

# POLITICAL ADS 2020: INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

## Background

The following data was derived from the Digital Advertising Accountability Program's monitoring of websites and mobile apps for express advocacy political advertising. The data describes ads encountered across the United States from January 1, 2020, to February 20, 2020. The data includes ads encountered on a number of social media platforms, websites, and search engines.

Because of difficulties sampling, we cannot generalize our data to the larger population or assess it for statistical significance. Rather, the summaries below represent a snapshot of activity on the web and in mobile apps as we have encountered them and are offered for illustrative purposes only. Note also that while many tables add up to our N of 314, some may not, for example where an ad was counted but one aspect of it was unreadable or unknowable.

## The Results

*Table 1.* Where we found political ads online.

<b>Type of site/service</b>	<b>Number of ads seen</b>
Non-social media website	170
Social media	105
Search engine	39
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>

*Table 2.* (to the right) How many ads were associated with which states.

“Associated” in this context means that the ad met one of the four following criteria:

1. The text of the ad explicitly mentioned a state
2. The candidate was running for statewide office in a specific state
3. The ad appeared on a state-specific website (e.g., local news websites)
4. The ad otherwise appeared to target a specific individual or group in a given state (e.g., targeted advertising)

<b>State</b>	<b>Number of ads seen</b>
Nevada	32
Iowa	25
Minnesota	24
South Carolina	20
Alabama	14
Florida	13
Kentucky	13
California	12
Ohio	11
Tennessee	11
Arkansas	9
Missouri	9
New Hampshire	9
South Dakota	9
New York	8
Oklahoma	8
Washington	8
Mississippi	7
Pennsylvania	7
Kansas	6
Texas	6
Arizona	5
Maine	5
Virginia	5
Colorado	4
Louisiana	4
Rhode Island	4
Alaska	3
Michigan	3
Connecticut	2
Hawaii	2
Illinois	2
North Carolina	2
West Virginia	2
Wyoming	2
Georgia	1
Idaho	1
Maryland	1
Massachusetts	1
Montana	1
New Mexico	1
Oregon	1
Vermont	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>

Table 3. The top ten advertisers (the person or entity that paid for an ad) from our dataset.

Type of site/service	Number of ads seen
Warren for President	115
Mike Bloomberg 2020	40
Tom Steyer 2020	19
Jaime Harrison for US Senate	16
Pete for America	15
Biden for President	10
Bernie 2020	9
Friends of Andrew Yang	9
Trump Make America Great Again Committee	9
Amy McGrath for Senate	8
<i>Total</i>	<i>250</i>

Table 4. Whether the political advertiser provided any “Enhanced Notice” and “Notice” to users.

For the purposes of this document, “enhanced notice” means any indication of a particular ad’s political nature, such as link, icon, or combination of words and phrases. “Notice” means any explanation, linked from an enhanced notice, that provides insight about the ad.

Notice type	Number of ads seen
“Enhanced notice” & “notice”	172
“Enhanced notice,” but no “notice”	94
Neither	45
<i>Total</i>	<i>311</i>

Table 5. Use of AdChoices icon.

We noticed that many political ads deployed the familiar AdChoices icon as its enhanced notice where we would have expected an icon or wording indicating that the ad was political. Further, we note that no ad in our dataset used the PoliticalAd icon as enhanced notice.

Form of “enhanced notice” in ads	Number of ads seen
Used AdChoices icon	118
Used other form	148
<i>Total</i>	<i>266</i>

Table 6. Types of entities that paid for political ads in our dataset.

Type of advertiser	Number of ads seen
Campaign	288
Committee	21
Non-profit	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>310</i>

Table 7. Types of contest (federal or state).

Type of contest	Number of ads seen
Federal	306
State	8
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>

Table 8. Types of federal contests.

Type of federal contest	Number of ads seen
President	245
Senator	46
Congressman	15
<i>Total</i>	<i>306</i>

Table 9. Types of statewide contests.

Type of statewide contest	Number of ads seen
Governor	7
Lt. Governor	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>8</i>

Table 10. Ads where the advertiser was related to a particular political party.

For example, an advertiser may have “Republican” or “Democrat” as part of its name, or the advertiser may be a candidate for office running on a specific party’s ticket.

Political party	Number of ads seen
Democratic Party	285
Republican Party	29
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>

Table 11. The top ten candidates for whom we encountered “pro” ads—that is, ads advocating for the **election** of this particular candidate.

Candidate name	Number of ads seen
Elizabeth Warren	116
Mike Bloomberg	41
Pete Buttigieg	22
Tom Steyer	19
Donald Trump	14
Amy McGrath	11
Joe Biden	10
Andrew Yang	9
Bernie Sanders	9
Jaime Harrison	8
<i>Total</i>	<i>259</i>

Table 12. The six candidates for whom we encountered “anti” ads—that is, ads advocating for the **defeat** of this particular candidate.

Candidate name	Number of ads seen
Lindsey Graham	14
Donald Trump	11
Mitch McConnell	10
Mike Parson	5
Kris Kobach	4
Jim Jordan	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>45</i>