Priorities

YouTube Playbook

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Overview

Of all the digital platforms, YouTube has the potential to reach the most voters, making the platform critical to persuading and mobilizing voters. We've written this playbook to help advertisers better understand this platform, and use all of the tools available to build and run impactful campaigns.

First, we make the case for why YouTube is so important for Democratic campaigns, using media research and competitive data.

Then, we share best practices for buying on YouTube including making reservations, using planning and measurement tools, and optimizing your inventory mix. There is a lot to consider when making buying, creative, and targeting decisions on YouTube, and we want all advertisers to understand the tradeoffs they are making with each decision. We focus on strategies for persuasion and mobilization campaigns, but YouTube can also play a role in voter registration, list-building, fundraising, or other direct response strategies.

Our past research has informed many of the best practices we recommend in this playbook. We have invested over four million dollars into experiments discussed here, and analyzed surveys with thousands of voters to build our understanding of the best way to leverage YouTube for persuasion and mobilization.

While this playbook focuses on YouTube advertising specifically, we believe that smart persuasion and mobilization programs require a well rounded mix of digital inventory sources and tactics. This includes YouTube, but it also includes social media platforms (like Instagram, or Snapchat), Connected TV (like Hulu, or Peacock), digital audio (like Pandora, or Spotify), paid search, online programmatic display & video inventory, and long term engagement with content creators, among others. A comprehensive media mix is essential for reaching more voters with persuasive and impactful creative strategies. You should determine the optimal media mix for your program based on a number of factors like your budget, audience, and available ad creative.

To summarize our recommendations:
1. **Invest in YouTube:** YouTube is one of the most important platforms for political advertising – in both the share of voters it can reach and the amount of time voters are spending on it. It's an especially important platform for Democratic campaigns seeking to reach voters of color and young voters, but our competitive data suggests that campaigns have not spent enough on the platform to-date. Spending more on YouTube helps to close the gap between consumption and investment.
2. **Take advantage of all YouTube offers:** Testing out different inventory sources and formats across the YouTube ecosystem will help you run more comprehensive programs: you'll reach more voters, engage them more efficiently and effectively, and achieve better scale at the height of the election cycle.
3. **Experiment with Targeting:** Leveraging many tactics in your campaign can help you maximize your reach to your intended audience.
4. **Measure your programs:** Google makes it easy to measure media performance through media metrics, but also offline impact using tools like Brand Lift and Search Lift. These tools make measuring *non-conversion* metrics in particular much more attainable, even with narrower audiences.

Why YouTube?

When building out a paid media strategy for your persuasion or mobilization program, you should first ask some key questions about your goals:
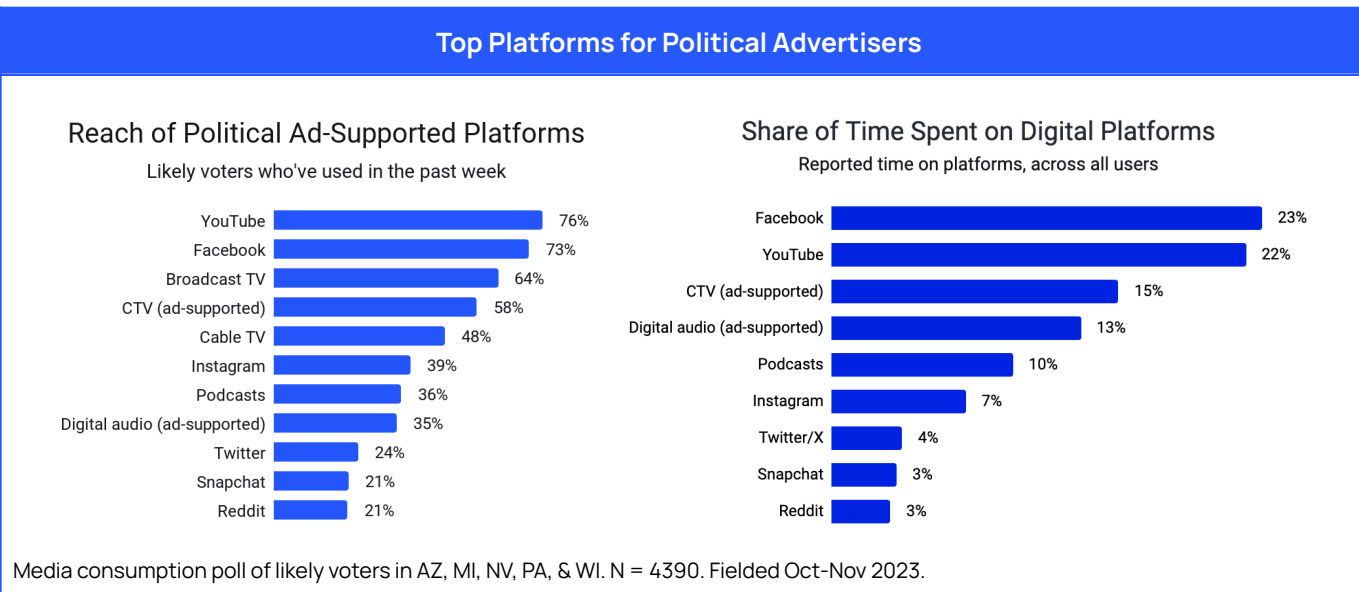
- Who are my target audiences for this specific program?
- What forms of media does my target audience consume regularly?
- How many voters can I afford to reach with the budget I have?
- What are the metrics that will prove the success of my program?

