# Political Campaigns' Use of E-mail vs. Television Advertising

Taewoo Kang

Correspondence: Taewoo Kang, Siena College, USA.

## Abstract

This research explores how political campaigns use e-mail and television advertising differently. The data consist of 267,675 television ad airings sponsored, and 2,164 e-mails sent, by the forty-seven U.S. Senate candidates who used both communication channels during the 2014 general election cycle. Major findings include that fundraising requests and get-out-the-vote messages were more commonly found in campaign e-mails than in television ads; that campaigns were more likely to use partisan appeals in their e-mails while they often used bipartisan appeals in their television ads; and that campaigns sometimes mentioned issues owned by the other party more frequently than their opponents did when using television ads whereas they tended to focus on issues owned by their party in their e-mails. Campaigns' use of multiple communication channels within a single election cycle should be monitored more systematically and thoroughly.

**Keywords**: campaigns, advertising, e-mail, television

## 1. Introduction

Campaigns pursue multiple strategies simultaneously. During an election cycle, a campaign can portray its candidate as a bipartisan consensus builder *and* as an ideological purist who will not compromise the party's core principles. Similarly, at a given moment, a campaign may bombard its supporters' inboxes with fundraising requests *and* air issue-based TV ads targeting swing voters. A campaign may even present multiple versions of "number one on my agenda" at a single time point – telling its supporters, for example, that the fight against climate change is its top priority and promising others that the campaign is first and foremost about cutting taxes.

Campaigns can tell different, at times inconsistent, stories simultaneously partly because they can target voters via various communication channels. For example, a candidate may believe that her e-mail recipients are a homogenous group of strong supporters and that those watching the campaign's television advertisements (aired during a local news program) are registered voters who are ideologically less extreme and/or more persuadable. In other words, campaigns understand that each communication channel or platform tends to be associated with different user groups, and they adjust their strategies accordingly.

As the new media environment provides campaigns with more targeting opportunities, scholars from various disciplines have examined the many ways in which campaigns construct their messages differently across communication channels and platforms (Ballard et al., 2016; Bode et al., 2016; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011; Fowler et al., 2021; Hillygus & Shields, 2008; Kang et al., 2018; Stromer-Galley, 2019). Comparing e-mail with television advertising provides a theoretically interesting opportunity to understand what campaigns want to achieve when they are communicating almost exclusively with their supporters and what they emphasize when they have a chance to speak to swing voters. Admittedly, this approach cannot address how campaigns target voters via other channels and platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, direct mail, and etc.).

Campaigns' main target, when using television advertising, is swing voters. Political campaigns air most of their advertisements during local news programs, rather than focus on TV programs watched by more partisan voters, which suggests that their main goal is to persuade, not to mobilize those who already support their candidates (Lovett & Peress, 2015; Ridout et al., 2012). When they use e-mails, however, campaigns tend to target those who already support their candidates. For example, campaign e-mails typically focus on fundraising (Epstein & Broxmeyer, 2020) as people who visit a campaign's website and receive campaign e-mails are more likely to be campaign supporters (Druckman et al., 2009; Williams & Trammell, 2005).

The first hypothesis (H1), therefore, is the following:

*H1: Fundraising requests and get-out-the-vote messages should be more common in campaign e-mails than in television ads.*

Next, campaigns may understand that those who are highly involved in politics have strong feelings towards both sides of the political spectrum (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Krupnikov & Ryan, 2022; Mason, 2015). As a result, campaigns will often invoke in-group favoritism and out-group animosity by making party labels salient. This is more likely when speaking to e-mail recipients. The strategy, however, should be less effective (or even counterproductive) for television advertising as swing voters do not identify strongly with a political party. Therefore, in their television ads, campaigns may often emphasize their bipartisanship, mentioning the other party positively (e.g., "The other party is right on Issue X" or "I will work with Democrats and Republicans to solve this important problem."). In theory, it should also be more common for campaigns to mention their own party negatively in their television ads.

Accordingly, I expect the following:

*H2: When using e-mail, campaigns are more likely to be partisan in their mention of Democrats and Republicans. Mentioning Democrats and Republicans in a bipartisan way (e.g., mentioning the opponent's party positively) should be more common in television ads.*

A previous study shows that campaigns emphasize different issues in their e-mails and television ads (Kang et al., 2018). In addition to such differences in overall issue agendas, however, the way in which campaigns deal with the issues owned (Petrocik, 1996) by the other party should be different between e-mail and television advertising. When it comes to television advertising, campaigns are often pressured to engage in dialogue with their opponents as television viewers are exposed to both Democratic and Republican ads. For example, when "a Republican runs an advertisement claiming her Democratic opponent 'wants to raise your taxes,' the Democrat may respond with an advertisement pledging not to raise taxes" (Kaplan et al., 2006, 730). By contrast, most e-mail recipients are exposed to the messages from their favored side only (Shearer, 2016), so campaigns do not need to think of e-mail campaigning as a dialogue. In other words, campaigns are less likely to feel compelled to respond to what their opponents say in their e-mails.

