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Separation by Television Program: Understanding the Targeting of Political Advertising in Presidential Elections

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GOLDSTEIN, and WILLIAM J. FELTUS

Although conventional wisdom suggests that imbalanced message flows are relatively rare in presidential campaigns, this view relies on the assumption that competing campaigns allocate their advertising similarly. In this research, we show that this assumption is false. We combine ad tracking data from the Wisconsin Advertising Project with a unique collection of survey data on the audience for various program genres. Examining advertising in the 2000, 2004, and 2008 U.S. presidential races, we find that the Republican and Democratic candidates distributed their advertising differently across different program genres, reaching different types of voters. A form of microtargeting has increasingly entered into the realm of political advertising buys. We find that who sees certain political ads is more nonrandom than scholars had previously thought, and we find that unbalanced message flows (a precondition for ad persuasion) are more prevalent than conventional wisdom has suggested.

Keywords political advertising, presidential elections, campaigns, targeting

In modern presidential campaigns, television advertising accounts for more spending than any other campaign expenditure. In 2004, over \$1.7 billion was spent on political advertising.¹ In 2008, Barack Obama opted out of federal financing for the general election, and much of the money he raised was spent on the air. Overall, spending on televised political advertising in 2008 was \$2.2 billion, with the biggest chunk of that spent on the presidential race. In the midterm contests of 2010, over \$3 billion was estimated to have been spent on television advertising.²

Even with all this money spent, scholars have been skeptical about whether such spending can make much of a difference. One reason for this is that many scholars believe

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the “die is cast” before the campaign starts. As Rosenstone (1985) put it, “[t]he important determinants of the 1984 presidential election were in place long before most people heard of Geraldine Ferraro, long before the candidates squared off in front of television cameras” (p. 25). Fundamental factors such as the state of the economy, the distribution of partisanship among the electorate, and presidential approval all create an environment in which there are few minds for the actual campaign to change.

But even when there are voters who might be open to persuasion, there is little to suggest that large media effects are to be found in presidential campaigns. Zaller (1996) writes,

The odds are against detecting large net media effects—that is, swings of 30 or 40 points in public opinion traceable to changes in the content of mass communication—in the context of presidential elections, because the flow of opposing communications is likely to remain, except for short interludes, fairly evenly balanced. (p. 48)

In other words, even those people who lack a strong partisan anchor are unlikely to be moved from their initial candidate preferences because presidential campaigns feature relatively balanced information environments. For every message received from one candidate, there is a message from the other candidate to offset it. Candidates are thought to allocate their resources to the same locations, generally the half dozen or so battleground states, and the presence of public financing in the general election campaign since the 1970s has helped to ensure that neither the Democratic nor Republican nominee had a large message advantage during the last weeks of the race. Thus, one-sided flows of information—a necessary condition to find advertising effects—were thought to be a rare occurrence in presidential campaigns. As one prominent scholar said during a recent presentation at the American Political Science Association meetings, “[i]t’s like the campaigns are conspiring to make it difficult for us to determine media effects.”

Yet the assumption of balanced message environments may no longer hold. For one, since the early 1990s, most presidential television advertising has been bought on local television stations as opposed to airing nationally, giving campaigns an opportunity to emphasize campaigning in different media markets (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002).³ Second, although a much more recent development, Barack Obama opted out of public financing in 2008, giving him the opportunity to spend much more than McCain on political advertising (Franz & Ridout, 2010).

But there is a third factor that might lead to uneven message streams in presidential campaigns and one that is central to our story. Namely, campaigns target their advertising during specific television programs in order to speak to specific types of voters. If competing campaigns are attempting to reach different profiles of voters (e.g., Republicans are reaching out to Republican voters and Democrats are targeting Democratic voters), the result can be another form of imbalanced message environment whereby some voters are hearing many more messages from one candidate than from his opponent.

Our goal here is to investigate the allocation of advertising during various television programs in recent presidential election campaigns. We examine whether campaigns select programs during which to advertise in an attempt to target their messages toward specific demographic groups. In doing so, we account for the different ways that candidates can gain an advantage in message flow, a critical condition for ads to have any sort of persuasive effect. Specifically, we examine the program targeting of television advertising in the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential general elections, analyzing data on advertising by

show type, market, and the early or late phase of the fall campaign. We supplement these tracking data with survey data on the audience profile for different television program genres, which allows us to examine the relationship between audience demographics and the deployment of campaign ads. Finding one-sided flows of information and who is exposed to them is crucial to isolating advertising effects in presidential races. Although we do not test for persuasion effects in this article, having a better understanding of the logic of where campaigns specifically place their ads is a necessary first step if we hope to locate a potential impact of advertising on American elections.

Targeting Through Political Advertising

You are most likely to see a political advertisement on television if you are watching a local news program in the morning or in the early or late evening. Indeed, most campaign advertisements across all types of elections air during news programs. In 2008, for example, presidential candidates aired just over 50% of all their ads during news programs (local and national; morning, noon, and evening). There have, however, been some important recent changes in ad deployment. The comparable figure on ads during news programs was 56% in 2004 and 64% in 2000. It seems presidential candidates have shifted their ad buys in recent years away from the traditional local news outlet to a more diverse set of programs.⁴

This movement towards more nuanced ad buying strategies is reflective of a broader trend in political campaigning—what some call microtargeting. This strategy involves more precisely identifying voters or households that might be receptive to a specific mobilization or persuasion message. Armed first with the turnout history and party identification of nearly every registered voter in a state or district, campaigns supplement these data with detailed information on spending habits purchased from consumer marketing companies. Campaigns then poll voters to look for relationships between consumer habits and political attitudes, which retroactively allows for the assignment of each voter in their files to a range of specific categories (e.g., a health care soccer mom, a NASCAR security dad) (Gertner, 2004; Sosnik, Dowd, & Fournier, 2006). This, in turn, informs the campaign's peer-to-peer contacts, Internet outreach, and direct mail, allowing for highly tailored and specific messages to reach specific voters. Such a strategy is a dramatic improvement over the more traditional geo-targeting in which candidates identify precincts, neighborhoods, or streets "most likely" to be for or against the candidate.

Although microtargeting is typically discussed when it comes to ground war tactics like direct mail and phone calls, media consultants are increasingly advocating a similar targeting effort with television advertising. Armed with data on the demographic profile of a show's audience (e.g., stay-at-home moms, sports fanatic single males), campaigns can more easily reach desired audiences and send more precise appeals. This trend toward sophisticated voter outreach is motivated by the idea that direct voter contacts and specific appeals work better than the traditional approach of sending out a generic message to an undifferentiated audience (Shaw, 2006; Bergan, Gerber, Green, & Panagopoulos, 2005; Green & Gerber, 2008). Although airing television advertising may still be a "shotgun" approach, media consultants increasingly believe that more precise targeting and tailored appeals can increase the efficiency of a 30-s campaign ad.

Consider three possible targeting strategies for presidential campaigns. First, campaigns can appeal to their own base, bringing them home and ensuring they come out to vote. In the 2004 reelection campaign of George Bush, for example, one of the campaign's stated goals was a greater focus on core Republican supporters, with the goal of boosting turnout in the hope of securing a clear majority of the popular vote. For Republicans,

appealing to the base should mean airing more ads on shows with a Whiter, more conservative, and more religious viewer profile. Democrats pursuing this strategy should place their spots on shows with a younger and more racially diverse audience, as well as shows with more liberal and secular viewers.