Understanding where your audience is spending their time online can help guide how an advertiser may build their strategy.

Voters exist in an increasingly **fragmented media environment.** Campaigns can no longer rely on traditional linear channels to reach large segments of the voting population. Consider, for example: the average voter used 3 social media platforms in the past week and subscribes to 4 streaming video platforms. The trend intensifies among the youngest voters: the average 18-24 year-old voter used 5 social platforms. In this atmosphere, few platforms come close to the ubiquity that traditional media like linear TV, print, or radio used to have, *but* YouTube is one of the rare platforms that does.

YouTube and Facebook are the two platforms with the widest reach among Americans, and specifically among likely voters in battleground states; these two platforms rise to the top regardless of age, gender, race, and geography. These two platforms also account for the **largest shares of time spent on (political ad-supported)** digital platforms.
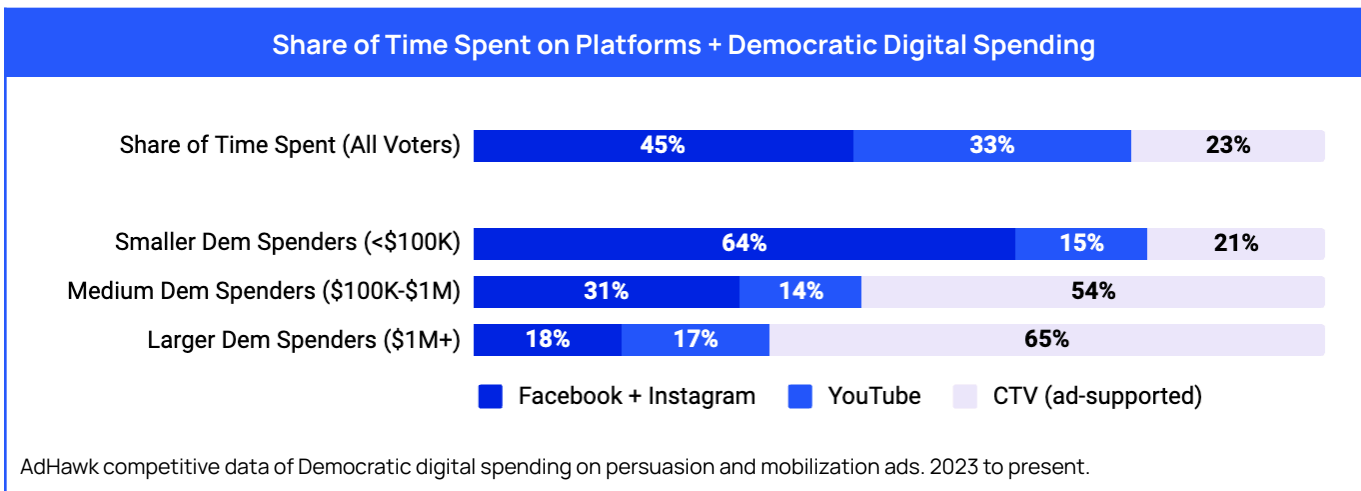
Streaming services, other social platforms like Instagram, and other digital media like music streaming and podcasts all play a meaningful role in online behavior as well.