Therefore, the third hypothesis is the following:

*H3: When using e-mail, campaigns are more likely to focus on the issues owned by their parties. Mentioning the issues owned by the opponent's party should be more common in television ads.*

## 2. Data and Methods

The data consist of 267,675 television ad airings sponsored, and 2,164 e-mails sent, by the forty-seven U.S. Senate candidates who used both communication channels during the 2014 general election cycle. Data on television ads come from the Wesleyan Media Project, which provides detailed tracking data on when the ads were aired and where they were placed during the 2014 elections. The WMP coding team double coded 1,939 ads, and intercoder reliability was high (e.g., % Agreements on the issue variables used in this study were above 90%). Data on campaign e-mails were collected and coded through the following steps. First, based on Ballotpedia, I identified all major party candidates running for the U.S. Senate in 2014. On September 7, 2014, I visited each candidate's campaign website and signed up to receive campaign e-mails. An account with a fake name was used during the sign-up process and the account was used for data collection only. For example, I never used the account to donate money or send a message, which could in theory affect the campaign behavior. In most cases, the e-mail sign-up was followed by a verification request (typically with a welcome message), which I responded within 10 minutes.

Below, I explain how the key variables used in this research are coded. Beginning with the descriptive statistics and OLS analysis presented in Tables 1 and 2, *Number of E-mail* and *Number of Ads* were counted at the candidate level. *Spending* data come from the Center for Responsive Politics. I relied on the Rothenberg and Gonzales Political Report (pure toss-ups coded 5, tilting races coded 4, leaning races coded 3, races with one party favored coded 2, and safe seats coded 1) to code *Competitiveness*. Candidates' *Name, Party, State, and Incumbent Status* were coded based on their Ballotpedia webpages. *Population* was coded based on the U.S. Census data (i.e., Estimates of Resident Population Change for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico).

*Fundraising* was coded 1 if a message makes a fundraising request (e.g., "Making a donation is the best thing you can do right now to save our Senate seat."), and 0 if the request is absent. *Get-Out-The-Vote* was coded 1 if a message asks the e-mail recipient/TV viewer to vote on Election Day or vote early (e.g., "Early voting has begun…Vote early until November 3rd"), and 0 if such an appeal is absent. A campaign's mention of Democrats and Republicans was coded on four separate variables: *Democrats Mentioned Positively* (0 or 1), *Democrats Mentioned Negatively* (0 or 1), *Republicans Mentioned Positively* (0 or 1), and *Republicans Mentioned Negatively* (0 or 1).

Issues were coded as binary variables first, and then each was weighted to reflect the relative importance of issue mentions. For example, if a message mentions only one issue (say, *Budget Deficit*), the variable *Budget Deficit* was coded as 1. If a message mentions *Budget Deficit* and *Medicare*, then *Budget Deficit* was coded as 0.5.

To test Hypothesis 1, I estimated ordinary least squares regression models predicting fundraising requests and get-out-the-vote messages, using the communication channel (E-mail vs. Ad) as the independent variable. To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, I estimated ordinary least squares regression models predicting the mentions of Democrats, Republicans, issues owned by the Democratic Party, issues owned by the Republican Party, and an issue on which the two parties were more competitive. Based on a previous study on partisan issue ownership (Holian, 2006), I choose *Taxes*, *Budget Deficit*, and *Iraq* as issues owned by the Republican Party. *Medicare*, *Social Security*, and *Environment* were chosen as Democratic-owned issues. I also included *Jobs* as an issue that is not owned by either political party. The issue was identified based on a 2014 Gallup poll (See Table A1) which suggested that the public perception of party strength on "the availability of good jobs" was evenly divided at that time (44% of the respondents reported that Democrats were stronger on the issue and 45% mentioned that Republicans would deal with the issue better).

