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ElectionGraph

*How social media ads mentioning
Biden or Trump shape 2024's
election information landscape*

PREPARED BY: 

Syracuse University's Institute for Democracy,
Journalism & Citizenship

MEDIA INQUIRIES: 

kkobland@syr.edu

FOR MORE INFO:

democracy@syr.edu



Table of Contents

1 Overview

2 Summary

3 Full Report

11 Organizations

21 “Mr. President”

26 Challenges to Tracking Political Campaigns

26 About the ElectionGraph Project



ElectionGraph Report

How social media ads mentioning Biden or Trump shape 2024's election information landscape



Institute for Democracy,
Journalism & Citizenship

Overview

More than 1,800 groups placed paid advertisements on Facebook and Instagram since last fall mentioning President Joe Biden or former President Donald Trump, according to an analysis by the Election Graph Project at Syracuse University's Institute for Democracy, Journalism & Citizenship.

- The research, supported by a grant from Neo4j® and use of the company's graph database technology and experts, captures a fraction of overall U.S. election-related content across all social media platforms.
- That's because while Meta currently allows approved organizations to access ad data, it is not required to be made available and is not similarly trackable on TikTok, Google, YouTube, or Snapchat.
- The findings nevertheless provide a framework to visualize the firehose of information and misinformation coming at voters from groups with a jumble of motives, ties and trustworthiness ahead of the 2024 elections.
- The data presented here demonstrates how requiring social media platforms to disclose details about election advertising and messaging can provide the public with important transparency and context — and why failure to do so makes voters vulnerable to manipulation without accountability.

Summary

We identified \$15.3 million spent by 1,802 groups that mention any of the presidential primary candidates in their advertising from more than 24,000 ad buys and 5,545 unique ads between Sept. 1, 2023 and Feb. 29, 2024. That amounts to an estimated 869 million impressions.

- Biden and Trump’s campaign, in addition, spent another estimated \$10 million and garnered roughly 303 million impressions.
- Biden was outspending Trump about 7-to-1 on ads on these platforms.
- The organizations that ran ads range from well-known PACs, political party groups or other candidates, to obscure players with harder-to-trace ties and agendas.
- The analysis identifies the Top 30 spenders each mentioning Biden and Trump. Americans for Prosperity (AFP) Action, the group tied to billionaire Charles Koch and that has criticized both Trump and Biden and backed Republican Nikki Haley’s failed effort against Trump for the nomination, was the top outside group for spending mentioning Biden and second-highest for spending mentioning Trump.
- Presidential candidate spending on advertisements on Facebook and Instagram was down significantly from the 2020 campaign during the same six-month period, with about 1/12th the volume of ad activity compared with four years before.
- The data analysis also revealed patterns in how groups apply the honorific of “President” before the rivals’ names. There was a pro-Biden lean among the groups that referred to “President Biden” but just “Donald Trump” — and a pro-Trump lean in the groups referring to “President Trump” but just “Joe Biden.”

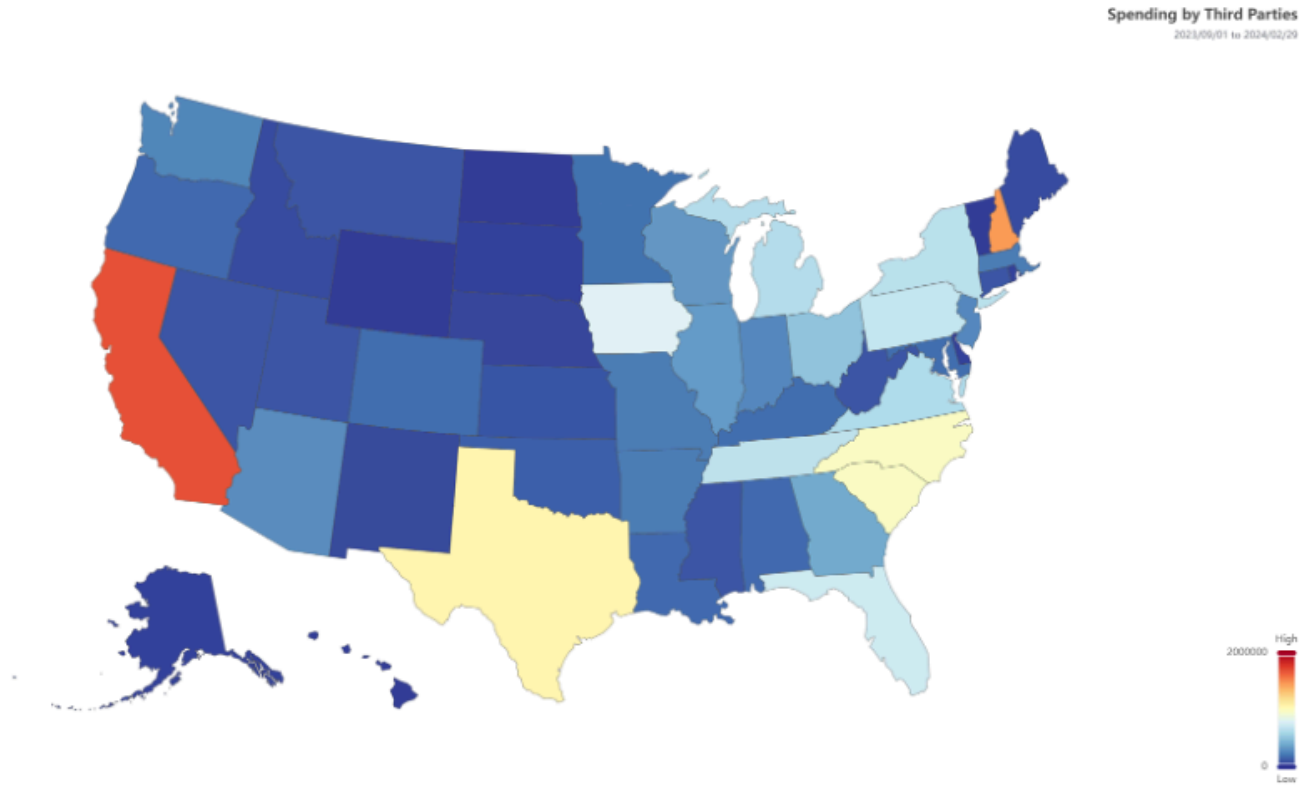
How Biden and Trump mentions in social media ads are shaping the 2024 election information landscape

This analysis focuses on the spending, volume and source of ads between Sept. 1, 2023, and Feb. 29, 2024, that mention “Joe Biden,” “Donald Trump,” “President Biden” or “President Trump.” To identify organizations that are running ads around the presidential campaign, we also included ads that mention any of the presidential primary candidates, such as Asa Hutchinson, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Vivek Ramaswamy. Mentions signal the ads are engaged with the presidential campaign in some way.

Combined, we estimate \$15,272,131 was spent on ads by organizations that mention the candidates.[\[1\]](#) This was spent on 24,219 total ad buys, and 5,545 unique ads. These include Political Action Committees and political parties, non-profit organizations, media and news outlets, fans of the candidates and other groups or individual citizens.

Mapping spending by state, we find a mixture of early primary voting states, swing states, and states that are key fodder for fundraising (See Figure 1). We found California received the greatest focus by organizations, followed by New Hampshire, then Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, followed by Iowa, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Tennessee, and Florida.

Figure 1: Organizations running ads that mention presidential candidates in key states between September 1, 2023 and February 29, 2024



Note: Range is \$0 - \$2 million. Dark Blue is \$0; Red is \$2 million

[1] We can only estimate the spending because Meta provides only an upper bound and lower bound dollar amount for each ad buy. We estimate the spend by calculating the mid-point of each ad buy's upper and lower bound.

Comparing 2024 with 2020

Presidential candidate spending on advertisements on Facebook and Instagram so far is down significantly from the 2020 campaign, and with about 1/12th the volume of ad activity four years before during the same six-month period.

From September 1, 2019, through February 28, 2020, our analysis found spending for all presidential primary candidates to be estimated at \$141,246,401. That was spent on 543,999 ad buys, for 10,091 unique ads.

By comparison, in the same time period in 2024, spending is estimated at \$9,978,182 on 1,120 unique ads from 11,168 ad buys.