Top Platforms for Political Advertisers

Reach of Political Ad-Supported Platforms
Likely voters who've used in the past week

Platform	%
YouTube	76%
Facebook	73%
Broadcast TV	64%
CTV (ad-supported)	58%
Cable TV	48%
Instagram	39%
Podcasts	36%
Digital audio (ad-supported)	35%
Twitter	24%
Snapchat	21%
Reddit	21%

Share of Time Spent on Digital Platforms
Reported time on platforms, across all users

Platform	%
Facebook	23%
YouTube	22%
CTV (ad-supported)	15%
Digital audio (ad-supported)	13%
Podcasts	10%
Instagram	7%
Twitter/X	4%
Snapchat	3%
Reddit	3%

Media consumption poll of likely voters in AZ, MI, NV, PA, & WI. N = 4390. Fielded Oct-Nov 2023.
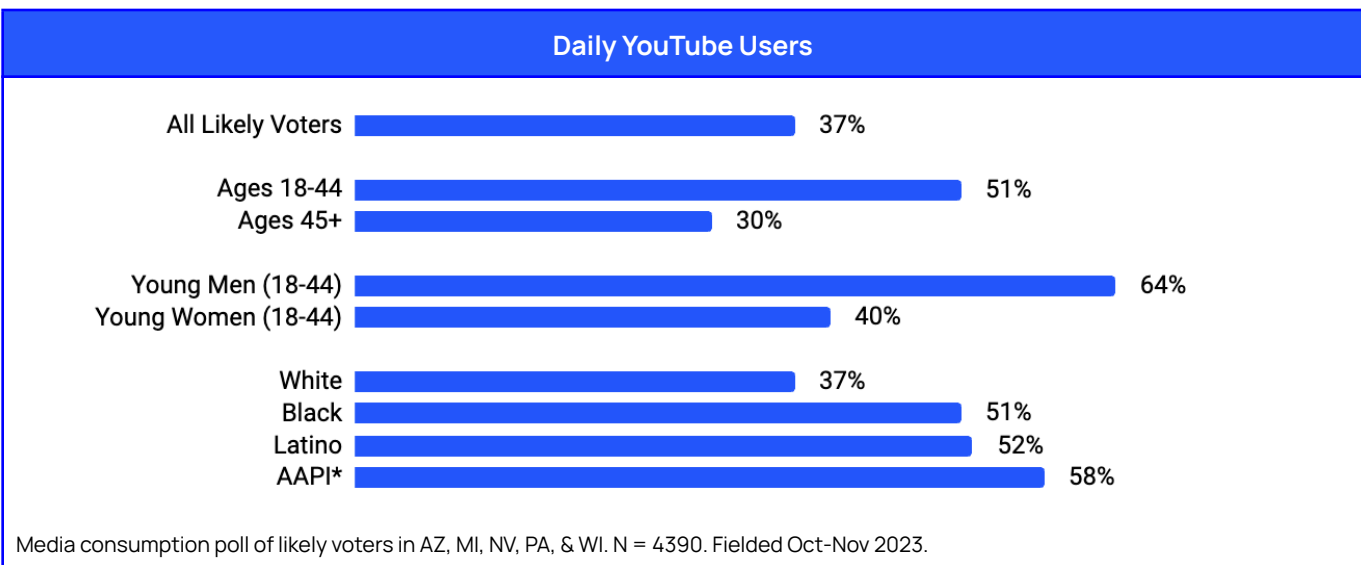
While 76% of voters have used YouTube in the past week, 37% of voters are using the platform *daily or multiple times per day*. Of voters who use YouTube at least weekly, half are spending over *5 hours per week* on the platform.

Additionally, we find that while a single platform (Facebook *or* YouTube) reaches 7 in 10 voters, the combination of **both Facebook *and* YouTube** together can reach 9 in 10 voters.

Media consumption data is only one factor in a media plan: cost, inventory, targeting, and audience capabilities are all important. With that caveat in mind, we're still interested in understanding what media consumption data can tell us about an overall media mix strategy. When comparing the amount of *time* that likely voters say they're spending on the platforms to the amount of *money* Democrats are spending to advertise on them, it raises the possibility that spenders might be under-utilizing the audience reach that YouTube has to offer. We're interested in continuing to experiment to better understand this question.

Share of Time Spent on Platforms + Democratic Digital Spending

	Facebook + Instagram	YouTube	CTV (ad-supported)
Share of Time Spent (All Voters)	45%	33%	23%
Smaller Dem Spenders (<$100K)	64%	15%	21%
Medium Dem Spenders ($100K-$1M)	31%	14%	54%
Larger Dem Spenders ($1M+)	18%	17%	65%

AdHawk competitive data of Democratic digital spending on persuasion and mobilization ads. 2023 to present.