## 3. Results

Before reporting how campaigns constructed their messages differently between e-mail and television advertising, I first present the basic characteristics of the 2014 U.S. Senate candidates who used both channels. First, Democratic candidates used e-mails more frequently. Nine out of ten candidates with the highest amounts of e-mails were Democrats (Table 1). As reported in Table 2, the partisan difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level ($p = 0.002$). On average, Democratic candidates sent 32.41 more e-mails than Republican candidates did. By contrast, party affiliation of candidate was not a significant predictor of how many candidate-sponsored television ads were aired ($p = 0.133$). Second, candidates in competitive races sent higher number of e-mails. As the competitiveness of the race increases by 1 unit (e.g., from safe seats to races with one party favored), the number of e-mails increased by 9.69 ($p = 0.027$). The competitiveness of the race was also a significant predictor of the number of television ads. One unit increase in competitiveness was associated with a 1010.33 increase in the number of the ads ($p = 0.003$). Third, spending, either measured as per capita (not reported here) or as absolute amount, is not a significant predictor of the number of e-mails. By contrast, campaigns with more resources aired more television ads ($p < 0.0001$) although per capita spending was not a significant predictor. In other words, campaigns with fewer resources were able to compete more equally with the better-resourced campaigns in terms of e-mail campaigning, but money played a more important role in television advertising. This is understandable because the cost of sending an additional e-mail is close to zero while the same cannot be said about airing an additional ad on television. Population size and incumbent status were not significant predictors of the two dependent variables, controlling for other factors (Table 2). Next, the current models explain the number of television ads ($R^2 = 0.72$) better than the number of e-mails ($R^2 = 0.33$), which implies that future studies may need to consider an additional set of variables to explain campaigns' use of e-mail. Lastly, as reported in Figure 1, both the number of e-mails and the number of ads increased as Election Day approached while what might be called "the weekend effect" (fewer ads on Saturdays and Sundays) is much more pronounced in the case of ads. When it comes to television advertising, the fact that the cost and availability of ad spots, as well as how many people will be home watching TV, vary between weekdays and weekends may affect campaigns' decision on when to air their ads while these factors should be less relevant for e-mail campaigning.

Table 1. Campaign Characteristics – U.S. Senate Candidates in 2014

| Name | E-mail | Ad | Spending | Party | State | Inc. | Comp. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jeanne Shaheen | 159 | 5,459 | 16436371 | D | NH | Yes | 2 |
| Michelle Nunn | 123 | 13,897 | 16063248 | D | GA | No | 2 |
| Kay Hagan | 109 | 15,116 | 24851013 | D | NC | Yes | 4 |
| Bruce Braley | 108 | 8,560 | 12068095 | D | IA | No | 5 |
| Mark Udall | 96 | 9,293 | 20463869 | D | CO | Yes | 4 |
| Mark Pryor | 96 | 8,060 | 14578504 | D | AR | Yes | 4 |
| Tom Udall | 94 | 6,657 | 8736822 | D | NM | Yes | 1 |
| Pat Roberts | 91 | 4,128 | 8113419 | R | KS | Yes | 4 |
| Mark Warner | 81 | 11,669 | 18114108 | D | VA | Yes | 2 |
| Mark Begich | 81 | 7,087 | 11082246 | D | AK | Yes | 4 |
| Gary Peters | 78 | 7,084 | 10289555 | D | MI | No | 3 |
| Thom Tillis | 72 | 6,869 | 10513963 | R | NC | No | 4 |
| Ed Gillespie | 71 | 7,708 | 7875545 | R | VA | No | 2 |
| Natalie Tennant | 67 | 2,911 | 3499419 | D | WV | No | 2 |
| Scott Brown | 66 | 4,118 | 9163652 | R | NH | No | 2 |
| Rick Weiland | 61 | 4,695 | 2314172 | D | SD | No | 2 |
| Shenna Bellows | 60 | 3,492 | 2335587 | D | ME | No | 1 |
| Travis Childers | 57 | 761 | 668975 | D | MS | No | 1 |
| Jeff Merkley | 45 | 8,035 | 11147553 | D | OR | Yes | 2 |
| Mary Landrieu | 39 | 14,559 | 19969352 | D | LA | Yes | 5 |
| David Perdue | 39 | 5,361 | 13796681 | R | GA | No | 2 |
| Tom Cotton | 39 | 4,576 | 13948938 | R | AR | No | 4 |
| Alison Grimes | 36 | 13,440 | 18829908 | D | KY | No | 3 |
| Allen Weh | 34 | 2,710 | 3630413 | R | NM | No | 1 |
| Dan Sullivan | 33 | 5,928 | 8048965 | R | AK | No | 4 |
| Ben Sasse | 31 | 1,540 | 5864653 | R | NE | No | 1 |
| Dick Durbin | 29 | 4,992 | 12614224 | D | IL | Yes | 1 |
| Gordon Ball | 25 | 852 | 971372 | D | TN | No | 1 |
| Cory Gardner | 24 | 6,011 | 12490384 | R | CO | No | 4 |
| Mitch McConnell | 23 | 16,791 | 30435557 | R | KY | Yes | 3 |
| Mike Rounds | 21 | 1,677 | 5176534 | R | SD | No | 2 |
| Bill Cassidy | 20 | 10,169 | 14655887 | R | LA | No | 5 |
| David Domina | 19 | 18 | 1227205 | D | NE | No | 1 |
| Amanda Curtis | 17 | 1,219 | 968388 | D | MT | No | 1 |
| Lamar Alexander | 16 | 2,301 | 9378379 | R | TN | Yes | 1 |
| Susan Collins | 15 | 5,091 | 5563101 | R | ME | Yes | 1 |
| Chris Coons | 14 | 1,084 | 8958014 | D | DE | Yes | 1 |
| Thad Cochran | 13 | 1,470 | 7868305 | R | MS | Yes | 1 |
| Joni Ernst | 11 | 9,360 | 11913212 | R | IA | No | 5 |
| Al Franken | 10 | 6,826 | 31908222 | D | MN | Yes | 2 |
| Jack Reed | 10 | 1,684 | 4649761 | D | RI | Yes | 1 |
| Brad Hutto | 9 | 473 | 522454 | D | SC | Yes | 1 |
| Jeff Bell | 8 | 98 | 599118 | R | NJ | No | 1 |
| Tim Scott | 7 | 1,248 | 4384151 | R | SC2 | Yes | 1 |
| Shelley Capito | 3 | 8,133 | 8779918 | R | WV | No | 2 |
| Steve Daines | 2 | 3,759 | 6668759 | R | MT | No | 1 |
| Lindsey Graham | 2 | 706 | 11464087 | R | SC | No | 1 |