There is some anecdotal evidence from 2004 that campaigns do target by television program. The Bush campaign faced a challenge that year because survey data showed that Republicans were less likely to watch television than Democrats (Seelye, 2004). As a consequence, the Bush team and Republican National Committee decided that they could more effectively reach their target audience—Republican base voters—with focused cable ad buys during television programs with a large conservative and Republican audience. Thus, Republicans placed substantial advertising in 2004 on the Golf Network and Speedvision (devoted to NASCAR), the two networks with the highest proportion of Republicans (Seelye, 2004). One benefit more generally of this “appeal to the base” strategy is fewer wasted resources on viewers who are predisposed to dislike the candidate. Even if the audience for such a targeted show is relatively small (e.g., a late night sports program or a cooking show on the Food Network), campaigns can ensure that a relatively larger share of viewers are likely to be receptive to the message.⁵

Of course, politics is not always about speaking to the converted. A second approach to winning elections is a direct appeal to the persuadable voter, where the ad buy or message is targeted to independents or undecided voters. The specific programs swing voters are watching may vary from year to year (or across elections within a year), as swing voters may be more or less interested in the economy, national security, or health care. That said, one place to potentially find political independents is among those watching local news. As Obama campaign manager David Plouffe (2009) writes of the 2008 election, “[w]hat 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). It should come as no surprise, then, that many campaigns focus their advertising dollars on local news, as persuasion is always a primary goal given the relative size of self-identified independents in the electorate.⁶ Indeed, one study of ad placement in 2004 at the congressional district level confirms that swing voters are very often the primary target of advertising (Lovett & Peress, 2010).

Finally, nothing prevents a campaign from trying to convince the other party’s supporters from switching their votes. This is typically done by making appeals to wedge issues, those that divide people who identify with the other political party, such as gay marriage or stem-cell research (Hillygus & Shields, 2009). Using this strategy is only possible if campaigns can identify what shows are watched by people with certain issue positions (e.g., pro-life voters might be more likely to watch medical dramas).

Our goal in this article is not to infer which specific strategy a campaign was using in a specific year. Indeed, it seems likely that all campaigns pursue all of these strategies simultaneously, though perhaps emphasizing one over another at certain times. Rather, our aim is to show that campaigns, through their televised political advertising, do have the ability to speak to specific groups of voters characterized by their partisanship, gender, race, and other factors. In doing so, we show that campaigns are rarely speaking to an undifferentiated audience when they decide to put an ad on television. The result is often an imbalance in message flows.

Methods and Data

To describe the television programs during which the candidates are airing their television ads, we rely upon data collected by the Wisconsin Advertising Project in the last three

presidential election campaigns. The data from 2000 and 2008 come from CMAG-TNSMI, a commercial firm that tracks political advertising. The data from 2004 come from Nielsen Media Research. Data from 2000 cover only the 75 largest media markets in the United States, while data from 2004 and 2008 cover all 210 media markets. The data in all years are at the level of the individual ad airing and allow us to know at what time, in which media market, on which television station, and during which program each spot aired.⁷ Because we are interested in the resource allocation strategies of the presidential campaigns themselves, we examine only ads paid for by the campaigns and those aired in coordination with the political parties. Because the campaigns cannot legally coordinate with interest groups on where to air advertising—or what to talk about—we exclude outside group advertising from our analyses.

The Wisconsin data allow us to describe the proportion of total ads that each campaign aired during a specific program or program type. Still, we also wanted to know the characteristics of the viewers of those programs. To obtain this information, we turned to two surveys conducted by Scarborough USA, a market-research firm (see the Appendix for more information). The Scarborough data combine telephone and mail surveys that were in the field in 2004 and 2008 and have a number of features that make them almost ideal for analyzing how campaigns target television programs. First, in addition to asking respondents questions about their sociodemographic characteristics and political views, the surveys asked if they watched a variety of genres of television programs, 20 different genres in 2004 and 23 different genres in 2008. These ranged from daytime soap operas, daytime talk shows, and game shows to local news, network news, and reality shows.⁸ Because we lacked survey data from 2000, we matched the advertising from the year 2000 with the 2004 survey data.⁹ A second important feature of these surveys is that they contain political information of the sort that campaigns want to know. Specifically, respondents were asked about their party identification and voting history, which allows us to know which genres of programs attract the most Republicans or people who are most likely to vote. A final advantage of the Scarborough data is their huge sample size. In 2004, the sample size was 103,702, and in 2008 it was 110,638. This means that we can have a great deal of confidence about the characteristics of the audience for various genres of programming.

The next step was to calculate a profile of the typical viewer of each genre. Specifically, we calculated the percentage of each program genre's audience that reported "always" voting in statewide elections and the percentage that reported being a Democrat (strong and independent) and a Republican (strong and independent). We then created a composite measure of the partisanship of a program genre's audience by subtracting the percentage of the audience that was Republican (both strong Republican and independent Republican) from the percentage that was Democratic (strong Democratic and independent Democratic). We also calculated the percentage of viewers of each program genre who were pure independents, female, Black, Hispanic, and religious. Religiosity was tapped by a question asking whether the respondent had made a donation to a religious organization.

Our calculations have considerable face validity. For instance, the program genre with the greatest percentage of women viewers (80.3% in 2004) was daytime dramas (i.e., soap operas). By contrast, in 2004, women made up only 35% of the audience for sports programs and 36% of the audience for science fiction. In 2008, the percentage of the audience that was Hispanic ranged from 10% for daytime soap operas in English to 79% for telenovelas, which are Spanish-language soap operas. Finally, in that same year, the audience for music videos was only 34% religious, compared to 70% for explicitly religious programming.

We supplemented data on the audience of each program with information about the characteristics of those who lived in each media market. We used U.S. Census Bureau

data from the year 2000 and yearly census population estimates for 2004 and 2008 to describe each media market in terms of the percentage of the population that is Black, the percentage Hispanic, and the percentage over age 65. Our multivariate models included additional information on the proportion of the market that was in a battleground state¹⁰ and the percentage of the vote that the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates received in the previous presidential election.¹¹

Measuring Resource Allocation

Using the Wisconsin advertising data, we created two measures of how much investment each presidential candidate was making during each specific television program and each type of program genre. For our first measure, the ratio measure, we calculated the proportion of each candidate's total ad airings that aired during each television program. For instance, Obama's campaign aired 1,399 of its 414,032 total ad airings during the television program *Divorce Court*, resulting in a proportion of .0034. McCain's campaign aired 304 of its 147,070 total ad airings during the same program. Thus, the proportion of total McCain spots aired during *Divorce Court* was .0021. We then divided this proportion for Obama by this proportion for McCain to produce a number that indicates the ratio of Democratic to Republican investment during the particular television program. For *Divorce Court*, this ratio is 1.63. In those instances in which the proportion of total resources devoted to the particular program for McCain was larger than the proportion for Obama, we divided the McCain proportion by the Obama proportion.

One advantage of this ratio measure is that it is intuitive. If the ratio is 2, that means that Obama (or McCain) devoted twice as many resources to advertising during a particular program, and a ratio of 10 indicates 10 times as many resources were devoted to ads during that program. Another advantage of this measure is that it takes into account total resources available to each campaign. Rivlin (2008) reports the simple ratio of Democratic to Republican ads aired during specific programs in the 2004 presidential campaign, but the problem with that approach, especially in 2008, was that the Obama campaign had a fairly large advantage in terms of total ads aired, especially when uncoordinated interest group and party spending are excluded. Thus, by using Rivlin's measure, it would appear that Obama devoted more resources to advertising during almost all television programs. Our measure, by contrast, reveals those programs during which McCain chose to spend a disproportionate share of his resources, even if Obama still out-advertised him.

There is, however, one disadvantage to our ratio measure: It equals infinity when one candidate places no advertising during a particular television program. Thus, for our multivariate models, in which the relative outlay of ad resources is our dependent variable, we switch to a slightly different operationalization, which we term the difference measure. This is simply the difference in the proportion of total ad resources devoted to a program genre. So for game shows, during which Obama allocated .061 of his resources and McCain allocated .071 of his resources, the difference measure would equal $-.010$.

Finally, we calculate the difference measure at the level of the media market so that we can see how the characteristics of those living in that market influence the relative proportion of resources that a candidate allocates.