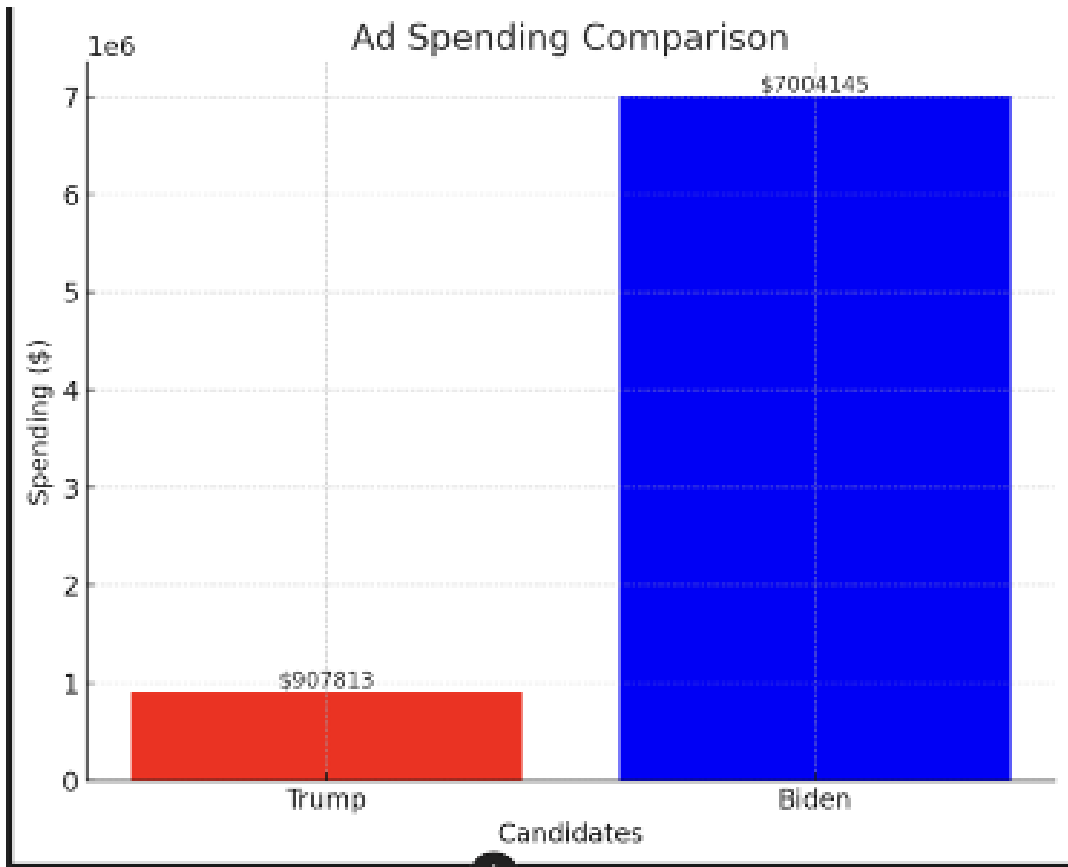
The Biden-Trump Gap

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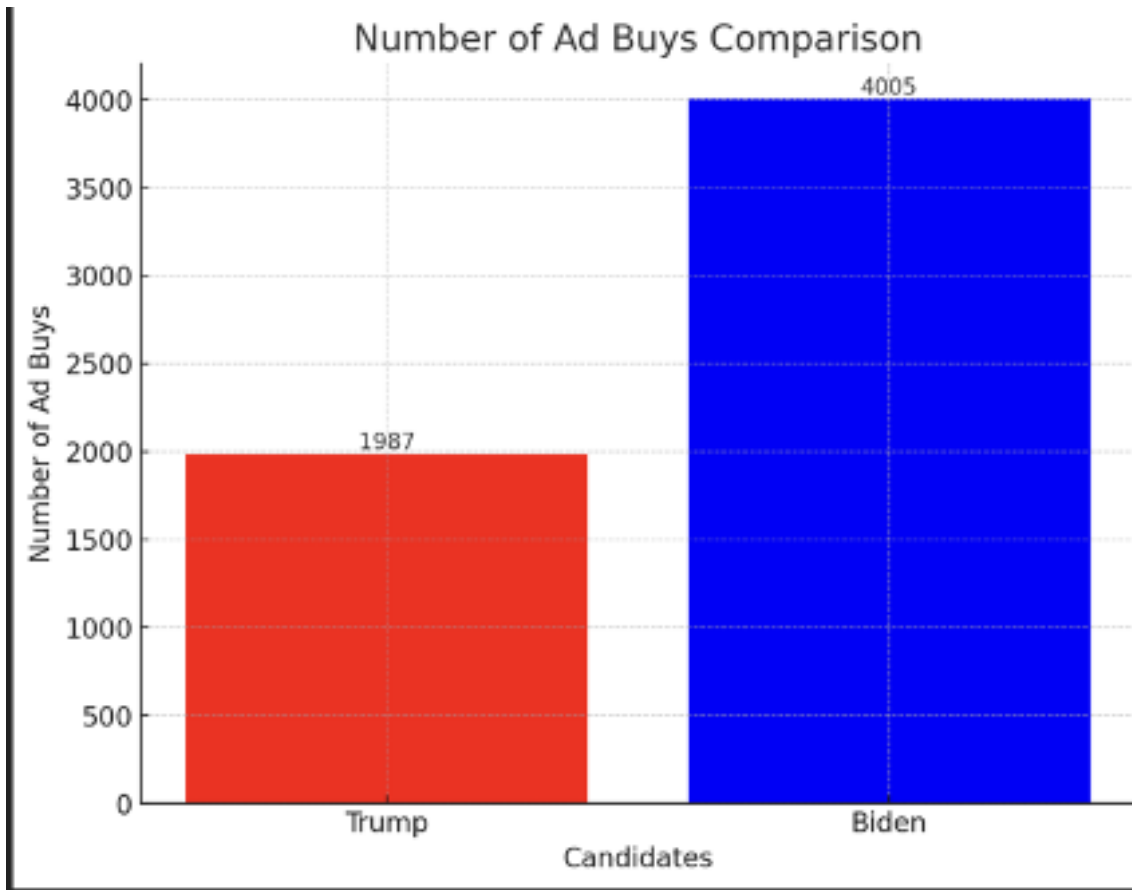
Figure 2: Trump and Biden Ad Spending on Facebook and Instagram



Their ad buy strategy is also distinct. Campaigns run many ad buys on an ad that has highly similar text but change phrases or swap out photos or videos, or they target different demographic groups.

We aggregate ad buys that have highly similar text to get a sense of the overall impact of the ad, what we call "unique" ads. Trump ran 1,987 ad buys on 179 unique ads, while Biden ran 4,001 ad buys on 178 unique ads (See Figure 3). This equates to an estimated 47,786,018 impressions for Trump and 255,249,547 for Biden.[\[2\]](#)

Figure 3: Trump and Biden Ad Buys on Facebook and Instagram



When we map the candidates' spending across the fifty states, we see the distinct differences in spending patterns. In Figure 4 and 5, we see that the Trump campaign focused on Iowa, but less so on New Hampshire and South Carolina. Texas, Florida, and California also are targeted states.

By contrast, given that Biden did not face a significant primary challenge, his advertising approach is distinctly different. His campaign spent more heavily in Pennsylvania and California, followed by Michigan, New York, Texas, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, and Wisconsin. Either key swing states or key states for fundraising appeals.

Figure 4: Trump State Ad Spend on Facebook and Instagram (Sept. - Feb.)