Finally, and importantly, YouTube's reach across all these metrics is even stronger among critical constituencies: **voters of color, younger voters, especially younger men,** are all more likely to use YouTube and be heavy YouTube users (using the platform daily or multiple times per day).

Daily YouTube Users

All Likely Voters	37%
Ages 18-44	51%
Ages 45+	30%
Young Men (18-44)	64%
Young Women (18-44)	40%
White	37%
Black	51%
Latino	52%
AAPI*	58%

Media consumption poll of likely voters in AZ, MI, NV, PA, & WI. N = 4390. Fielded Oct-Nov 2023.

Planning & Buying Best Practices

Overview

Google's ad platform, Google Ads, can be used by political advertisers to run issue, electoral, and GOTV ads that can maximize reach with voters, deliver impactful, multi-format ad creative, drive online engagement, and boost electoral outcomes. In order to successfully launch Election ads,[1] advertisers must go through Google's Election Ads verification process.[2] Advertisers running ads that *don't* fall under the policy do not need to go through the same verification process (e.g., down-ballot candidates, issue advocacy, etc.) Individual states may have their own restrictions regarding what content can and can't be run across Google properties.

Political advertisers on YouTube have access to a variety of tactics to run smart programs. This includes access to an array of inventory (YouTube.com, YouTube Select, YouTube TV, etc. - see inventory table below for more info), formats (bumper, non-skip, long-form, audio - see format strategy table below for more info), access to a mix of targeting tactics, testing (Brand Lift, Search Lift, sequential messaging) and reporting (real time metrics across tactics) to see the impact of each campaign. We recommend testing out *all* of these tactics as your budget allows, as they each can bring value to a program and maximize your reach across audiences, while increasing effectiveness and cost efficiency, especially during competitive electoral moments.

Self-Serve Advertising

YouTube has a comprehensive and dynamic self-serve advertising platform that gives advertisers great control over and visibility into their buys. The platform lets you buy impressions through its own ad auction, where advertisers compete in real time for ad impressions by bidding up and down on CPMs (i.e. deciding how much they're willing to pay to win impressions). This is incredibly valuable for complex (or simple!) political programs that require a mix of formats and targeting strategies, frequent creative swaps, and real-time pacing and budgeting decisions. The platform also doesn't require minimum spend levels - advertisers can run campaigns at both $100 or $1M levels on the platform (note: minimum investment levels *may apply* for buying YouTube TV or Select inventory - more on that later).

Beyond this, research conducted by Priorities USA in 2018 suggests that persuasion advertising programs conducted on self-serve platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Search can have a significant effect on electoral outcomes. The experiment targeted two different congressional districts with a total budget of $90,000, and found an increase of support for the Democratic candidate of 0.57pp. While there is obvious value in accessing additional digital inventory sources (e.g., Hulu, Spotify) to fully saturate audiences online, programs can be effective without access or budget to include non-self-serve platforms. Beyond this, this

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[1] Google defines Election ads as ads that mention a federal or state level candidate/officeholder, political party, or ballot initiative.
[2] Google's Election ads verification process can be found here.

experiment was conducted by two Priorities USA fellows with limited, previous digital advertising experience. Even if you are new to advertising on the platform, you can run a smart program that has an impact!

Reserving Inventory

As expected, YouTube inventory becomes more scarce during competitive advertising moments (think Election Day or Black Friday). To alleviate this, YouTube allows advertisers to pre-book inventory (YouTube Select/YouTube TV and standard inventory) to get ahead of market constraints and run more cost efficient campaigns. Prebooking YouTube inventory guarantees access to inventory and helps lock in lower rates.
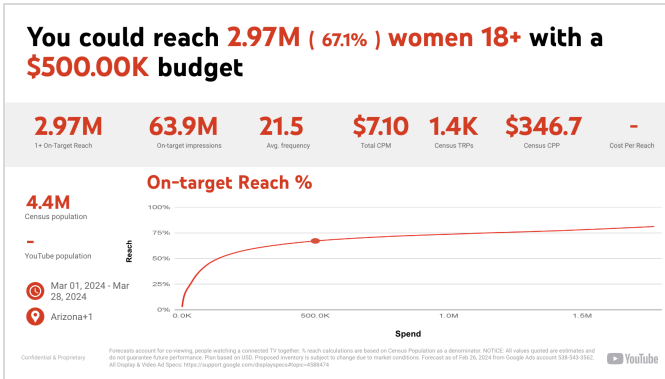
During a midterm or presidential election year, we recommend making reservations across YouTube inventory, especially during peak moments (Q3/Q4) and in more competitive/smaller states (i.e., prioritize Nevada over California). **These reservations are not public, they do not require payment at the time of reservation, and can be edited and/or canceled if strategy changes.** We believe the benefit of reserving early outweighs any downside to booking before budgets and strategies are finalized.