Results

It is important to establish first that different types of voters (e.g., Republicans, independents, and Democrats, likely versus unlikely voters) can be found watching different

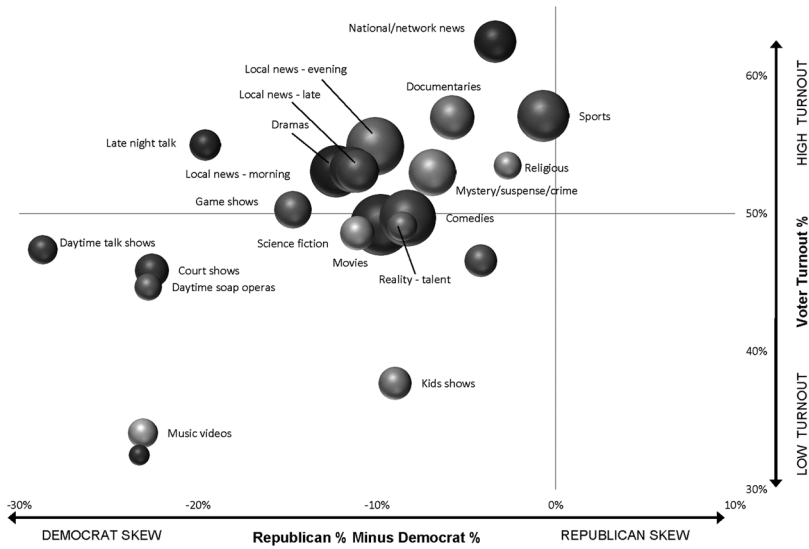


Figure 1. Partisanship and voting history of program genre viewers (2008).

television programs. Figure 1 shows that this is indeed the case by plotting the average partisanship (the percentage of Republicans minus the percentage of Democrats) for each program genre asked about in the 2008 Scarborough survey. Those genres left of the vertical line are those that skew Democratic, while those right of the line skew Republican. The vertical axis speaks to the likelihood of “always” voting in statewide elections, with those program genres above the line having a predicted turnout of better than even. The size of the bubble indicates the proportion of Americans who report watching that program genre.

The first thing to note is that all program genres have a Democratic skew. In general, Democrats are heavier television watchers than Republicans, a fact consistent with our conversations with campaign professionals. It is easy to find an audience that is heavily Democratic, especially if one advertises during daytime talk shows, daytime soap operas, court shows, reality dating shows, or music video programs. The difficulty Democratic campaigns face, however, is that most of those program audiences that are heavily Democratic are also below 50% in their likelihood of turning out to vote. The less Democratic a program genre becomes, the more likely the audience is to cast a ballot on election day. Thus, if one wants to reach an audience of people who are likely to turn out to vote, that audience, while still having a Democratic tilt, is going to be much more Republican. As a result, we should expect Republican candidates who want to reach their base to advertise during national network news, religious programs, and sports programming. A replication of this figure for 2004 (not provided here) shows a very similar pattern, though in that year there were a few genres of programming (sports, national network news, and adventure reality shows) that had slightly more Republicans than Democrats watching.

Genre-Level Ad Allocation

In which program genres did Democrats and Republicans devote relatively more resources? Table 1 shows the ratio of Democratic to Republican resources spent on advertising during each program genre. During the 2000 campaign, Gore spent disproportionately on advertising during late night talk shows, religious programs, and daytime talk shows. Daytime talk

Table 1
Ratio of Democratic to Republican resources for each program genre

2000		2004		2008	
Program	Ratio	Program	Ratio	Program	Ratio
Court shows	0.49	Sports	0.37	Daytime soap operas	0.58
Myst./Suspense/Crime	0.53	Kids' shows	0.49	Game shows	0.86
Documentaries	0.54	Myst./Suspense/Crime	0.72	Daytime talk shows	0.86
Science fiction	0.72	Daytime soap operas	0.80	Documentaries	0.88
Sports	0.79	Nat'l/Network news	0.83	Local news	0.91
Local news	0.85	Documentaries	0.90	Myst./Suspense/Crime	0.92
Nat'l/Network news	0.95	Local news	0.94	Late night talk	1.01
Novelas	0.97	Game shows	0.96	Sports	1.08
Reality-Adventure	0.98	Dramas	1.02	Reality-Adventure	1.09
Dramas	1.02	Religious	1.05	Religious	1.10
Game shows	1.15	Daytime talk shows	1.13	Nat'l/Network news	1.15
Daytime soap operas	1.22	Reality-Talent	1.15	Dramas	1.22
Movies	1.31	Reality-Adventure	1.20	Reality-Talent	1.26
Comedies	1.61	Novelas	1.33	Kids' shows	1.52
Daytime talk shows	1.73	Late night talk	1.55	Comedies	1.58
Religious	2.05	Movies	1.84	Court shows	1.63
Late night talk	4.67	Comedies	1.89	Movies	1.70
		Science fiction	2.00	Novelas	2.33
		Reality-Dating	2.79	Reality-Dating	2.60
		Court shows	2.82	Science fiction	2.76

Note. Entries are the ratio of the percentage of total Democratic resources devoted to the genre to the percentage of total Republican resources devoted to the genre. We eliminated genres that did not have at least 50 ad airings in a particular year.

shows, and especially late night talk shows, skew heavily Democratic. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly given popular rhetoric, religious programming also has a slight Democratic skew—the audience is about 3 percentage points more Democratic than Republican, according to data from 2008. In 2000, the Bush campaign advertised heavily in some unlikely places, such as court shows, whose audiences are heavily Democratic and less likely to vote than average. They also placed disproportionately more ads during science fiction shows and mystery/suspense/crime programs. Science fiction tends to skew quite heavily Democratic, though crime program audiences tend to be more Republican than average.

In 2004, the Democratic presidential campaign concentrated its advertising on reality dating shows and science fiction programs, but its heaviest advertising relative to the Republican campaign was during court shows. Here the Kerry campaign devoted almost 3 times as many resources relative to Bush. The audience for all three of these program types skewed Democratic—almost 10 percentage points more Democratic than Republican in the case of reality dating shows.¹² The Bush campaign advertised heavily relative to Kerry during sports programming, which was one of only three genres of programs that skewed Republican in 2004.

In 2008, Democrats placed over twice as much ad effort as Republicans during science fiction shows, reality dating programs, and telenovelas. Recall from Figure 1 that all of these genres are ones that skew Democratic, especially reality dating programs. These program genres, however, are not ones that have audiences that consistently vote. Indeed,

the lowest voting turnout of any group is found among those who watch reality dating programs. On the other hand, Obama devoted proportionately as many resources as McCain on sports programs and national news, both of which have higher numbers of Republican viewers and both of which saw proportionately less Kerry advertising in 2004. Relative to Obama, the McCain campaign focused its advertising during daytime soap operas, game shows, and daytime talk shows, all of which skew heavily Democratic.

Program-Level Ad Allocation

To provide a more granular look at the data, we list in Tables 2–4 the programs (as opposed to genres) during which both the Republican and the Democratic candidate had the greatest relative advantages in terms of advertising.¹³ Table 2 speaks to the 2000 presidential campaign, showing all programs on which one candidate out-aired the other by at least a 2.5 to 1 margin. Bush's greatest advantage was during the program *Noticiero Telemundo*, a Spanish-language news program during which he aired 63 ads and Gore aired none. Bush also had huge ad advantages on *60 Minutes II*, *Noticiero Univision* (another Spanish-language newscast), *Nash Bridges*, and *Matlock*. Interestingly, six of the 16 programs during which Bush devoted over 2.5 times as many resources as Gore were Spanish language. Bush also concentrated his advertising during real-life courtroom shows, such as *Judge Joe Brown*. Hour-long dramas were a frequent venue as well for heavy Bush advertising. By contrast, Gore's ad advantages came during late night talk shows and half-hour situation comedies. He also held an ad advantage during one Spanish-language soap opera.

Table 2
Programs with greatest Bush and Gore ad advantage in 2000

Bush advantage programs		Gore advantage programs	
Program	Ratio	Program	Ratio
<i>Noticiero Telemundo</i>	inf	<i>DKDA</i> (Spanish soap opera)	11.27
<i>60 Minutes II</i>	5.98	<i>Late Show</i>	5.49
<i>Noticiero Univision</i>	4.35	<i>Tonight Show</i>	5.00
<i>Nash Bridges</i>	4.16	<i>Late Night</i>	4.12
<i>Matlock</i>	4.00	<i>Drew Carey</i>	3.37
<i>Real TV</i>	3.50	<i>3rd Rock From the Sun</i>	2.75
<i>Judge Joe Brown</i>	3.46		
<i>Noticias</i>	2.93		
<i>Mujeres Enganadas</i>	2.83		
<i>Noticiero Univision—Fin de Semana</i>	2.82		
<i>Law & Order: Special Victims Unit</i>	2.82		
<i>Despierta America</i>	2.71		
<i>Touched by an Angel</i>	2.62		

Note. The first Ratio column is the ratio of the percentage of total Bush ad airings during a particular program to the percentage of total Gore ad airings. The second Ratio column shows the ratio of the percentage of total Gore ad airings to the percentage of total Bush ad airings. Ratios are reported only for those programs during which more than 50 total ads aired and that received advertising in more than one media market.