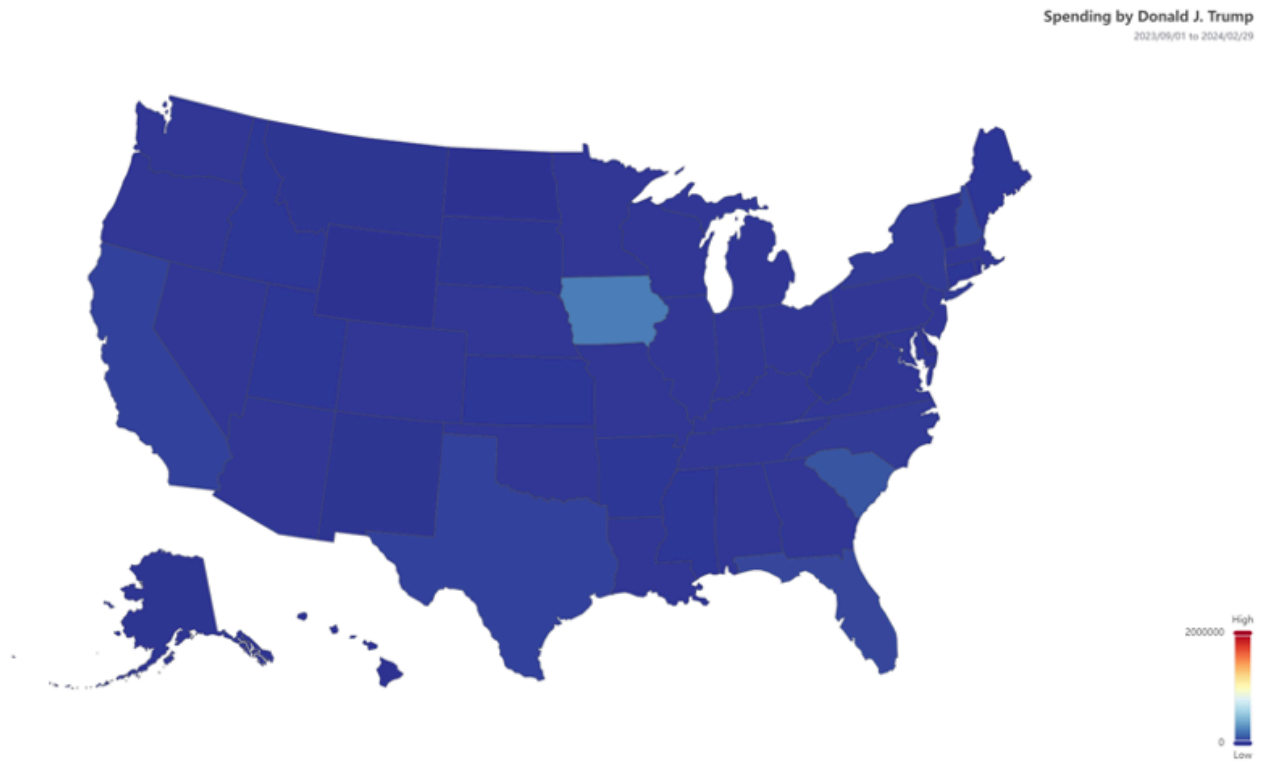
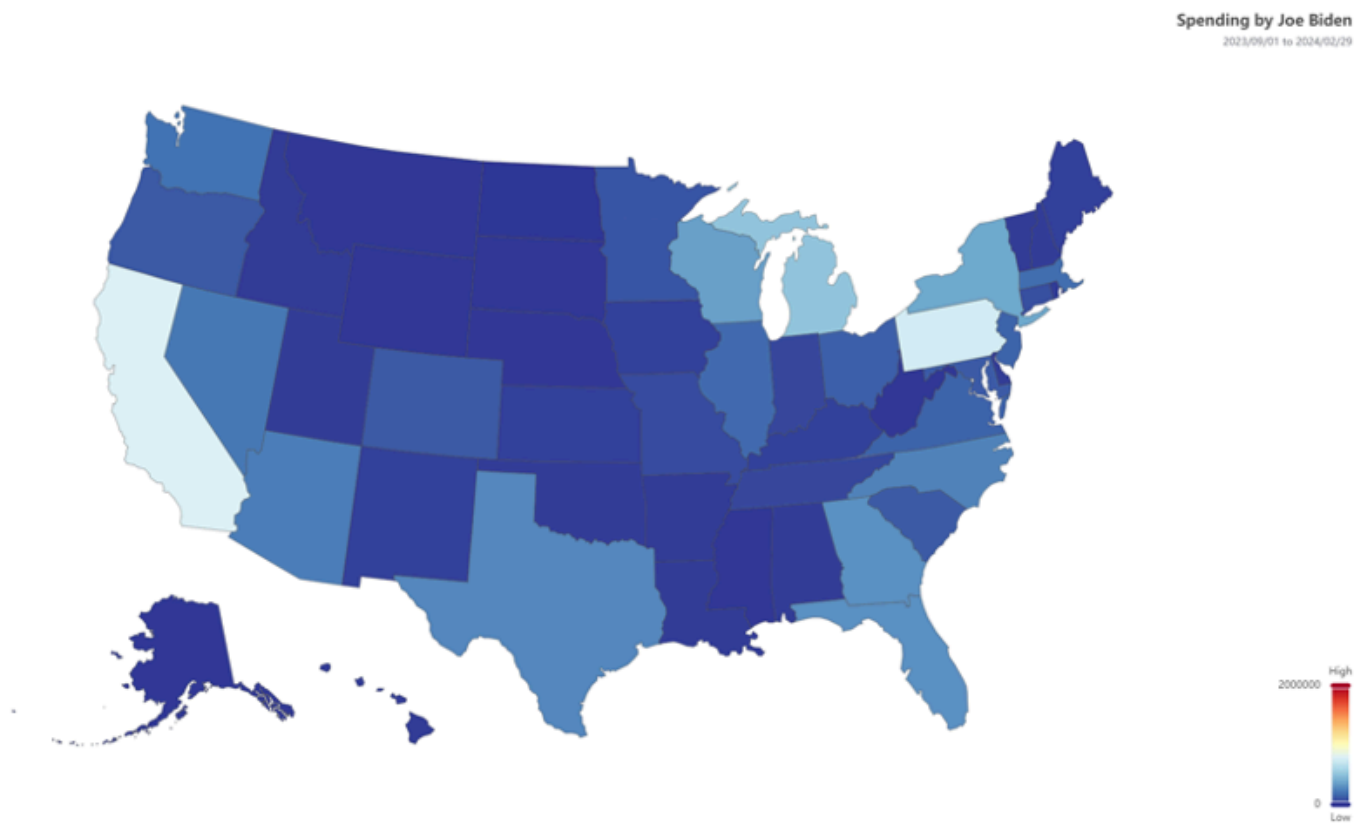
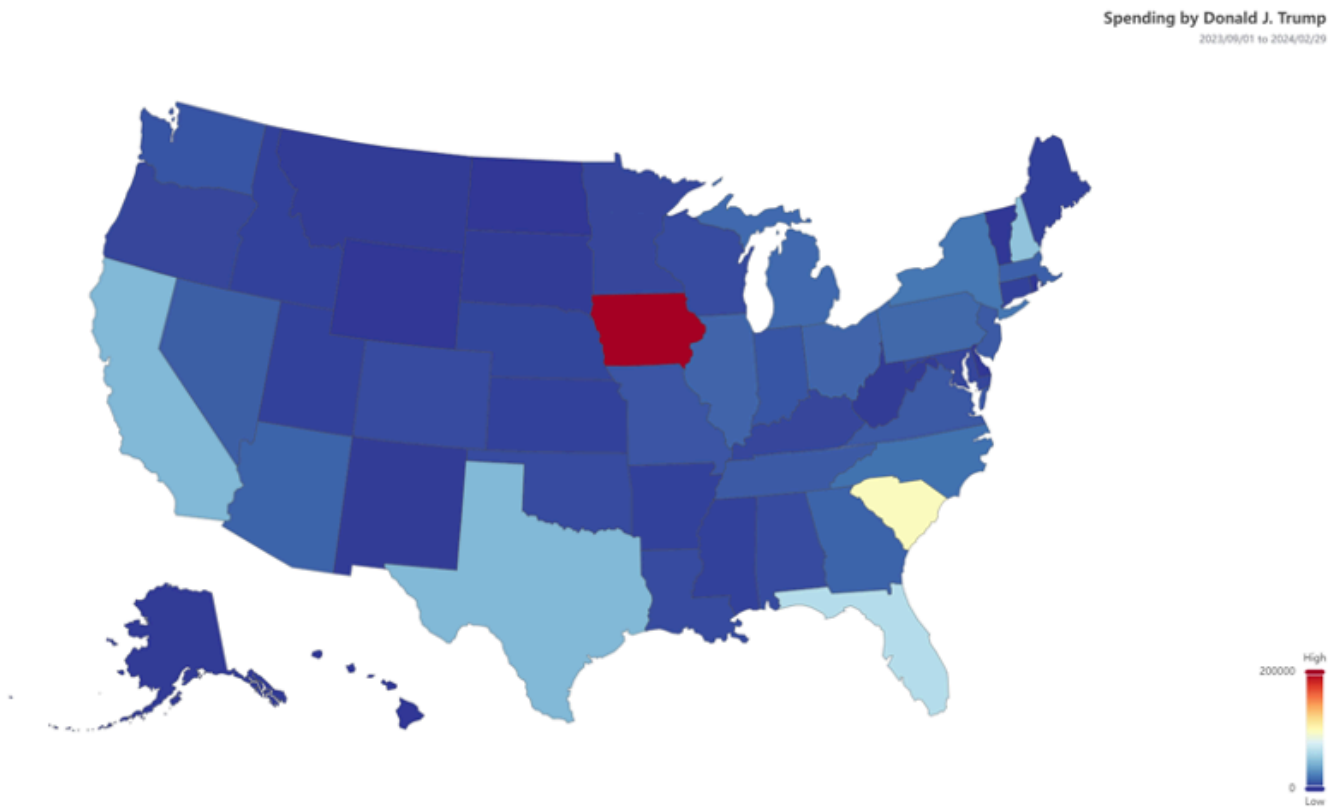


Figure 5: Biden State Ad Spend by State on Facebook and Instagram (Sept. - Feb.)



Because Donald Trump’s expenditures on Facebook ads was so low, we changed the expenditure scale from \$0 - \$200,000 to highlight more clearly the states where the Trump campaign ran ads (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Trump Ad Spend by State on Facebook and Instagram (Sept. - Feb.)