Notes: Inc. refers to incumbent. Comp. refers to competitiveness.

Table 2. OLS Predictors of Number of Television Ads and E-mails

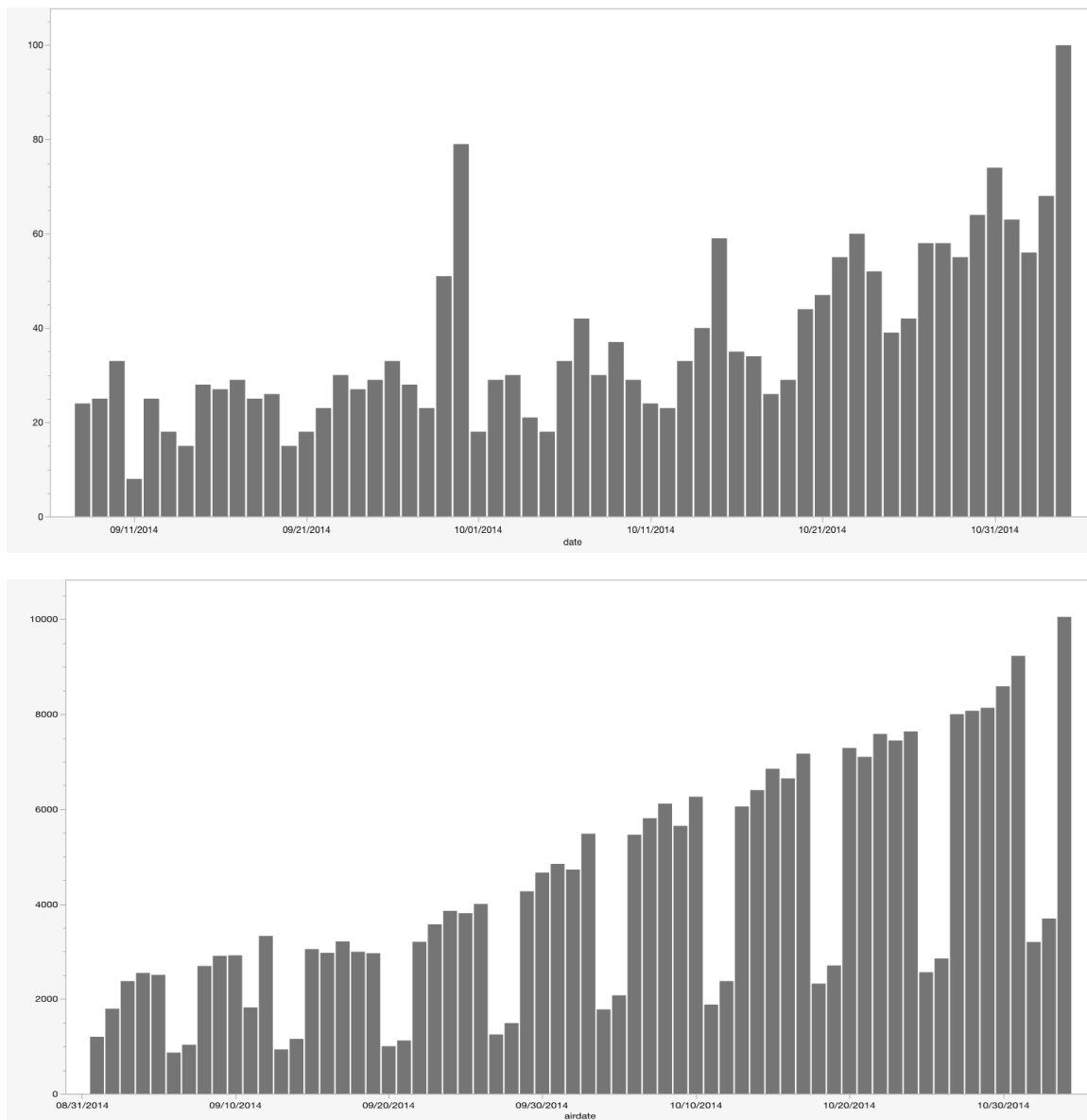| IVs | DV = N of TV Ads | | | DV = N of E-mails | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coef. | SE | $p$ | Coef. | SE | $p$ |
| Spending ($) | <.000 | <.000 | <.0001 | <.000 | <.000 | 0.989 |
| Population (2014) | <.000 | <.000 | 0.321 | <.000 | <.000 | 0.461 |
| Competitiveness (1-5) | 1010.327 | 313.532 | 0.003 | 9.686 | 4.224 | 0.027 |
| Incumbent | -711.664 | 841.710 | 0.403 | 1.087 | 11.340 | 0.924 |
| Democrat | 1137.869 | 742.047 | 0.133 | 32.405 | 9.998 | 0.002 |
| Intercept | -1156.373 | 919.715 | 0.216 | 0.867 | 12.391 | 0.945 |
| $N$ | 47 | | | 47 | | |
| $R^2$ | 0.7236 | | | 0.3282 | | |