Table 3
Programs with greatest Bush and Kerry ad advantage in 2004

Bush advantage programs		Kerry advantage programs	
Program	Ratio	Program	Ratio
Summer Olympics Sun Primetime 2	inf	ABC Sunday movie of week special	inf
Summer Olympics Sun pm 3	inf	<i>Sanford & Son</i>	inf
Summer Olympics Sat Primetime 1	inf	<i>Hughleys-Syn</i>	inf
Summer Olympics Opening Ceremony	inf	<i>Good Times</i>	inf
Summer Olympics Mon Primetime 1	inf	<i>Parkers-Syn</i>	322.16
Summer Olympics Sun Primetime 1	inf	<i>Living Single-Syn</i>	181.22
Summer Olympics Wed Primetime 1	inf	<i>Martin-Syn</i>	143.32
Summer Olympics Sat pm 3	inf	<i>Girlfriends-Syn</i>	72.84
NBA on ABC Sun 1	inf	<i>Parkers</i>	64.75
Summer Olympics Sun pm 1	inf	<i>Steve Harvey-Syn</i>	64.55
Summer Olympics Thu pm 2	inf	<i>America's Black Forum</i>	40.27
Summer Olympics Thu pm 1	inf	<i>Al Rojo Vivo</i>	29.61
Summer Olympics Fri pm 2	inf	<i>Fresh Prince of Bel Air-Syn</i>	27.83
Summer Olympics Tue Primetime 1	inf	<i>Trading Spouses</i>	15.25
Summer Olympics Tue pm 1	inf	<i>Last Call with Carson Daly</i>	12.08
60 Minutes special	inf	<i>Jerry Springer</i>	11.37
Summer Olympics Sat pm 2	inf	<i>Buena Vista IV</i>	9.18
Summer Olympics Tue pm 2	inf	<i>Maury</i>	8.17
Summer Olympics Thu Primetime 1	inf	<i>That 70s Show-MF-Syn</i>	7.89
Summer Olympics Mon pm 2	inf	<i>Montel Williams</i>	7.88
Fox Nextel Cup Winners Circle	inf	UPN weekend movie	7.82
Summer Olympics Closing Ceremony	inf	<i>Judge Mathis</i>	7.58
Summer Olympics Wed pm 1	inf	<i>Late Late Show with Craig Kilborn</i>	7.34
Summer Olympics Sun am 1	inf	<i>Renovate My Family</i>	7.11
Summer Olympics Sat pm 1	inf	<i>King of Queens-Wknd</i>	6.97
Summer Olympics Fri pm 1	inf	<i>Fear Factor-Syn</i>	6.87
Summer Olympics Fri Primetime 1	inf	<i>Conan O'Brien</i>	6.25
Summer Olympics Mon pm 1	inf	<i>Just Shoot Me-Wknd</i>	6.01
Summer Olympics Sat Primetime 3	inf	<i>Cash Explosion</i>	5.98
Summer Olympics Sat Primetime 2	inf	<i>West Wing-Syn</i>	5.90
Summer Olympics Sun am 2	inf	<i>Just Shoot Me-Syn</i>	5.87
Summer Olympics Wed pm 2	176.46	<i>George Michael Sportsmachine</i>	5.80
Summer Olympics Sun pm 2	155.35	<i>Swan 2</i>	5.79
Summer Olympics Thu Primetime 2	94.56	<i>Bachelor</i>	5.70
Local NFL football preseason	92.87	<i>Dharma & Greg-Wk-Syn</i>	5.33
Summer Olympics Fri Primetime 2	90.34	<i>Judge Hatchett</i>	5.16
Summer Olympics Tue Primetime 2	46.86	<i>Hot Ticket</i>	5.03
Summer Olympics Mon Primetime 2	46.01	<i>That 70s Show-Wk-Syn</i>	4.86
Summer Olympics Wed Primetime 2	31.52	<i>ER-Syn</i>	4.79
Sunday morning special	25.75	<i>Extra-Wknd</i>	4.77
<i>Frasier</i>	20.09	<i>Daily Buzz 2</i>	4.74
CBS NCAA basketball	17.73	<i>Texas Justice</i>	4.70
<i>Century City</i>	16.32	<i>Drew Carey</i>	4.70
<i>Apprentice Wed</i>	10.61	<i>MASH</i>	4.54
U.S. Open tennis Sun	10.13	<i>Daily Buzz 1</i>	4.47

(Continued)

Table 3
(Continued)

Bush advantage programs		Kerry advantage programs	
Program	Ratio	Program	Ratio
<i>Apprentice</i>	9.46	<i>Drew Carey</i> –Wknd	4.40
ABC college football game	8.52	<i>Inside Edition</i> –Wknd	4.37
Ryder Cup golf Sun	8.30	<i>Seinfeld</i> –Wknd	4.25
<i>District</i>	8.11	<i>Wife Swap</i>	4.24
<i>Crossing Jordan</i>	6.08	<i>Will & Grace</i> –Wknd B	4.15
NBC movie of week Sun	5.28	<i>Hollywood Squares</i> –Wknd	3.93
Ryder Cup golf Sat	5.14	<i>Will & Grace</i> –Wknd A	3.89
ABC college football game late	4.60	<i>Judge Joe Brown</i>	3.89
<i>CSI</i>	4.39	<i>Late Show with David Letterman</i>	3.66
ABC college football game early	4.33	Local movie	3.63
<i>District</i>	4.14	<i>Extreme Makeover Home Edition</i>	3.62
Fox NASCAR Nextel–Pre	4.07	<i>Insider Weekend</i>	3.55
ABC college football game late	3.90	<i>ABC World News Morning</i>	3.48
Home Depot college football	3.85	<i>King of Queens</i> –Syn	3.47
British Open	3.57	<i>Friends</i> –Wknd	3.31
<i>CSI</i> Fri spec	3.54	<i>Access Hollywood</i> –Wknd	3.31
U.S. Open day–Week 2–Fri 2	3.46	<i>Cops</i> –Syn	3.22
<i>American Idol</i> Tues	3.43	Fox movie special	3.21
Fox NFL Sunday–National min	3.38	<i>Yes, Dear</i> –Syn	3.20
Kansas City 400	3.26	<i>Stargate SG-1</i>	3.19
<i>D.A.</i>	3.23	<i>Celebrity Justice</i>	3.19
<i>20/20</i> special edition	3.14	<i>Saturday Night</i>	3.08
<i>NYPD Blue</i>	3.06		
Fox NASCAR Nextel Cup	3.06		

Note. The first Ratio column is the ratio of the percentage of total Bush ad airings during a particular program to the percentage of total Kerry ad airings. The second Ratio column shows the ratio of the percentage of total Kerry ad airings to the percentage of total Bush ad airings. Ratios are reported only for those programs during which more than 50 total ads aired and that received advertising in more than one media market. Olympic programming is divided into afternoon and primetime blocks by day.

Table 3 reports the program-level data for 2004, using a 3 to 1 margin in ad airings as a cutoff. Clearly, the Bush campaign was concentrating its advertising during sports programming, especially the Summer Olympics. During many blocks of Olympic programming, Kerry did not air any ads at all. One reason for this may be the timing of the Olympic Games. The Olympics were held August 13 through 29, which was after the Democratic National Convention but just before the Republican National Convention. It may have been the case that the Bush campaign was seeking to divert some of the attention given to Kerry during his just-completed convention, or it may have been the case that the Kerry campaign was conserving dollars, given that he had to make his federal funds last for a much longer time than Bush. Bush was also spending (and probably trying to deplete) the remainder of his primary funds, which were still available to him until his nominating convention. That he chose to air ads during the Olympic Games, however, is still indicative of a desire to reach a sports-loving (and more Republican-friendly) audience.