When you look at the spending just for the month of February, at the height of the primary voting season, Biden’s campaign is focused on California, Michigan, New York, Texas, and Florida (Figure 7), while Trump is focused primarily on South Carolina (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Biden State Ad Spend by State on Facebook and Instagram February

Spending by Joe Biden
2023/02/01 to 2024/02/29

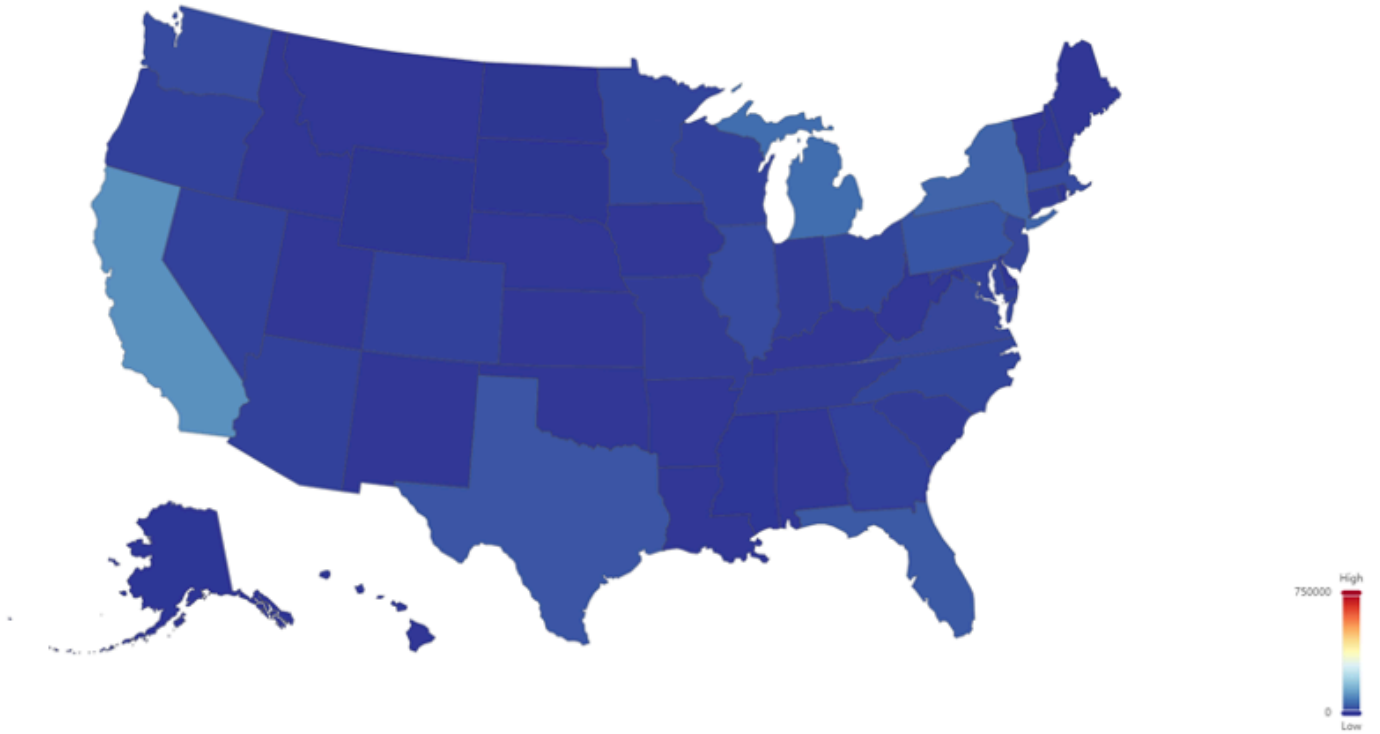
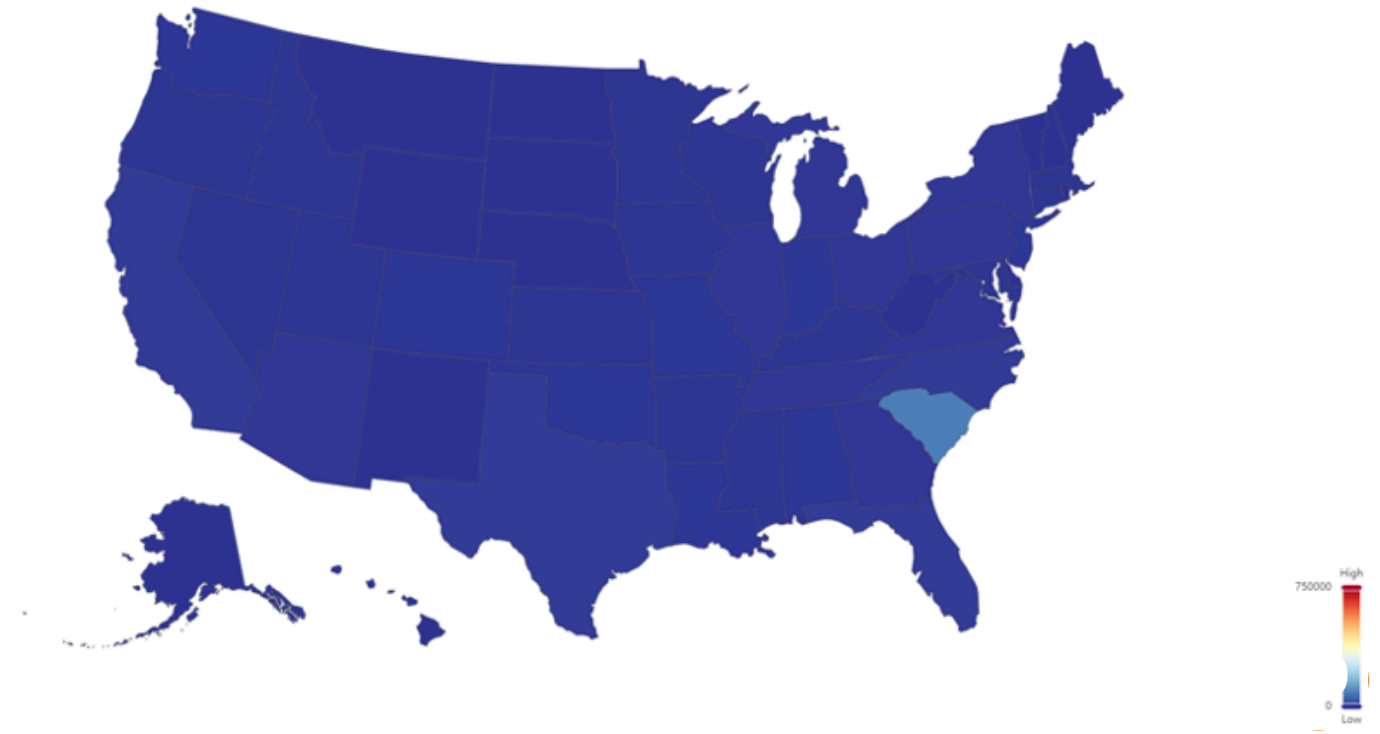


Figure 8: Biden State Ad Spend by State on Facebook and Instagram February

Spending by Donald J. Trump
2023/02/01 to 2024/02/29



[2] We can only estimate the spending because Meta provides only an upper bound and lower bound dollar amount for each ad buy. We estimate the spend by calculating the mid-point of each ad buy's upper and lower bound.