Figure 1. Number of E-mails (Top) & Ads (Bottom) by Date

Next, I compare the content of the e-mails with that of the television ads. First, as expected (H1), fundraising requests and get-out-the-vote messages were more common in e-mails than in television ads. Specifically, 67% of campaign e-mails specifically asked the recipient to donate to the campaign while not a single ad solicited campaign contributions (Table 3). The difference is much larger when I include the e-mail messages that feature a "donate" button (e.g., "Click here to donate $27") but do not mention fundraising specifically (e.g., "Making a donation is the best thing you can do right now to save our Senate seat."). In other words, the current analysis underestimates the frequency of fundraising e-mails. Television ads can be, and are being, used for fundraising in some contexts (e.g., UNICEF TV commercials), but almost never in American politics. The finding that the 2014 U.S. Senate campaigns focused heavily on fundraising in their e-mails should not surprise anyone studying political campaigns, and it is consistent with the previous findings from the presidential campaigns (Epstein & Broxmeyer, 2020). It is also clear that campaigns were more likely to urge people to vote in their emails than in their television ads ($p < 0.0001$). This may result from the beliefs held by campaigns that the e-mail recipients are a homogenous group who will vote for the correct candidate while the vote choice of those who are forced to watch a political commercial on TV is less predictable. In short, the first hypothesis (i.e., fundraising requests and get-out-the-vote messages should be more common in campaign e-mails than in television ads) is supported by the current analysis.

Table 3. OLS Predictors of Fundraising Request and Get-Out-The-Vote (E-mail vs. Ad)

| DVs | Coef. | SE | p | $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fundraising Request | 0.670 | 0.001 | <.0001 | 0.668 |
| Get-Out-The-Vote | 0.105 | 0.003 | <.0001 | 0.006 |

Notes: Independent variable is E-mail (vs. Ad). Intercepts are not reported here. N=269,837.

Second, as expected, campaigns were more likely to mention their own party positively in their e-mails while they often mentioned the other party positively in their television ads. Table 4 reports the results from ordinary least squares regression models with the communication channel (E-mail vs. Ad) as the independent variable and four types of party mentions as the dependent variables. A positive coefficient in the table means that the dependent variable (e.g., mentioning Democrats in a positive way) was present more often in e-mails, and a negative coefficient means that the dependent variable was present more often in television ads. Democrats mentioned their party more positively in their e-mails (Coef. = 0.108, $p < 0.0001$) and Republicans behaved the same way (Coef. = 0.209, $p < 0.0001$). Democrats were more likely to mention Republicans in a positive manner in their television ads than in their e-mails (Coef. = -0.028, $p < 0.0001$). Similarly, Republicans often mentioned Democrats positively in their television ads although the relationship was not significant at the 95% confidence level (Coef. = -0.006, $p < 0.0768$). Both Democrats (Coef. = 0.118, $p < 0.0001$) and Republicans (Coef. = 0.183, $p < 0.0001$) were more likely to mention the other side in a negative way in their e-mails. There were no significant findings for both Democrats and Republicans in terms of mentioning their own party in a negative way. These patterns are consistent with the idea that campaigns have swing voters in mind when they use television ads while they take more partisan approaches when communicating with their e-mail recipients.