Table 4
Programs with greatest McCain and Obama ad advantage in 2008

McCain advantage programs		Obama advantage programs	
Program	Ratio	Program	Ratio
Summer Olympics Opening Ceremony	81.64	<i>Tyler Perry's House of Payne</i> –Wknd	inf
CMA Music Festival	9.11	<i>Reba</i>	inf
<i>Celebrity Family Feud</i>	7.24	<i>Punk'd</i>	inf
2008 Alma Awards	7.13	<i>Sin Senos No Hay Paraiso</i>	inf
Republican National Convention–NBC	6.77	<i>Reba</i>	inf
<i>Morning Blend</i>	6.26	<i>La Rosa De Guadalupe</i>	inf
<i>Muy Buenos Dias</i>	5.99	<i>Aqui Y Ahora</i> –Uni	inf
Republican National Convention–CBS	5.90	<i>El Cuerpo Del Deseo</i>	inf
<i>America United: In Support</i>	5.88	<i>Palabra De Mujer</i>	inf
<i>Comics Unleashed</i>	5.48	<i>Tierra De Pasiones</i> –Tel	inf
NFL football–NBC	5.21	<i>Veredicto Final</i>	inf
<i>Fashion Rocks</i> –CBS	4.99	<i>Wayans Brothers</i>	38.60
<i>Ebert & Roeper</i>	4.89	<i>Tyler Perry's House of Payne</i>	30.95
<i>Wipeout</i>	4.62	<i>Fresh Prince of Bel–Air</i>	28.42
NFL preseason football–Fox	4.29	<i>Lola Erase Una Vez</i>	24.86
<i>I Love Lucy</i>	4.19	<i>Mujer Casos/La Vida Rl</i>	21.31
Summer Olympics late–NBC	4.13	<i>El Gordo Y La Flaca</i>	21.31
<i>Judge Maria Lopez</i>	3.98	<i>Caso Cerrado</i>	18.12
<i>Titulares Y Mas</i> –Tel	3.94	<i>Don Francisco Presenta</i>	17.41
ABC Saturday night movie	3.93	<i>Jamie Foxx Show</i>	16.19
<i>America's Most Wanted</i>	3.80	<i>Cristina</i>	14.74
<i>Northland Adventures</i>	3.79	<i>Everybody Hates Chris</i>	13.50
<i>Law & Order: Criminal Intent</i>	3.72	<i>El Show De Los Suenos</i>	12.97
<i>Al Rojo Vivo Con Mar</i> –Tel	3.68	Game–CW	12.08
<i>Primer Impacto: Fin De Semana</i>	3.62	<i>Half & Half Weekend</i>	10.48
<i>Conteo De Noticias</i>	3.47	<i>Stargate SG-1</i>	9.41
U.S. Open tennis–Pt	3.42	<i>Casos De Familia</i> –Uni	9.24
Cheers	3.42	<i>Legend of the Seeker</i>	8.70
Republican National Convention–ABC	3.40	<i>Judge Jeanine Pirro</i>	8.37
<i>Sports Extra</i>	3.39	<i>Sabado Gigante</i> –Uni	7.10
<i>Chronicle</i>	3.35	<i>12 Corazones</i> –Tel	6.69
<i>Primer Impacto</i> –Uni	3.34	<i>One on One</i>	6.50
Summer Olympics–Aft	3.27	<i>Los Favoritos Casos/Fmla</i>	6.39
Merrill Lynch–NBC	3.27	<i>Bernie Mac Show</i>	5.46
<i>One Life to Live</i>	3.26	<i>Saturday Night Live pres</i>	4.14
<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	3.12	<i>America This Morning</i>	4.07
<i>Upfront with Mike Gousha</i>	3.11	<i>Judge Karen</i>	3.86
Democratic National Convention–ABC	3.11	<i>One Tree Hill</i>	3.55
<i>Noticiero Telemundo</i> –Tel	3.01	<i>Gossip Girl</i>	3.34
Democratic National Convention–NBC	3.01	<i>My Wife and Kids</i> –Wknd	3.20

Note. The first Ratio column is the ratio of the percentage of total McCain ad airings during a particular program to the percentage of total Obama ad airings. The second Ratio column shows the ratio of the percentage of total Obama ad airings to the percentage of total McCain ad airings. Ratios are reported only for those programs during which more than 50 total ads aired and that received advertising in more than one media market.

Kerry seemed to be playing to the base with his advertising—or at least Bush was writing off some voters who were likely to vote Democratic—given that many of the programs on which Kerry had a huge ad advantage were those with largely Black casts and presumably high numbers of Black voters watching. Among the top Kerry programs in this category were *Sanford and Son*, *The Hughleys*, *Good Times*, *The Parkers*, *Living Single*, *Martin*, and *Girlfriends*. Kerry also held high relative ad advantages during several talk shows, both daytime and late night.

Turning to Table 4, Obama, like Kerry 4 years before, emphasized advertising on programs with large Black audiences, such as *Tyler Perry's House of Payne*, *The Wayans Brothers*, and *The Jamie Foxx Show*. There were also many Spanish-language programs during which Obama held an advantage over McCain. That is not to say that McCain ignored Hispanic audiences; on some Spanish-language programs, McCain held advantages over Obama.

Although Tables 2 through 4 focus on those shows with large relative imbalances in targeting, this does not suggest that such imbalances are the norm. In fact, many ads are aired during programs that are evenly targeted by the competing campaigns. In 2000, for instance, 23% of the ads were aired during a program for which one candidate had a greater than 3 to 2 relative ad advantage. The comparable figure for 2004 was 17% and 22% in 2008. Thus, in spite of our evidence that campaigns are targeting specific audiences with their ads, there are still many programs during which both candidates advertise at fairly similar levels. The most important of these is local news, which accounts for at least 40% of ad airings in each year.

Predicting Ad Allocation

Our examination of the individual programs during which each candidate devoted disproportionate advertising was revealing; competing candidates often allocated their ad spending differently across programs. Thus, for specific sectors of the population watching specific genres of television programs, there existed one-sided—or at least imbalanced—message flows across candidates. To identify more specifically the audiences the candidates were trying to speak to, we estimated a series of ordinary least squares regression models. The first set predicts the difference in the proportion of total resources devoted to advertising during each genre (Table 5). In other words, the dependent variable is the difference measure described earlier, measured at the level of the market/genre/time period. There are five time period indicators, each indicating a 2-week period prior to election day. The omitted category is the period more than 10 weeks prior to election day. For example, one entry in this data structure might be soap operas in Milwaukee in the last 2 weeks of the election. Another might be sports programs in Bangor during the first 2 weeks of October. We restrict all analyses to market genres that have at least 50 total ads aired in that time period. The second set of models (Table 6) predicts the proportion of the Democratic candidate's ads devoted to each genre/market/time period (of total Democratic ads in that market), and the third set of models (Table 7) does the same for the Republican candidate.