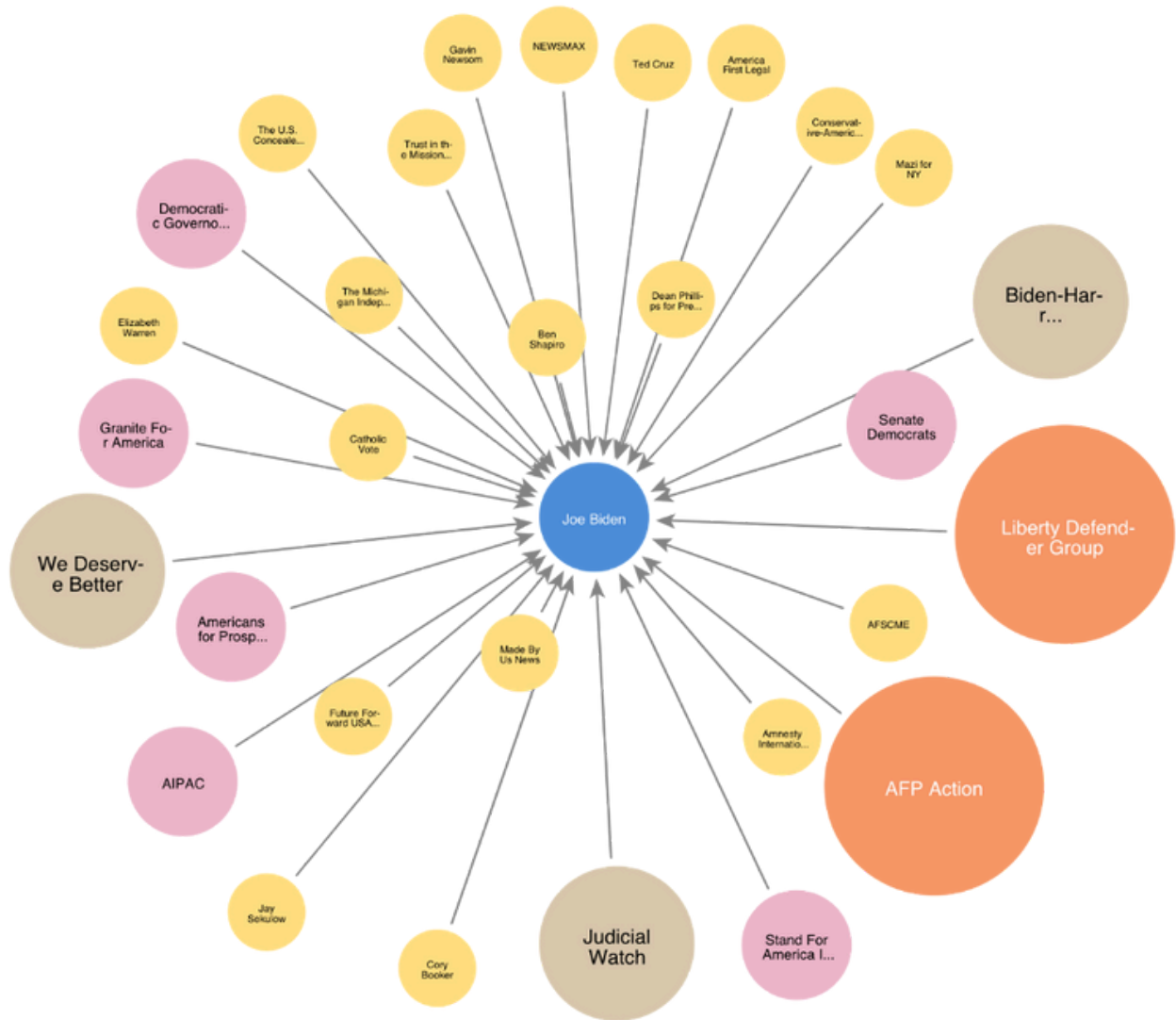
Organizations

We further explored which organizations specifically mention Biden and which specifically mention Trump.

- More ads that mention Biden are attack ads (47%) as compared with attack ads that mention Trump (37%).[\[3\]](#)
- The analysis shows that of the Top 10 groups spending on ads mentioning Biden, the spending by those critical of him — from AFP Action and Judicial Watch to America First Legal, and We Deserve Better (which promoted Biden's short-lived primary rival Rep. Dean Phillips) outweighed that by groups supporting him, such as Biden-Harris HQ, Senate Democrats or the Democratic Governors' Association.
- Top 10 spenders on ads mentioning Trump included campaigns for Democratic Senate and House candidates with strong anti-Trump messaging, including U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff's Senate bid in California and the U.S. House race in Virginia for Eugene Vindman. Schiff was lead prosecutor in Trump's first impeachment trial. Vindman is the Ukrainian-born retired U.S. Army colonel who as an ethics lawyer assigned to the National Security Council raised concerns about Trump's 2019 call pressuring Ukrainian President Zelensky to investigate Biden's family. The Conservative group is a marketing organization that features right-leaning news stories and commentary.

The top organizations that mentioned Biden in their advertisements are visualized in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Top Organizations that Mention Biden in the Facebook and Instagram Ads



Note: Figure Created with Neo4j Bloom ®

Key

| | | |
|--------|--------|--------------------------|
| Orange | Orange | \$850,000 to \$1,500,000 |
| Tan | Tan | \$430,000 and \$849,999 |
| Pink | Pink | \$150,000 and \$429,999 |
| Yellow | Yellow | \$47,000 and \$149,999 |

Table 1: Top 30 Orgs mentioning Biden

| Organization Facebook Page Name | Estimated Spend |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| AFP Action | 1,497,941 |
| Liberty Defender Group | 1,005,467 |
| Judicial Watch | 807,109 |
| Biden-Harris HQ | 744,829 |
| We Deserve Better | 457,567 |
| AIPAC | 365,588 |
| Senate Democrats | 358,059 |
| Democratic Governors Association (DGA) | 293,195 |
| Americans for Prosperity | 195,072 |
| Granite For America | 178,345 |
| Stand For America INC | 160,353 |
| America First Legal | 143,631 |
| Gavin Newsom | 142,890 |
| Jay Sekulow | 129,151 |
| Made By Us News | 127,188 |

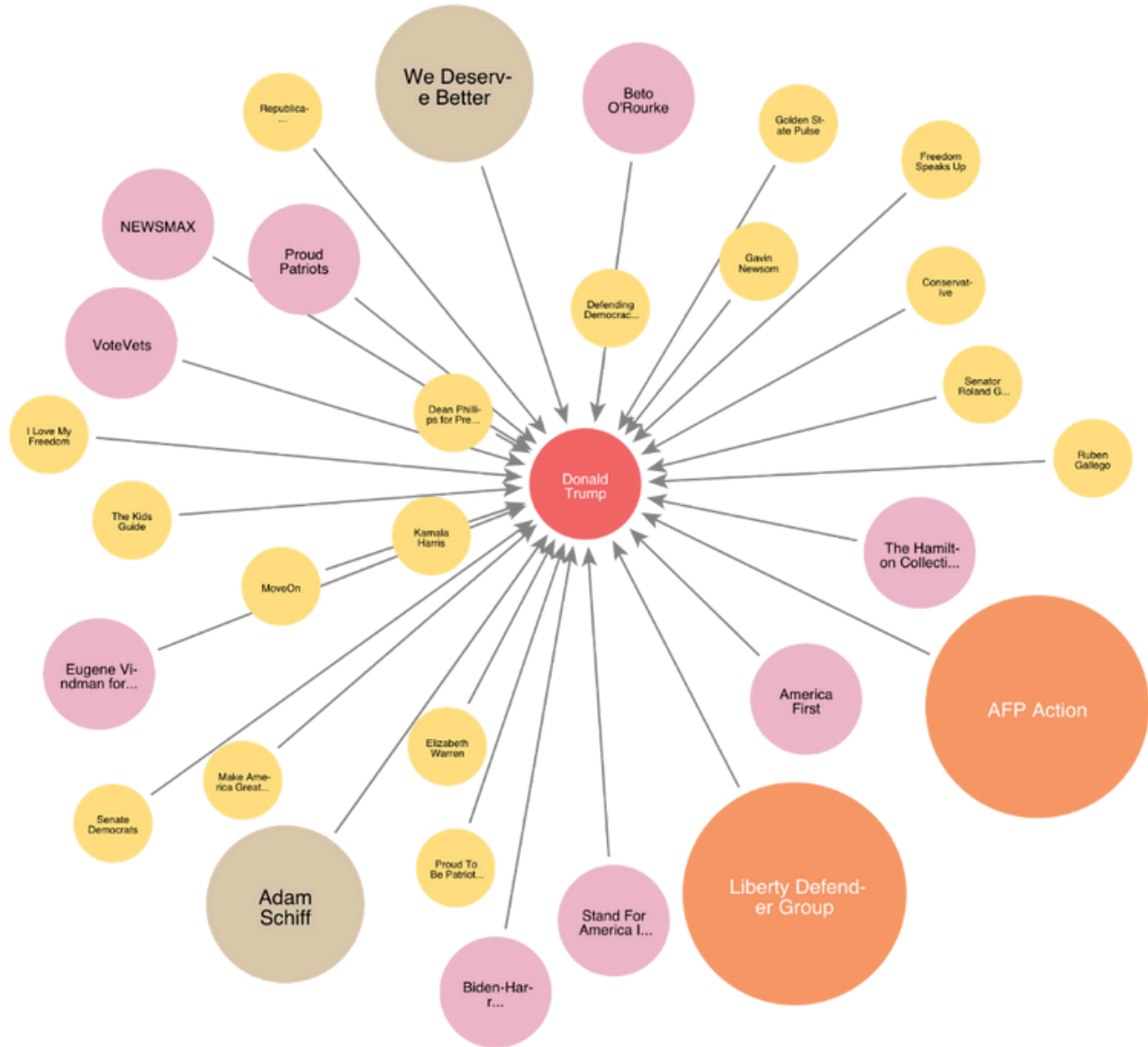




| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| NEWSMAX | 119,828 |
| CatholicVote | 112,779 |
| Dean Phillips for President 2024 | 111,400 |
| Future Forward USA Action | 99,761 |
| Conservative-American.org | 94,039 |
| Ted Cruz | 83,306 |
| Mazi for NY | 71,429 |
| The U.S. Concealed Carry Association for Saving Lives Action Fund | 66,583 |
| Trust in the Mission PAC | 58,244 |
| Cory Booker | 57,758 |
| Elizabeth Warren | 57,239 |
| Amnesty International USA | 54,799 |
| AFSCME | 51,156 |
| Ben Shapiro | 48,595 |
| The Michigan Independent | 47,497 |