Table 4. OLS Predictors of Party Mentions (E-Mail vs. Ad)

| | Democrats | | | | Republicans | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DVs | Coef. | SE | p | $R^2$ | Coef. | SE | p | $R^2$ |
| Democrat (pos.) | 0.108 | 0.004 | <.0001 | 0.005 | -0.006 | 0.003 | 0.0768 | <0.001 |
| Democrat (neg.) | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.1071 | <0.001 | 0.183 | 0.004 | <.0001 | 0.020 |
| Republican (pos.) | -0.028 | 0.004 | <.0001 | <0.001 | 0.209 | 0.004 | <.0001 | 0.033 |
| Republican (neg.) | 0.118 | 0.003 | <.0001 | 0.013 | - | - | - | - |

Notes: Independent variable is E-mail (vs. Ad). Intercepts are not reported here. N=238,288. "pos." refers to positive and "neg." refers to negative.

Lastly, the extent to which campaigns focus on the issues owned by their parties differs between e-mails and television ads. Campaigns mentioned the issues owned by their party more frequently in their e-mails (Table 5). Republicans were more likely to mention Taxes ($p = 0.0003$), Budget Deficit ($p < 0.0001$), and Iraq ($p < 0.149$). Democrats were more likely to mention Medicare ($p = 0.0001$), Social Security ($p < 0.0001$), and Environment ($p < 0.103$). On the issue that is not owned by any political party (i.e., Jobs), Republicans mentioned the issue more frequently ($p < 0.0001$) which is understandable given the Republican Party's slight advantage on the issue in 2014 (Gallup 2014, October 13). Statistical significance at the 95% confidence level was obtained in five out of seven cases, and the direction of the relationship was consistent with the expectations on every issue owned by a political party.

When it comes to television ads, the patterns were more mixed. Specifically, campaigns sometimes mentioned the issues their party owns more frequently than their opponents did. In other cases, however, the relationship between party issue ownership and issue mention was reversed. Specifically, Democrats mentioned Taxes more frequently ($p < 0.0001$) while Medicare was more central in the messages sent by Republican candidates ($p < 0.0001$). This may mean that campaigns tend to engage in dialogue with their opponents when using their television ads (Kaplan et al., 2006), but not necessarily in their e-mails.

Table 5. OLS Models Predicting Issue Mentions (Democrats vs. Republicans)

| | E-Mail | | | | TV Ads | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DVs | Coef. | SE | p | $R^2$ | Coef. | SE | p | $R^2$ |
| Taxes | -0.012 | 0.003 | 0.0003 | 0.006 | 0.046 | 0.001 | <.0001 | 0.029 |
| Budget Deficit | -0.013 | 0.002 | <.0001 | 0.016 | -0.041 | <0.000 | <.0001 | 0.027 |
| Iraq | -0.001 | 0.001 | 0.149 | 0.001 | -0.008 | <0.000 | <.0001 | 0.009 |
| Jobs | -0.014 | 0.003 | <.0001 | 0.008 | -0.034 | 0.001 | <.0001 | 0.006 |
| Medicare | 0.017 | 0.004 | 0.0001 | 0.007 | -0.006 | <0.000 | <.0001 | 0.001 |
| Social Security | 0.021 | 0.004 | <.0001 | 0.012 | 0.013 | <0.000 | <.0001 | 0.003 |
| Environment | 0.004 | 0.002 | 0.103 | 0.001 | 0.002 | <0.000 | <.0001 | <0.000 |

Notes: Independent variable is Democrat (vs. Republican). Intercepts are not reported here. N=265,118.

## 4. Discussion

Modern campaigns target voters with increasing precision across communication channels which makes it difficult to monitor what campaigns say directly to voters in a systematic and complete manner. In this analysis, I find that campaigns use e-mail and television advertising differently. In terms of the quantity, Democrats had advantages over Republicans in their e-mail campaigning, but not in television advertising. Better-resourced campaigns aired more television ads, but spending was not a significant predictor of the number of e-mails. Campaigns also constructed their messages differently between e-mail and television advertising. In their e-mails, campaigns often focused on fundraising and get-out-the-vote. When campaigns mentioned Democrats and Republicans in their e-mails, they did so in a clearly partisan way (i.e., in-group favoritism and out-group animosity). By contrast, campaigns often used a bipartisan appeal in their television ads, mentioning the other party positively. Lastly, campaigns were more willing to talk about the issues owned by the other party when using television advertising.