The estimates reported in Table 5 suggest the campaigns were speaking to slightly different partisans in the year 2000. As the share of viewers becomes more heavily Democratic, ads placed in these genres are disproportionately sponsored by the Gore campaign. Conversely, more Republican program genres have a greater relative share of Bush-sponsored ads. The candidates, however, targeted independents similarly. Neither candidate put disproportionate levels of advertising on genres with higher turnout, or with

Table 5
Predictors of ratio of Democratic to Republican advertising in market/program genre

	2000			2004			2008		
	Coef.	SE	p	Coef.	SE	p	Coef.	SE	p
Count of Dem ads (1,000s)	2.372	0.342	.000	0.185	0.039	.000	0.308	0.070	.000
Count of Rep ads (1,000s)	-1.004	0.260	.000	-0.161	0.034	.000	-0.446	0.052	.000
Program characteristics									
% Dem-% GOP	0.405	0.222	.074	0.226	0.045	.000	-0.115	0.036	.002
% Independent	0.350	2.369	.883	2.809	0.461	.000	-0.115	0.306	.709
% Always vote	-0.026	0.221	.906	-1.000	0.174	.000	0.403	0.084	.000
% Female	-0.149	0.095	.121	0.069	0.023	.003	0.008	0.027	.768
% Black				-1.389	0.189	.000	0.259	0.102	.013
% Hispanic	-0.059	0.208	.777	-0.203	0.070	.005	0.102	0.061	.097
% Religious				0.973	0.204	.000	-0.672	0.108	.000
Local news	-0.145	0.028	.000	-0.038	0.011	.001	0.064	0.017	.000
Timing									
8-10 weeks before	-0.028	0.019	.146	-0.091	0.028	.002	-0.019	0.007	.009
6-8 weeks before	-0.012	0.018	.513	-0.029	0.008	.000	-0.033	0.007	.000
4-6 weeks before	-0.052	0.018	.006	-0.005	0.005	.339	-0.030	0.006	.000
2-4 weeks before	-0.068	0.016	.000	-0.006	0.004	.099	-0.033	0.008	.000
Last 2 weeks	0.032	0.020	.123	-0.021	0.006	.001	-0.054	0.012	.000
Market characteristics									
% Market in battleground	0.059	0.033	.074	0.020	0.012	.097	0.009	0.008	.275
% Black	0.044	0.072	.547	0.025	0.031	.420	-0.061	0.044	.163
% Hispanic	-0.076	0.049	.129	-0.024	0.024	.314	-0.033	0.026	.205
% Over 65	0.306	0.138	.031	-0.038	0.089	.672	-0.351	0.121	.005
% GOP vote in prev. elec.	-0.094	0.094	.324	0.051	0.045	.266	0.062	0.048	.194
Constant	-0.019	0.341	.956	-0.047	0.090	.601	0.113	0.107	.292
N		486			2,041			2,817	
R ²		0.534			0.173			0.203	

Note. All models clustered on media market. All percentage variables are coded 0-1.

Table 6
Predictors of ratio of Democratic advertising in market/program genre

	2000			2004			2008		
	Coef.	SE	p	Coef.	SE	p	Coef.	SE	p
Count of Dem ads (1,000s)	2.294	0.338	.000	0.169	0.034	.000	0.354	0.040	.000
Count of Rep ads (1,000s)	-0.441	0.179	.017	0.021	0.029	.459	-0.110	0.019	.000
Program characteristics									
% Dem-% GOP	-0.175	0.168	.303	-0.156	0.060	.010	-0.071	0.021	.001
% Independent	-1.233	1.618	.450	3.272	0.621	.000	2.276	0.214	.000
% Always vote	0.192	0.151	.210	-1.389	0.192	.000	0.444	0.051	.000
% Female	0.084	0.075	.269	0.413	0.025	.000	0.154	0.017	.000
% Black				-1.629	0.171	.000	0.542	0.065	.000
% Hispanic	0.010	0.138	.940	-0.034	0.083	.685	0.397	0.041	.000
% Religious				2.721	0.215	.000	0.326	0.071	.000
Local news	0.165	0.023	.000	0.182	0.013	.000	0.181	0.013	.000
Timing									
8-10 weeks before	-0.002	0.017	.899	0.008	0.026	.745	0.021	0.004	.000
6-8 weeks before	-0.010	0.015	.508	0.016	0.006	.010	0.016	0.004	.000
4-6 weeks before	-0.051	0.016	.003	0.018	0.004	.000	0.001	0.003	.816
2-4 weeks before	-0.101	0.015	.000	0.020	0.004	.000	0.003	0.004	.351
Last 2 weeks	-0.030	0.016	.073	0.027	0.006	.000	0.034	0.006	.000
Market characteristics									
% Market in battleground	0.058	0.035	.104	0.011	0.009	.207	-0.004	0.004	.402
% Black	0.083	0.069	.233	0.029	0.031	.353	-0.004	0.020	.824
% Hispanic	-0.146	0.049	.004	-0.034	0.030	.256	-0.050	0.042	.234
% Over 65	0.422	0.143	.005	-0.010	0.118	.935	0.113	0.103	.276
% GOP vote in prev. elec.	-0.015	0.104	.884	0.065	0.034	.056	0.068	0.000	.019
Constant	-0.026	0.233	.911	-0.771	0.101	.000	-0.794	0.070	.000
N		486			2,041			2,817	
R ²		0.767			0.599			0.760	

Note. All models clustered on media market. All percentage variables are coded 0-1.

Table 7
Predictors of ratio of Republican advertising in market/program genre

	2000			2004			2008		
	Coef.	SE	p	Coef.	SE	p	Coef.	SE	p
Count of Dem ads (1,000s)	-0.078	0.124	.533	-0.016	0.023	.478	0.047	0.053	.379
Count of Rep ads (1,000s)	0.563	0.137	.000	0.182	0.021	.000	0.336	0.045	.000
Program characteristics									
% Dem-% GOP	-0.580	0.103	.000	-0.383	0.035	.000	0.044	0.032	.176
% Independent	-1.583	1.179	.186	0.462	0.495	.353	2.390	0.219	.000
% Always vote	0.218	0.135	.114	-0.388	0.114	.001	0.041	0.063	.517
% Female	0.233	0.062	.000	0.344	0.021	.000	0.146	0.020	.000
% Black				-0.241	0.127	.061	0.283	0.076	.000
% Hispanic	0.070	0.110	.531	0.169	0.062	.007	0.295	0.043	.000
% Religious				1.748	0.157	.000	0.998	0.082	.000
Local news	0.310	0.020	.000	0.220	0.013	.000	0.117	0.014	.000
Timing									
8-10 weeks before	0.026	0.009	.005	0.100	0.010	.000	0.040	0.006	.000
6-8 weeks before	0.001	0.008	.862	0.045	0.004	.000	0.050	0.006	.000
4-6 weeks before	0.002	0.008	.850	0.023	0.003	.000	0.030	0.006	.000
2-4 weeks before	-0.033	0.010	.002	0.026	0.004	.000	0.036	0.008	.000
Last 2 weeks	-0.061	0.009	.000	0.049	0.006	.000	0.088	0.011	.000
Market characteristics									
% Market in battleground	-0.001	0.018	.942	-0.008	0.008	.312	-0.013	0.007	.090
% Black	0.039	0.051	.445	0.004	0.029	.889	0.057	0.039	.149
% Hispanic	-0.070	0.030	.027	-0.010	0.026	.703	-0.017	0.031	.576
% Over 65	0.116	0.106	.279	0.028	0.081	.729	0.464	0.104	.000
% GOP vote in prev. elec.	0.079	0.059	.190	0.015	0.033	.657	0.006	0.036	.862
Constant	-0.007	0.196	.971	-0.723	0.084	.000	-0.907	0.078	.000
N		486			2,041			2,817	
R ²		0.908			0.837			0.514	

Note. All models clustered on media market. All percentage variables are coded 0-1.

strong female and Hispanic audiences.¹⁴ On the other hand, Bush did place relatively more advertising on local news programs.¹⁵ The model also shows that Gore advertised disproportionately more than Bush in media markets with a higher percentage of those over age 65, and Gore tended to spend more than Bush in markets with a greater number of battleground voters.

Tables 6 and 7 allow us to see the ad buy strategies of each campaign separately, as opposed to the strategies of the competing campaigns relative to each other. Table 6 shows that Gore was not specifically targeting any partisan group, although he did buy at greater rates on local news than in other genres. Table 7 demonstrates that Bush put an even higher share of ads on local news (hence the positive effect in Table 5), and tended to avoid genres with higher Democratic audiences. All told, the results suggest that one particular feature of the 2000 air war was a more focused appeal to Republican viewers on the part of Bush, with Gore doing less to target particular partisans.

Returning to Table 5, there were also partisan differences in the audiences to which the candidates were speaking in 2004. Indeed, we would expect to find this pattern in 2004 given the Republicans' new use of media-targeting research based on consumer surveys.¹⁶ To that end, a larger relative share of Bush than Kerry ads were placed on programs with more Republican viewers and with a higher likelihood of voting. Conversely, Kerry had the advantage on shows with greater Democratic audiences and a lower likelihood of turning out, and he put disproportionately more ads in genres with a higher share of self-identified independents. On the other hand, Kerry invested relatively less than Bush in programs with large audiences of Hispanics and Blacks, and he devoted disproportionately more advertising than Bush to genres with a greater percentage of religious viewers.¹⁷ Tables 6 and 7 illuminate further some differences between the candidates. Most importantly, Kerry placed fewer ads during programs with more Democratic viewers, and Bush did the same, though more aggressively, judging from the size of the coefficients (and the results in Table 5). Bush also appeared not to target genres with greater numbers of independents. All told, then, Kerry seemed to be speaking to a fairly diverse audience, whereas Bush (as in 2000) seemed far more focused on speaking to Republican voters.