The top organizations that mentioned Trump in their advertisements are visualized in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Top Organizations that Mention Biden in the Facebook and Instagram Ads



Note: Figure Created with Neo4j Bloom ®

Key

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
|  | Orange | \$850,000 to \$1,500,000 |
|  | Tan | \$430,000 and \$849,999 |
|  | Pink | \$150,000 and \$429,999 |
|  | Yellow | \$47,000 and \$149,999 |

Table 2: Top 30 Orgs mentioning Trump

| Organization Facebook Page Name | Estimated Spend |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Liberty Defender Group | 1,310,679 |
| AFP Action | 1,060,450 |
| Adam Schiff | 578,634 |
| We Deserve Better | 441,484 |
| Eugene Vindman for Congress | 316,042 |
| NEWSMAX | 311,564 |
| Proud Patriots | 295,462 |
| VoteVets | 212,330 |
| The Hamilton Collection | 179,997 |
| Biden-Harris HQ | 164,335 |
| Stand For America INC | 152,917 |
| Conservative | 144,369 |
| Proud To Be Patriots | 133,073 |
| Senate Democrats | 129,862 |
| Elizabeth Warren | 103,687 |





| | |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|
| Golden State Pulse | 96,722 |
| Gavin Newsom | 92,381 |
| Kamala Harris | 86,657 |
| MoveOn | 76,195 |
| Defending Democracy Together | 74,999 |
| The Kids Guide | 73,452 |
| Freedom Speaks Up | 73,183 |
| Republican Dogs | 71,711 |
| I Love My Freedom | 58,071 |
| Make America Great Again Inc. | 57,777 |
| Dean Phillips for President 2024 | 50,400 |
| Ruben Gallego | 49,682 |
| Senator Roland Gutierrez | 48,495 |
| America First | 45,324 |
| Beto O'Rourke | 44,854 |

It's worth noting that several of the organizations show up in both lists, suggesting that their ads reference Trump and Biden in their advertising. For example, AFP Action is Americans for Prosperity, a conservative organization that advances policy and advocacy to push for limited government.

AFP endorsed Nikki Haley and ran ads that portrayed Nikki Haley as a “proven conservative” that can “turn the page on the past” and beat Joe Biden (See Figure 11). They also ran ads that argue that Trump brings “too many distractions” to be the nominee.

Figure 11: AFP Action Ad Example

AFP Action
Sponsored • Paid for by AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY ACTION, INC.(AFP ACTION)
Library ID: 731763005679756

Nikki Haley is the strongest candidate to stop Biden and help elect Republicans across the country!

HALEY CRUSHES BIDEN

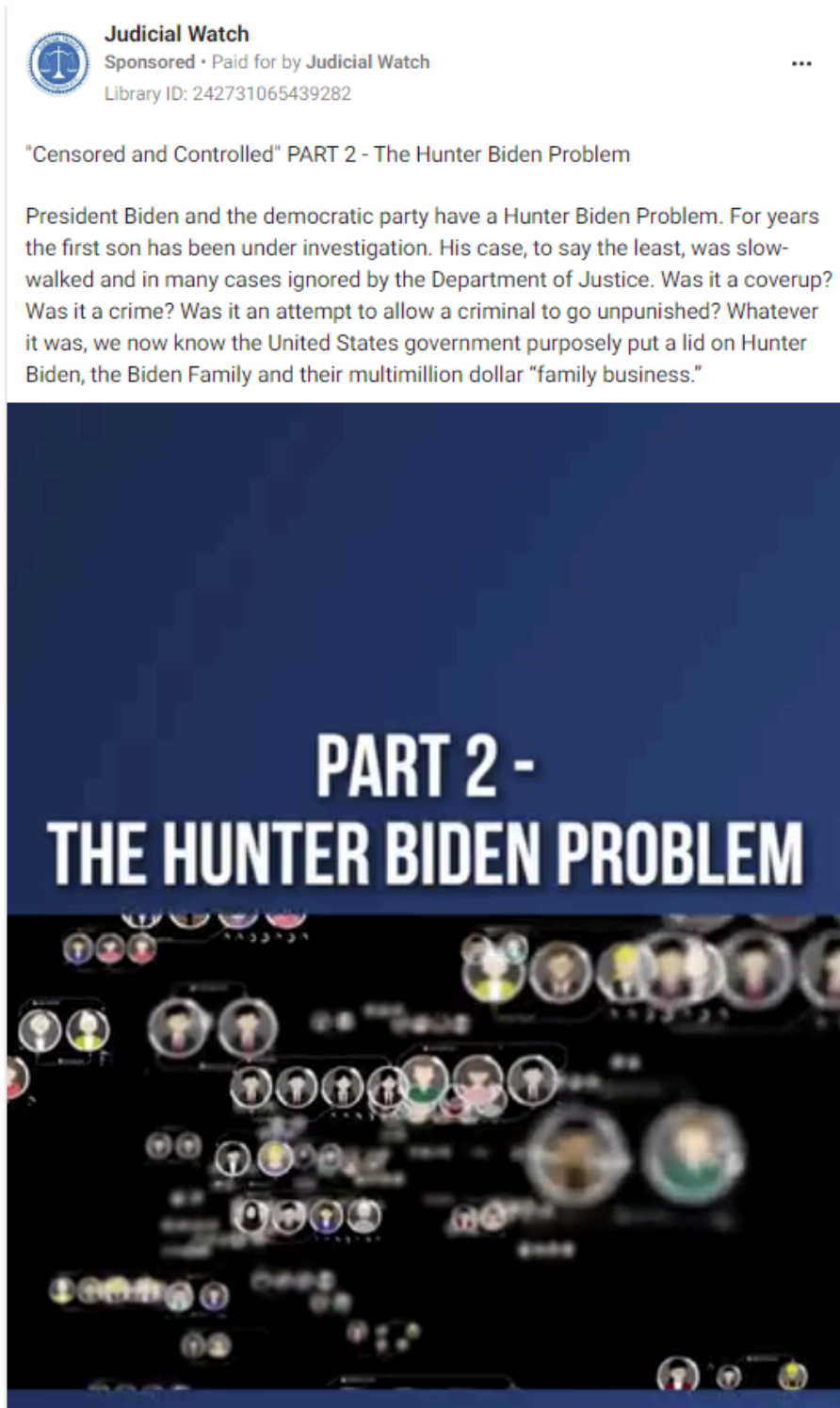
| Media Outlet | Support (+) |
|----------------------|-------------|
| FOX NEWS | +11 |
| WSJ | +17 |
| THE MESSENGER | +10 |
| MARQUETTE LAW SCHOOL | +10 |

ACTIONFORHALEY.COM
We can't risk four more years of Biden and Harris

[Learn more](#)

Judicial Watch, a conservative organization that describes itself as an educational foundation, ran ads, for example, that feature a documentary of Representative Jim Jordan’s effort to investigate Hunter Biden, President Joe Biden’s son, for potential improper dealings that are alleged to extend to President Biden (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Judicial Watch Ad Example



Judicial Watch
Sponsored • Paid for by Judicial Watch
Library ID: 242731065439282

"Censored and Controlled" PART 2 - The Hunter Biden Problem

President Biden and the democratic party have a Hunter Biden Problem. For years the first son has been under investigation. His case, to say the least, was slow-walked and in many cases ignored by the Department of Justice. Was it a coverup? Was it a crime? Was it an attempt to allow a criminal to go unpunished? Whatever it was, we now know the United States government purposely put a lid on Hunter Biden, the Biden Family and their multimillion dollar "family business."

**PART 2 -
THE HUNTER BIDEN PROBLEM**

We Deserve Better is Dean Phillips' aligned Political Action Committee. Phillips contested Joe Biden for the Democratic Party nomination. Most of his ads highlight his policy platform, emphasizing that Democrats would rather not have Biden as their nominee, and noting positive poll numbers in New Hampshire. The candidate faced controversy when an operative associated with his campaign claimed responsibility for creating an AI-generated voice of Biden that was then used to call likely Democrats and encourage them not to vote in the New Hampshire primary. On January 19th, the PAC released an ad with a video of an unidentified man demonstrating that the PAC had just created an AI bot of Dean Phillips that could answer questions in Dean Phillips' voice. The ad ran only in New Hampshire and cost less than \$100 and was seen by 1,000 - 2,000 people (See Figure 13).