E-mail has a potential for empowering campaigns with fewer resources. A challenger who cannot compete with the incumbent on prime-time TV ads should be able to send as many e-mails as she wants. The medium also does not limit campaign messages to a 30-second spot. In addition, e-mail has a potential to enhance interactions between politicians and their constituents (Vaccari, 2014). Despite these promising characteristics, the way modern campaigns use e-mail may increase voter cynicism. For example, voters may not approve the way in which campaigns currently focus on fundraising in their e-mails. Also, campaigns are far less likely to mention policy issues in their e-mails. Around 88% of the ads examined in this study mentioned at least one policy issue while only 22% of the e-mails did ($p < 0.0001$, N=265,118). Even when policy issues are discussed in e-mails, campaigns are less likely to engage in dialogue with their opponents as they do not feel compelled to respond to what the opponents say in their e-mails. Furthermore, as what campaign say in their e-mails are different from what they say through other channels, campaigns' current use of e-mail may worsen the divide between the deeply involved and the rest of Americans (Krupnikov & Ryan, 2022). Campaigns may also increase the e-mail recipients' in-group favoritism and out-group animosity with consistently partisan appeals.

This study improves our understanding of how campaigns use e-mail and how it differs from their use of television advertising. There are several things that need to be further examined in future studies. First, future studies should examine the communication channels and platforms that were not included in this research (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, direct mail). This should be done with clear theorizing, not merely to maximize the amount of data. Second, it might be interesting to separate the TV ads aired on programs that are heavily watched by partisans and see if their content more closely resembles that of the e-mails. It is possible for a candidate to say the same things across her e-mails and some of her TV ads (aired during programs with partisan viewers) while taking a very different approach in other ads (aired during programs with more centrist viewers). For testing this idea, scholars will need a measure that systematically distinguishes among TV programs based on the viewers' ideology and partisanship, which could be challenging as the relationship between TV program and viewer characteristics may change over time and/or differ across locations. For example, a TV program that was watched mostly by Democrats in an election cycle may attract more centrist viewers in the next. Even during the same election cycle, a TV program's viewer characteristics can vary significantly across the media markets, states, or regions.

It is also possible to distinguish among e-mails. Campaigns tend to target past donors in their direct-mail campaigning (Hassell & Monson, 2014), so it is possible for a campaign to send more – and/or different – e-mails to those who donate to the campaign. Furthermore, a campaign may differentiate their e-mail messages depending on where the recipients live. For example, in most cases, e-mail recipients are required to submit their zip-codes when signing up for campaign e-mails. An ongoing project examines this idea using 150 e-mail accounts with unique zip-codes. It seems that this type of geotargeting was not heavily used in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, but we do not know whether this happened in other races and whether future campaigns will send different e-mails to those located in different areas.

In addition, some of the key assumptions made in this study can be examined more thoroughly. For example, I assumed that mentioning partisan labels should be an effective strategy for partisans, and that the strategy should not work for swing voters. However difficult it may be, it would be beneficial to confirm if campaigns indeed hold such beliefs. As for voter responses, it is possible to test whether swing voters react negatively – and whether partisans react positively – when a candidate emphasizes her (the opponent's) ideology or party affiliation. Similarly, whether swing voters reward bipartisanship and punish partisan/ideological candidates can be studied more systematically.

The current use of e-mail by political campaigns may seem trivial or concerning as the potential of the medium as a tool for enhancing American democracy (e.g., improved or more frequent two-way interactions between candidates and voters) has not yet been fully realized. This could change when campaigns' use of e-mails is monitored more systematically and critically, and when the medium's role is discussed more widely and thoroughly.

## Acknowledgments

**Authors contributions**

Not applicable.

**Funding**

Not applicable.

**Competing interests**

Not applicable.

**Informed consent**

Obtained.

**Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

**Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

**Open access**

**Copyrights**

**References**

Ballard, A. O., Hillygus, D. S., & Konitzer, T. (2016). Campaigning online: Web display ads in the 2012 presidential campaign. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *49*(3), 414-419. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516000780

Bode, L., Lassen, D. S., Kim, Y. M., Shah, D. V., Fowler, E. F., Ridout, T., & Franz, M. (2016). Coherent campaigns? Campaign broadcast and social messaging. *Online Information Review*. https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-11-2015-0348

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The american voter*. University of Chicago Press.

