examine the circumstances under which ads with certain characteristics are used. Do those visual images, music, or voiceover depend on the type of candidate airing the ad, the closeness of the race, or even the issue at stake?

Another area of growing scholarly interest is a more in-depth analysis of ad targeting. Some very recent research has matched ad tracking data at the level of the television program with survey data about the political characteristics of those who watch those television programs (Lovett and Peress 2010; Ridout et al., 2012). This allows researchers to determine exactly

to which types of voters (e.g., likely supporters, swing voters, high-turnout voters) campaigns want to speak. Moreover, the ad tracking data available nowadays allow researchers to examine how targeting may change over the course of a campaign. For instance, do campaigns target likely supporters in their ad appeals early on in order to "shore up the base" or do they save their appeals for likely supporters in order to encourage them to vote on Election Day?

Although we have not touched much on it so far, experimental research on the effects of political advertising has also evolved, thanks in large part to the Internet. Whereas the seminal experimental studies of advertising (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995) had to rely upon bringing people into a lab, researchers nowadays are able to show people videos of political ads in their homes, allowing for an easily obtained, relatively inexpensive nationally representative sample of participants. One example of such research using advertisements embedded into online surveys is Clinton and Lapinski's (2004) investigation into the effects of negative advertising on voter turnout.

The study of political advertising is also reaching beyond the borders of the United States as well. In particular, researchers have exploited variation in institutional factors, such as the design of electoral systems, to explore how the logic of campaign attacks is similar to, and different from, that in the United States. For example, Elmelund-Præstekær (2011) examines how issue ownership influences party attacks in Denmark, while Desposato (2008) compares campaign messages in Brazil, El Salvador, and Mexico.

Finally, while our discussion has been focused on televised political advertising, other forms of advertising deserve study as well. Many studies of advertising outside the United States have looked at newspaper advertising, which can be as important as television or more so, depending on the context. Within the United States, researchers have also begun to look at political advertising on radio, showing how it is typically narrowcasted in order to reach niche audiences (Overby and Barth 2006; Kenski, Hardy, and Jamieson 2010). As electoral politics has migrated to the Internet, the study of political videos distributed online is also a growing field of study. For instance, Wallsten (2010) has traced how the Obama-championing "Yes, We Can" video produced during the 2008 campaign "went viral" and was viewed by millions of people. Others have examined the use of online videos in election campaigns in New Zealand (Salmond 2010) and Finland (Carlson and Strandberg 2008). Although much of this literature is descriptive, as it continues to develop it will likely become more theoretical and employ larger and more systematic sources of data.

All told, the study of political advertising has advanced considerably over the past decade, and one reason for that is the availability of new datasets that allow researchers to answer questions that were difficult or impossible to do in the past. In taking advantage of these data in their research, scholars have

continued their conversation with political campaigns and consultants. While scholars have learned much from campaign professionals, the reverse is true as well. Both communities are interested in the consequences of an overall more negative campaign environment. Both are interested in identifying features of advertisements that make them more persuasive. And both are interested in knowing how campaigns do target—and can better target—their ad messages.

Of course, these developments have implications for voters as well. For instance, being better able to target persuadable voters means that those voters who need more information to make up their minds are going to receive it. But it also means that the electorate as a whole is less likely to hear both sides in the contemporary political campaign. This could have certain long-term consequences, such as the reinforcement of any ideological or partisan polarization already present within the electorate. These normative implications are critical areas that will direct much research in the coming years.

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NOTES

1. Information about the Oklahoma archive is available online at http://pcc.ou.edu/Archive (accessed July 9, 2014).

2. The list of published materials from this search is available from the authors on request.

3. Almost all of the 2006, 2010, and 2012 ads in the database have been coded. Inter-coder reliability tests and data checking are ongoing, though. Any discrepancies between the numbers reported here (e.g., the percentage of ads that were negative) and the final released numbers should be very small.

4. See the project's website: http://wiscadproject.wisc.edu/. In the fall of 2014, the Wesleyan Media Project will release the full set of 2010 data and the congressional data from 2012. For more information see http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu. The 2000 data cover the top 75 media markets in the United States, while subsequent years cover either the top 100 or all 210 markets, depending on the year.

5. For the ad data between 1998 and 2004, coders indicated only the first four issue mentions. Since 2006, this limit has been lifted, although rarely do coders identify more than four issues.

6. It should be noted that the data here have one limitation in looking for targeting strategies based on viewership trends. The Wisconsin and Wesleyan archives only have data for political ads aired on local broadcast networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox) or for national cable buys, meaning that the data do not track local cable (i.e., ads aired on the Golf Network only in Detroit). Although local cable purchases constitute a small proportion of political advertising, it is likely to grow in future elections as campaigns seek to microtarget sub-constituencies.

7. For example, using data from a 2010 survey, the Pew Center reported that 51 percent of Republicans, 54 percent of Democrats, and 48 percent of independents tuned in regularly to local television news. The next most used medium was daily newspapers, which drew 45 percent of Republicans, 41 percent of Democrats, and only 38 percent of Independents (Pew Center for the People & the Press 2010, "Americans Spending More Time Following the News. Ideological News Sources: Who Watches and Why." Released September 12, 2010. Available at http://people-press.org/2010/09/12/americans-spending-more-time-following-the-news/; accessed July 7, 2010.

8. Oprah viewership statistics come from Aswini Anburajan on NBC News' "First Read" website: http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2007/12/07/4425062-breaking-down-oprahs-numbers. Accessed on July 6, 2011.

9. The Wisconsin Advertising project used storyboards (a visual image taken every few seconds along with a transcription of the voiceover) for coding advertising. But the Wesleyan Media Project in 2010 and 2012 used the actual videos of ads, allowing for the coding of things such as the music, images, and voiceover.

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