Figure 13: We Deserve Better Ad Example

The image shows a screenshot of a Meta advertisement. At the top, the ad is from 'We Deserve Better', a sponsored post paid for by 'WE DESERVE BETTER INC - Digitally created'. Below the header, the text reads 'We created an AI bot of Presidential Candidate Dean Phillips'. The main content is a video player showing a man with a beard wearing a red hoodie with the text 'the We Deserve Better PAC' on it. The video player includes a play button, a progress bar at 0:01 / 1:18, and icons for settings, share, and volume. Below the video, the text 'DEAN.BOT' and 'Talk to AI Dean Phillips' is displayed, along with a 'Learn More' button.

Note: See [the ad](#) in the Meta ad library.

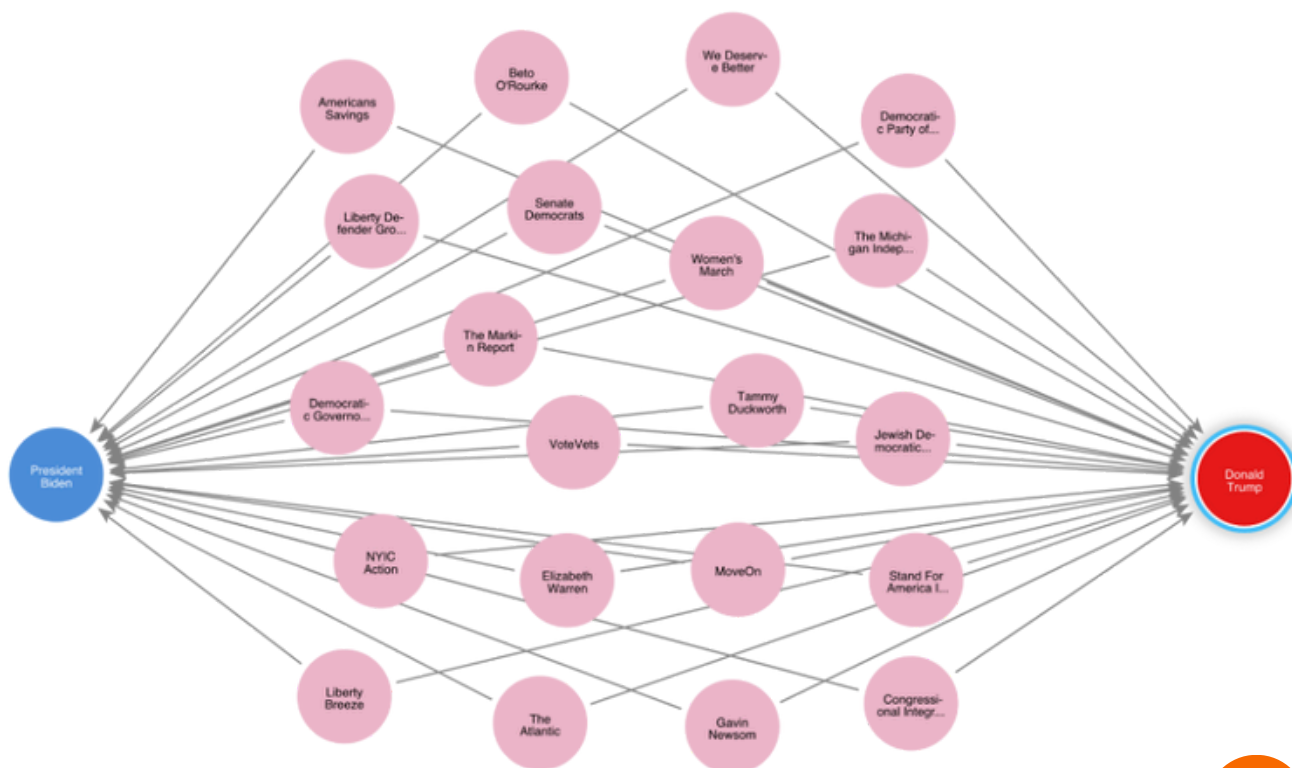
[3] We have built an algorithm that categories the content of messages by candidates into several categories, including attack ads. We use the pre-trained BERT model and gold-labeled samples of candidate messages to train the model. Performance: Precision = .81, Recall = .78; F1 = .79.

“Mr. President”

Given that some organizations referenced both candidates, we dove deeper. We noted that some organizations seemed to show intentional strategy in whether they applied the honorific of “President” to the candidates. Specifically, we explored which organizations referred to President Biden and Donald Trump within an ad as well as organizations that referred to President Trump and Joe Biden.

Seventy two organizations give Biden the honorific by mentioning “President Biden” but did not give the same honorific to “Donald Trump” in their advertisements (See Figure 14).

Figure 14: Organizations that spent more than \$1,000 on Ads that Mention President Biden and Donald Trump in their Facebook and Instagram Ads

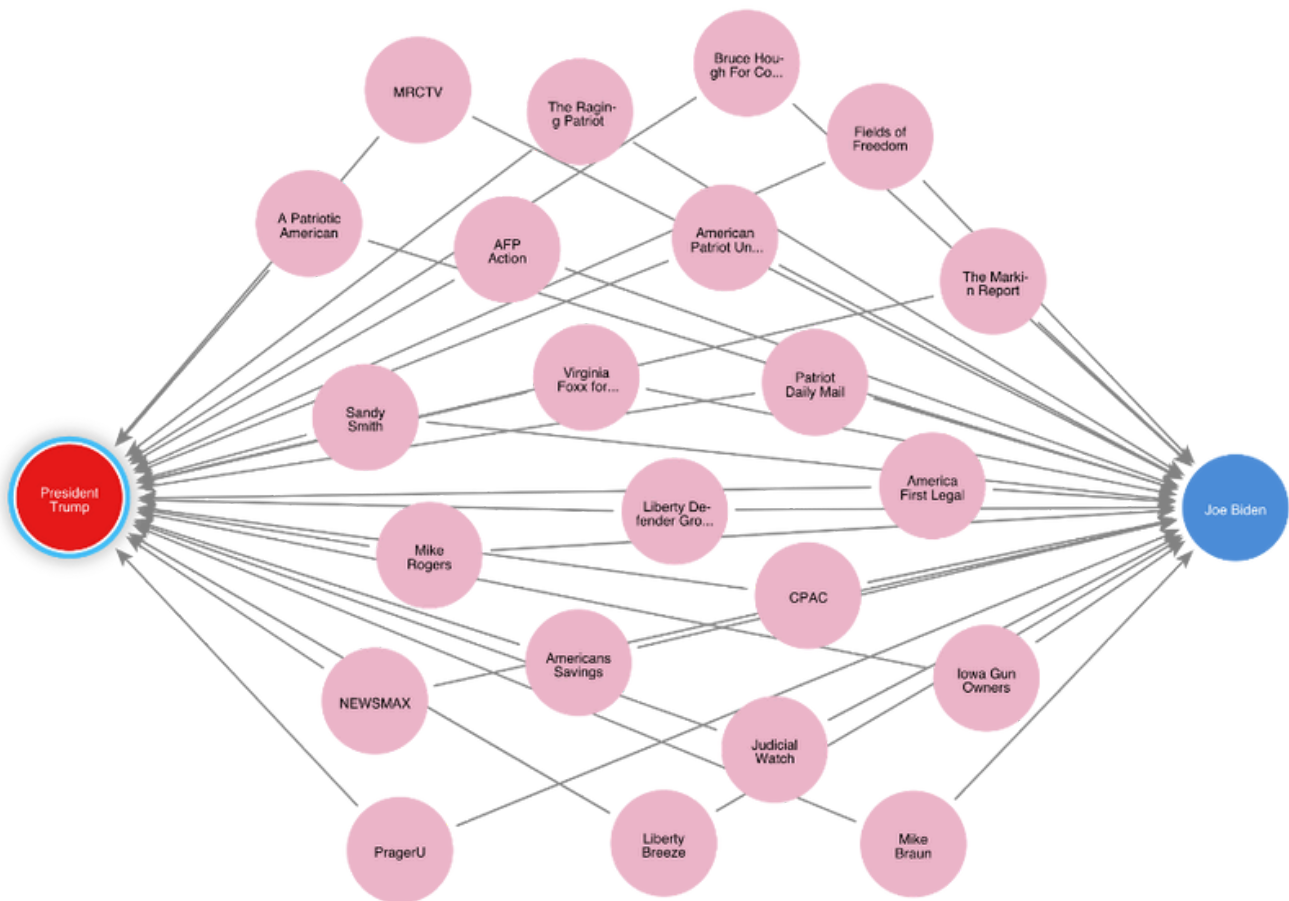


Note: Figure Created with Neo4j Bloom ®

The majority of these organizations are Democratic-leaning or left-leaning organizations, (MoveOn, VoteVets, Women’s March), organizations tied to Democratic candidates (e.g. Tammy Duckworth, Beto O’Rourke), and Democratic Party organizations (Senate Democrats). A few of the organizations are right-leaning (Liberty Defender Group). A close analysis of their ads suggests that they were included because they mentioned both candidates multiple times, sometimes with and sometimes without the honorific in the same ad, and as such got included in our analysis.