Chen, L. J., & Reeves, A. (2011). Turning out the base or appealing to the periphery? An analysis of county-level candidate appearances in the 2008 presidential campaign. *American Politics Research*, *39*(3), 534-556. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X10385286

Druckman, J. N., Kifer, M. J., & Parkin, M. (2009). Campaign communications in US congressional elections. *American Political Science Review*, *103*(3), 343-366. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409990037

Elmelund-Præstekær, C. (2011). Mapping parties' issue agenda in different channels of campaign communication: A wild goose chase? *Javnost-the Public*, *18*(1), 37-51. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2011.11009050

Epstein, B., & Broxmeyer, J. D. (2020). The (surprisingly interesting) story of e-mail in the 2016 presidential election. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *17*(3), 232-248. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2020.1755762

Fowler et al. (2014). *"Political Advertising in 2014." Version 1.0 [dataset].* Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Media Project, Department of Government at Wesleyan University.

Fowler, E. F., Franz, M. M., Martin, G. J., Peskowitz, Z., & Ridout, T. N. (2021). Political advertising online and offline. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(1), 130-149. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000696

Gallup. (2014, October 13). U.S. Voters Give GOP Edge vs. Dems on Handling Top Issues. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/178268/voters-give-gop-edge-handling-top-issues.aspx

Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2004). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout*. Brookings Institution Press.

Green, D. P., Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2002). *Partisan hearts and minds: Political parties and the social identities of voters*. Yale University Press.

Hassell, H. J., & Monson, J. Q. (2014). Campaign targets and messages in direct mail fundraising. *Political Behavior*, *36*(2), 359-376. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-013-9230-8

Hillygus, D. S., & Shields, T. G. (2008). *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400831593

Holian, D. B. (2006). Trust the party line: Issue ownership and presidential approval from Reagan to Clinton. *American Politics Research*, *34*(6), 777-802. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X06290906

Iyengar, S., & Westwood, S. J. (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(3), 690-707. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152

Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *76*(3), 405-431. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038

Johnson, K., & Krueger, B. S. (2012). Analyzing the capacity of unsolicited political email. In *E-politics and organizational implications of the Internet: Power, influence, and social change* (pp. 220-244). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-0966-2.ch013

Kang, T., Fowler, E. F., Franz, M. M., & Ridout, T. N. (2018). Issue Consistency? Comparing Television Advertising, Tweets, and E-mail in the 2014 Senate Campaigns. *Political Communication*, *35*(1), 32-49. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1334729

Kaplan, N., Park, D. K., & Ridout, T. N. (2006). Dialogue in American political campaigns? An examination of issue convergence in candidate television advertising. *American Journal of Political Science*, *50*(3), 724-736. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00212.x

Krueger, B. S. (2006). A comparison of conventional and Internet political mobilization. *American Politics Research*, *34*(6), 759-776. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X06290911

Krupnikov, Y., & Ryan, J. B. (2022). *The Other Divide: Polarization and Disengagement in American Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Lovett, M., & Peress, M. (2015). Targeting Political Advertising on Television. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *10*(3), 391-432. https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00014107

Malhotra, N., Michelson, M. R., & Valenzuela, A. A. (2012). Emails from official sources can increase turnout. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *7*(3), 321-332. https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00011073

Mason, L. (2015). "I disrespectfully agree": The differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(1), 128-145. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12089

Nickerson, D. W. (2007). Does email boost turnout. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *2*(4), 369-379. https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00007032

Nielsen, R. K. (2011). Mundane internet tools, mobilizing practices, and the coproduction of citizenship in political campaigns. *New Media & Society*, *13*(5), 755-771. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810380863

Peress, M. (2011). Securing the base: Electoral competition under variable turnout. *Public Choice*, *148*(1), 87-104. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-010-9647-0

Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 825–850. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111797

Ridout, T. N., Franz, M., Goldstein, K. M., & Feltus, W. J. (2012). Separation by television program: Understanding the targeting of political advertising in presidential elections. *Political Communication*, *29*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2011.619509

Rosenstone, S. J., & Hansen, J. M. (1993). *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America*. Longman Publishing Group.

Shearer, E. (2016). Elisa Shearer Archives. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/staff/elisa-shearer/

Stromer-Galley, J. (2019). *Presidential campaigning in the Internet age*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190694043.001.0001

Vaccari, C. (2014). You've got (no) mail: How parties and candidates respond to e-mail inquiries in Western democracies. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *11*(2), 245-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2014.899536

Vaccari, C. (2017). Online mobilization in comparative perspective: Digital appeals and political engagement in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. *Political Communication*, *34*(1), 69-88. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1201558

Williams, A. P., & Trammell, K. D. (2005). Candidate campaign e-mail messages in the presidential election 2004. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *49*(4), 560-574. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764205279438