In 2008, McCain devoted relatively more resources to programs with a large religious audience, and Obama placed more ads (relative to McCain) during programs with larger audiences of Blacks and Hispanics (see Table 5). But contrary to our findings from 2000 and 2004, the Democratic nominee in 2008 actually devoted relatively more resources to programs that featured larger Republican audiences than did the Republican nominee. The Obama campaign also placed disproportionately more ads during programs with higher turnout than did the McCain campaign. These programs with high-turnout audiences generally attract a greater proportion of Republican viewers. Finally, when looking at Tables 6 and 7, we see that both candidates were speaking to independents (because the coefficients are roughly the same size, they offset each other, making the coefficient in Table 5 statistically insignificant), and McCain did not target genres with Republican audiences any more than genres with Democratic audiences.

As a whole, our findings suggest that different types of citizens were exposed to different ratios of Republican and Democratic advertising and that this relationship varied across campaigns. To better visualize one aspect of this, we created a series of predicted effects, varying partisan viewership in each year and holding all other control variables constant.¹⁸ Figure 2 demonstrates that Kerry and Gore put more relative focus on shows with a strong Democratic bias in viewership, and Bush did the same for genres with more Republicans in 2000 and 2004. In 2008, though, this pattern reverses, with Obama having more of an

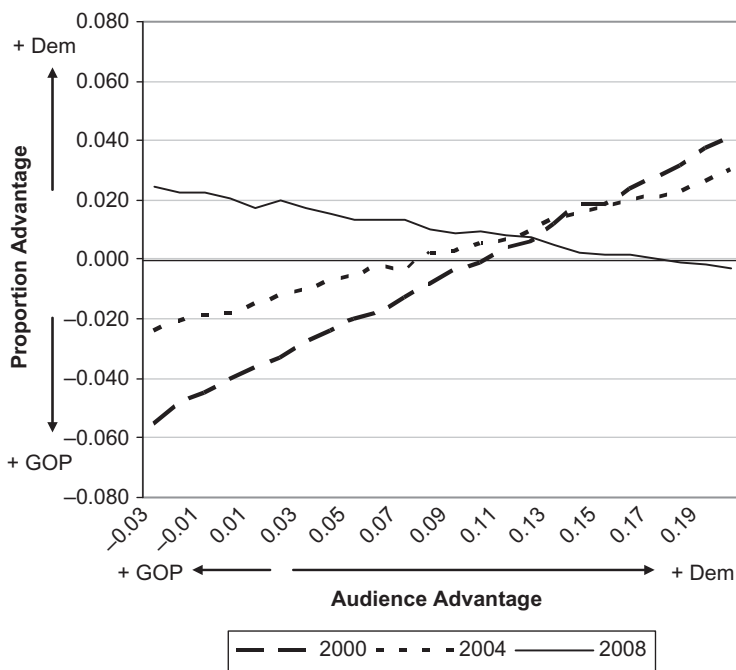


Figure 2. Audience partisanship and predicted democratic ad advantage. Predicted effects from results in Table 6, holding all control variables constant.

ad advantage during programs with larger numbers of Republicans, while the candidates were at parity during programs with larger Democratic audiences.

A couple of other findings from Table 5 are worth noting as well. First, the percentage of the media market in a battleground state marginally mattered for relative ad allocation in 2000 and 2004, with Democrats focusing on those media markets that are mostly encompassed within battleground states. Certainly, this pattern has been noted anecdotally before, with the Bush campaign spending heavily in some markets, even if only to reach a small number of battleground state voters. In 2008, however, McCain and Obama allocated advertising similarly in those markets that straddled battleground states. Second, how well the party's candidate did in a media market in the previous election had no influence on ad allocation in 2000, 2004, or 2008.

Our model estimates also allow us to speak to the timing of advertising. As noted earlier, there are five indicators, each indicating a 2-week period prior to election day. The omitted category, which serves as our basis for comparison, is the period more than 10 weeks prior to election day. In all three election years, almost all of the coefficients carry with them negative signs, indicating that Democrats were disproportionately more likely to put advertising early in the race, while Republicans were more likely to put their advertising in the fall. Why this party difference? It probably has more to do with the context of each race rather than inherent differences in party strategies. For instance, in 2004, due to the timing of the two parties' conventions, Kerry had to stretch his general election public funding over 3 months, while Bush only had to stretch his over 2 months. This gave Bush the opportunity to air a greater relative share of his ads during the fall campaign. And in 2008, McCain had fewer resources than Obama (and his Internet-fundraising machine), compelling the GOP nominee to put a greater proportionate share of ads later in the election (with the hope of a last-minute surge in support).

Of course, one might expect that campaigns might allocate their advertising differently at different times during the race. Specifically, it makes sense that candidates would be focused on getting the base out to vote during the last weeks of the campaign. A thorough test of this is beyond the scope of this article, but we did estimate a series of models (not shown) in each year for various time frames. The results in 2008, for example, suggest that Obama ads reached independents in the final month of the campaign but were more likely to reach program genres with a higher number of Republicans in September. On the other hand, McCain's ads reached an audience of political independents consistently through the fall campaign. In 2004, the Bush campaign consistently aired advertising during programs with greater shares of Republican viewers, while Kerry's ads reached a wide variety of voters in the final weeks of the campaign, a shift from earlier in the fall when his ads were disproportionately seen by independents and Democrats. To be sure, more work is needed to fully explore such dynamics, as these results could indicate a bit more volatility in who sees ads than suggested by our earlier models.

Discussion and Implications

The evidence presented here suggests that some campaigns—at least at the presidential level—are more likely than others to advertise on programs whose audiences have certain demographics. Campaigns do not simply go to a television station, asking merely to buy a certain number of gross ratings points (GRPs). Instead, they ask for a certain number of GRPs during specific television programs in order to appeal more efficiently to the audiences they want to reach. Thus, a form of microtargeting has increasingly entered into the realm of political advertising buys. In fact, a better word for this phenomenon might be “macrotargeting” given that groups of individuals, not specific individuals, are targeted by these ad buy strategies.¹⁹

Ultimately, our study makes an important contribution in demonstrating that the decision to air an ad during a particular program is neither random nor characterized by identical ad deployment tactics across candidates. The upshot is that dissimilar audiences—defined by the types of television programs they watch—were being exposed to imbalanced message flows from the competing candidates, thus increasing the potential for ads to persuade. Even someone who lived in a media market in which the candidates aired the exact same number of ads may not have been exposed to a balanced message flow. Indeed, some individuals watching some types of programs may have seen twice as many Democratic candidate ads as Republican ads, while some individuals in the same media market watching different programs may have seen twice as many Republican ads.

Knowing that different campaigns allocate their advertising across television programs—and that these allocations result in imbalanced flows of information—is a key first step to understanding the impact of political advertising on the choices voters make and, ultimately, who wins elections. Future research on the topic, though, should dig deeper, considering first why decisions to target certain programs with certain audiences vary across years and whether these decisions are predictable. Second, it should examine whether efforts to target ads to certain programs are ultimately successful in locating a persuasion or mobilizing effect.

As our analysis has shown, the Bush television campaign in 2004 was somewhat different from its 2000 campaign, most obviously in its increased emphasis on sports programming (though both focused on program genres with large Republican audiences). Meanwhile, the 2004 Kerry campaign looked much like the 2000 Gore campaign, though the former placed more ads on shows with higher shares of pure independents.