Figure 15 shows the organizations that ran ads that gave Donald Trump the President honorific, but did not do so for the current president, Joe Biden.

Figure 15: Organizations that spent more than \$1,000 on Ads that Mention President Trump and Joe Biden in their Facebook and Instagram Ads

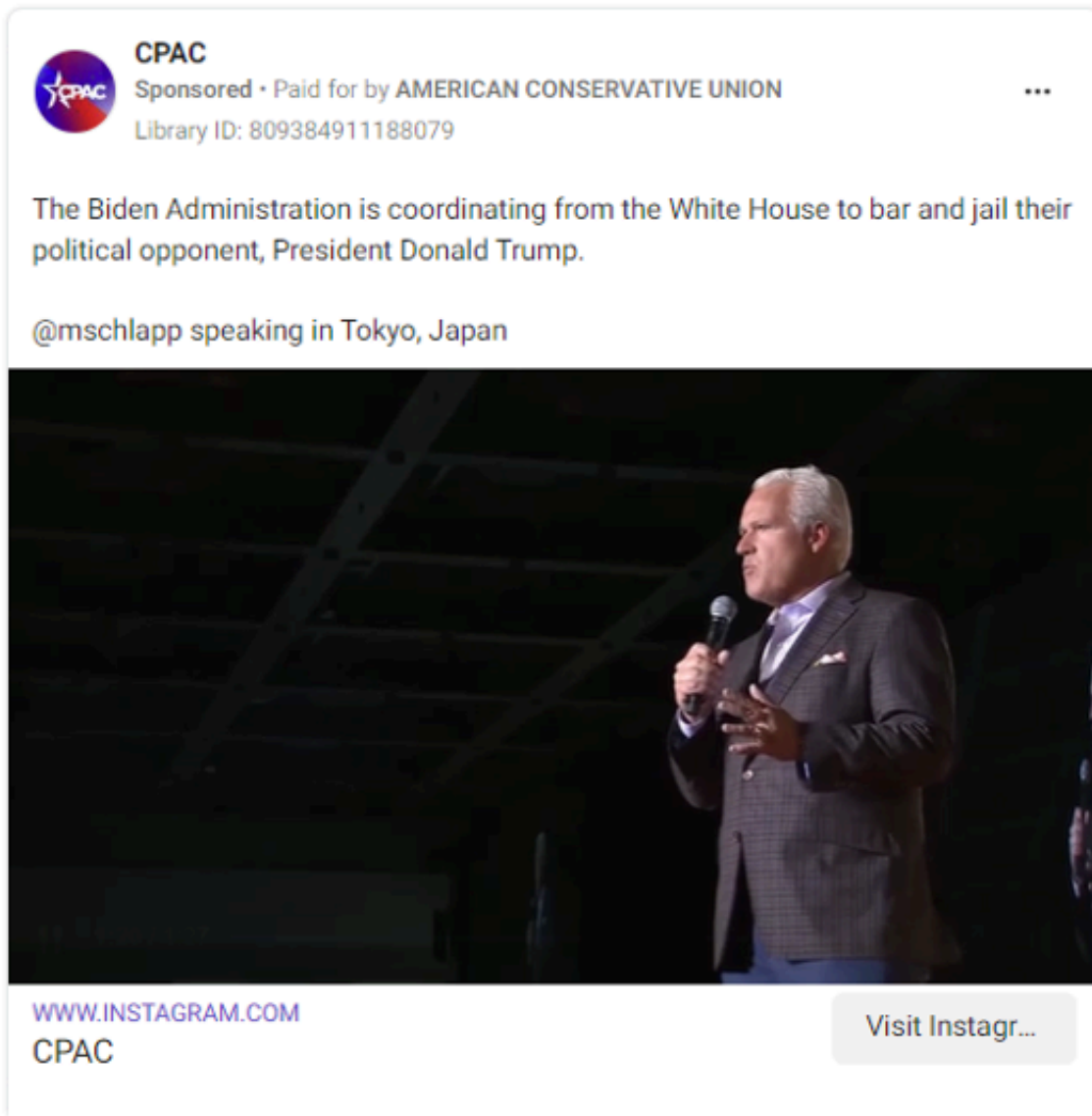


Note: Figure Created with Neo4j Bloom ®

What we find is that all of these organizations are conservative or right-leaning. A few patterns of interest. First, starting in late January and February, candidates who were endorsed by Donald Trump ran ads highlighting the endorsement using the phrase “President Trump”.

Second, we find the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) ran two ads that make false claims. In an ad that ran at the end of September and early October, Matt Schlapp, Chair of CPAC, is shown at a conference in Japan telling the audience that the Biden administration, and Joe Biden is “using his authority to put his opponent in prison” (Figure 16).

Figure 16: CPAC Ad Example 1



Another ad that ran at the end of October and early November features a video of Kari Lake interviewing Schlapp. In the discussion, Lake declared the 2020 election was corrupted, rigged, and stolen by Democrats (Figure 17).

Figure 17: CPAC Ad Example 2

CPAC
Sponsored • Paid for by AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE UNION
Library ID: 358092843331918

We have exposed the radical left of their election fraud tactics. It will be hard for them to replicate it in 2024, but we should always be watchful for any possible corruption. @karilake and @mschlapp

MATT SCHLAPP & KARI LAKE
CPAC HOSTS INVESTORS SUMMIT TO SAVE AMERICA

WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM
CPAC

Visit Instagr...

Third, we find a set of organizations, with Liberty Defender Group the most active, that are unaffiliated with any political organization but suggest they are aligned with the Trump campaign. Their ads start with video clips. The clips come from broadcast news, congressional hearings, or speeches from Trump or other prominent Republicans. Then the ads shift to calling on viewers that support Trump to fill out a poll in exchange for a Trump 2024 flag or a hat, and says that the flag or hat are free when the viewer sends \$5 for shipping and handling (Figure 18, 19). Some of the videos also feature graphic images of destruction and violence and attack Biden's immigration and southern border policies.

Figure 18: Liberty Defender Group Example 1

Liberty Defender Group
Sponsored · Paid for by Liberty Defender Group
Library ID: 369661209191672

Take The Poll To Save America in 2024! Get a Free Trump 2024 Flag and Gold Coin in exchange! #SaveAmerica2024

Click the link to take the poll and support Trump in 2024!

FREE!
TRUMP -2024-
TAKE AMERICA BACK

FREEDOM-DEFENDER.COM
Loyal Trump Supporters! Claim Your Free Gifts

Learn more

Challenges to Tracking Political Campaign Information on Social Media

We are able to research ads that run on Facebook and Instagram because Meta has created an API that allows organizations they approve to access the ad data.

- At this time, no other technology platform provides this access.
- As a result, we cannot track ad activity on TikTok, Google, YouTube, or Snapchat. Google provides a [searchable website](#) to find political ads, and they provide limited utilities for downloading some political ad data, but it doesn't include ad content.

About IDJC's ElectionGraph Project

This is the first report of a yearlong research project by the Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship and a team from Syracuse University's [School of Information Studies](#) to examine trends in the U.S. presidential race and other top 2024 contests including races for U.S. Senate and key congressional districts.

IDJC's ElectionGraph Project seeks to illuminate hidden trends and actors spreading and influencing inaccurate information targeting U.S. voters through social media. It is supported by a grant from Neo4j® and use of the company's graph database technology and experts.

- The analysis was conducted by collecting ads run on Facebook and Instagram through the Meta Ad Library API through a data licensing agreement with Meta.
- We used search terms of the candidates' names and their Facebook page accounts to collect ad activity by the candidates as well as mentions of the candidates in other organizations' ads.

- We used python and Neo4j® software to generate the analyses, and Neo4j's Bloom® tool to generate the figures and graphs.

[Jennifer Stromer-Galley](#), professor at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University and a nationally recognized expert in political campaigns and misinformation, leads the researchers in collaboration with the IDJC's Kramer Director [Margaret Talev](#), a Newhouse professor of practice and journalist specializing in American politics, elections and the White House, and research director [Johanna Dunaway](#), a political science professor at the Maxwell School and expert in political communication, partisan polarization and mass media. You may visit our [website](#) or email our team at democracy@syr.edu with questions or suggestions. For media inquiries, please email Keith Kobland — the Associate Director of Media Relations — at kkobland@syr.edu.



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