The pattern of ad buys was different in 2008. The syndicated consumer research used by the Bush campaign in 2004 was also purchased and analyzed by Democratic media firms, including the firm GMMB, which did Kerry's media buying and was then hired by the Obama campaign and the Democratic National Committee for the 2008 cycle. The McCain campaign, lacking Obama's financial resources, was not able to extensively invest in expensive macrotargeting and was thus forced to buy less expensive gross ratings points on daytime and other dayparts that have a higher percentage of Democratic voters. This had the effect of Democratic program genres seeing greater shares of McCain ads and Republican program genres seeing greater shares of Obama ads.

As mass media audiences continue to fragment, political advertisers will increasingly turn to macrotargeting methods to deliver specific messages to more narrowly defined audiences. In 2012, both the Democratic and Republican presidential media planners will surely use macrotargeting techniques, as will an increasing number of congressional and statewide campaigns. A preliminary study of political primetime advertising in September and October of 2010 shows evidence of macrotargeting in statewide U.S. Senate and gubernatorial campaigns (Parker, 2010). Republican campaigns were much more likely to place advertising on primetime college and professional football games with high-turnout Republican-leaning viewers, while Democrats were more likely to buy edgier sitcoms like *30 Rock* and *Two and a Half Men*, which research indicates have high-turnout Democratic-skewing audiences. When it came to comedy, Republican media buyers were more comfortable with the family audiences for *America's Funniest Home Videos*. Some programs had high appeal for both parties, including *Dancing with the Stars*, which—despite Sarah Palin's presence in the audience—attracted more Democratic and Republican spot insertions than any other primetime show.

In short, the fundamental trends we identify in this article are likely to accelerate in future years. Based on our discussions with media professionals in both parties, it is clear that the use of media macrotargeting in political television advertising will be even more prevalent in the 2012 presidential campaign than it was in 2008 or 2004. And, as we have argued, these trends have important implications for the study of political advertising. Future ad buying strategies will likely result in a continued growth in one-sided flows of information, a necessary condition for finding advertising effects that was once considered rare in presidential elections. These new techniques, although providing scholars with additional leverage for finding advertising effects, will also make their task more difficult because the increasingly non-random nature of ad targeting will force scholars to understand and model both the goals and targets of advertising.

Notes

1. Figures come from TNSMI/CMAG as reported by CNN.com (Preston, 2007).
2. The 2008 figure comes from TNSMI/CMAG as reported by *Broadcasting and Cable* (Atkinson, 2008). The 2010 dollar amount comes from Kantar Media/CMAG as reported by *Advertising Age* (Wheaton, 2010).
3. Buying ads on local television instead of on the national networks was first done to any large degree in the 1988 presidential campaign. By 1992, almost all of Clinton's ad buys were on local television.
4. These numbers come from our coding of the Wisconsin Advertising Project data. The trend away from local news broadcasts is not indicative of a shift toward other more traditional ad buy outlets, as the proportion of ads purchased by presidential candidates during talk shows and game shows (both popular genres for political ads) was roughly constant across years.

5. This same mobilization approach also characterizes much of campaigns' increasing Web presence. Because political sites such as partisan blogs and candidate Web sites tend to be visited by core supporters (Hindman, 2008), candidates can often tailor messages and mobilization or fund-raising appeals directly to particular user profiles (Kaye, 2009).

6. This statement depends, of course, on how you define an independent voter. If you rely on the simple question of whether a survey respondent self-identifies as a Republican, Democrat, or independent, the latter group represents about 30% of the electorate. As political scientists well know, however, many of these respondents lean more heavily toward one of the two major parties (Keith et al., 1992). This leaves about 1 in 10 voters, on average, who are truly independent of any party attachments. But in either case, this slice of the electorate is crucial to the outcome of any close election.

7. Our comparison of the Nielsen data with the TNSMI/CMAG data in the 100 media markets in which they overlapped in 2004 reveals near perfect agreement on the number of presidential ads aired in each market. It should also be noted that both sources of data only track broadcast network purchases and exclude local cable buys. Because cable channels have a more differentiated audience compared to broadcast stations, local cable buys may be even more highly targeted by presidential candidates than broadcast television.

8. We were able to assign most ad airings to a specific genre: 92% in 2000 and 94% in 2004 and 2008. Most of the programs that could not be assigned likely had very few viewers. Many were locally produced, such as *Atlanta's Best Homes* or *New Hampshire's Business*, and many others were one-time events, such as coverage of a Puerto Rican Day parade.

9. Although this approach is not ideal, we do not believe that the characteristics of the audience for particular types of television programs would have changed much over the course of 4 years, and indeed our comparison of 2004 with 2008 data confirms that intuition. For instance, the average absolute change across genres in the percentage of viewers who were Democrats between those two elections was 2.1 percentage points the average absolute change across genres in the percentage of viewers who were Black was 1.4 percentage points; and the average absolute change across genres in the percentage of viewers who were religious was 1.2 percentage points.

10. We calculated this by assigning each county in the United States to a media market (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2008). Because some markets cross state boundaries, some of the market's population is located in nonbattleground states. We aggregated the county population by state for each market, getting the percentage of the population that lies in the competitive state.

11. We purchased county-level election data from Dave Leip's Atlas of Presidential Elections (<http://uselectionatlas.org/>).

12. Court programming was not one of the genres asked about in the 2004 survey, but in the 2008 survey, the audience for court shows was about 22 percentage points more Democratic than Republican.

13. A couple of methodological points are in order. First, we report only those programs during which the candidates combined aired more than 50 spots. While a 3 to 1 ad advantage may look impressive, it does not tell us much substantively about the candidates' relative allocation of ads if only four ads in total were aired during the program. Second, we eliminated those programs that had advertising in only a single media market. This was done so as not to focus in on those local programs that aired only in a market in which one candidate was on the air. For instance, we might observe a 50 to 0 ad advantage for one candidate on a local sports program, but the importance of that is questionable if only one candidate was on the air in that media market.

14. For these models in 2000, we only have data on the top 75 media markets, which explains the smaller sample size in that year than in 2004 and 2008. And because we restrict the analysis to genres with at least 50 airings in the unit of analysis, the variables tapping proportion of Black viewers and religious viewers are dropped because of collinearity.

15. We include a fixed effect for local news because candidates still put between 40% and 50% of their ads in this single genre.

16. Many portray the Bush campaign as abandoning swing voters in 2004 to focus on the base, but it should be noted that Rove (2010) challenges that point (pp. 70–74), suggesting that Bush's campaign pursued both base and independent voters.

17. The finding for Black viewership is a bit deceptive. As we demonstrated in Table 3, Kerry had huge relative advantages over Bush on shows with largely Black casts. By our coding of shows to genres, however, these programs are assigned to the larger category of comedies, which had Black audiences at about the national average. If we had viewer demographics at the program level, the effect of race might change.

18. Effects were simulated using Clarify for Stata.

19. Microtargeting, as noted, refers to specific research methodologies used by both parties to classify millions of individual voters for the purpose of direct contact through the mail, by telephone, or precinct walking lists. Macrotargeting deals with mass television and radio and looks to increase the cost-efficiency of such "shotgun media."

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Appendix: Description of Scarborough Data

Scarborough's sample universe includes all persons ages 18 and above in the continental United States, sampled by designated market area (DMA; DMA is a registered trademark of The Nielsen Company.) Scarborough uses a two-stage probability sample design. In the first stage a random sample of households is selected within each DMA. In the second stage a random respondent is selected in each sample household.

Interviews begin with a telephone survey in which respondents are asked about newspaper readership, radio listening, Internet usage, newspaper and other media-related Web site usage, cable and satellite access, and extended demographics. In the next phase of data collection, each respondent receives by mail a self-administered consumer survey, covering shopping and lifestyle habits, and a television diary in which the person is asked to record television viewing for an entire week.

Special efforts are made to improve the representativeness of the survey. Up to 16 attempts are made to contact sampled households. Respondents who are Internet users are given the option of completing the mail survey online if they have not responded to paper survey mailings. Special incentives and extra contacts are used in media markets with a large percentage of Blacks or Hispanics. For Spanish speakers, interviews are conducted in Spanish and Spanish-language surveys, letters, and diaries are used. Respondents can also contact a toll-free helpline in Spanish or English. Finally, data are weighted on geography, age within gender, household size, education, race, and Hispanic ethnicity and projected to population totals using Claritas universe estimates.