Typically, YouTube Select/YouTube TV inventory requires minimum investment levels (e.g. $35K per quarter). If your program has limited budget, consider relying more heavily on the self-serve YouTube auction, and/or reserving YouTube Select/YouTube TV inventory only in your higher spend quarters (e.g. Q4 of election year only). Advertisers can also reserve auction-specific inventory through YouTube's Instant Reserve process where there are no minimum spend requirements.

Making reservations alongside inventory bought through the self-serve auction will maximize your scale while giving you the flexibility to make real-time adjustments to your YouTube strategy. **Work with your Google representatives or firm to build a reservation strategy that aligns with your program goals and gives your program and budget flexibility**.

YouTube Planning Tools

YouTube's Reach Planner tool is a good starting place when building out a YouTube strategy. The tool lets you build program specific forecasts to indicate how well your budget will saturate your given audience and which YouTube formats will help you do so. **This tool should be used directionally to assess likely reach, likely CPM, and a reasonable format mix.** This tool will *not* help you estimate the exact number of people that can be reached through a given targeting strategy (i.e., Facebook's audience builder tool). **Build out a YouTube strategy that works best for your budget and program, using reach planner to guide your process.**

You could reach 2.97M (67.1%) women 18+ with a $500.00K budget

2.97M	63.9M	21.5	$7.10	1.4K	$346.7	-
1+ On-Target Reach	On-target impressions	Avg. frequency	Total CPM	Census TRPs	Census CPP	Cost Per Reach

On-target Reach %

4.4M Census population

- YouTube population

Mar 01, 2024 - Mar 28, 2024

Arizona+1

Forecasts account for co-viewing, people watching a connected TV together. % reach calculations are based on Census Population as a denominator. NOTICE: All values quoted are estimates and do not guarantee future performance. Plan based on USD. Proposed inventory is subject to change due to market conditions. Forecast as of Feb 26, 2024 from Google Ads account 538-543-3362, All Display & Video Ad Specs: https://support.google.com/displayspecs#topic=4588474

Confidential & Proprietary ▶ YouTube

Non-skippable in-stream (CPM) could reach 2.18M Female 18+ in selected geos (Mar 01, 2024 - Mar 28, 2024)

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Name	Location	Dates	Demographics	Pricing	Budget	On Target Impressions	On Target Reach	Cost Per Reach	TRP	Total Billable Units	Total Avg. Cost
Non-skippable in-stream (CPM)	selected geos	Mar 01, 2024 - Mar 28, 2024	Female 18+	Auction	$375.00K	38.56M	2.18M	$168.15K	870.67	39.3M impr	$9.55 CPM

DETAILED CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

SUGGESTED BID	AVG FREQ & CAP	DEVICES	NETWORK		AUDIENCES		LINEUPS
tCPM: $12.62	17.7X 5 per week	-	YouTube, GVP		-		-

CONTENT EXCLUSIONS		AD POLICIES		SURFACES	
-		All inventory		In-stream (non-skippable)	

Confidential & Proprietary — NOTICE: All values quoted are estimates and do not guarantee future performance. Plan based on USD Proposed inventory is subject to change due to market conditions. Forecasts account for co-viewing, people watching a connected TV together Forecast as of Feb 26, 2024 from Google Ads Account (538-543-3362) All Display & Video Ad Specs: https://support.google.com/displayspecs#topic=4588474 ▶ YouTube

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Beyond this, Google offers a **free and publicly available [political advertising transparency report](#)** that aggregates years worth of creative, targeting, and spend data from all Election advertisers on the platform.

Google's transparency report does have its limitations however, and to solve for this, Priorities USA built out [AdHawk](#), a suite of competitive ad tracking tools, to more easily pull out actionable insights from this report (and that of Facebook & Snapchat). Reach out to [competitive@priorities.org](#) for more information about AdHawk.

AdHawk
by Priorities.

Data is available until: CTV: 2024-02-27   GOOGLE: 2024-02-28   FACEBOOK: 2024-02-25   SNAPCHAT: 2024-02-29

Search Query
Election

	PRESIDENT ×		
	All Senate Races ×	× ∨	
	All House Races ×		

Date Range

Past Month	∨

Crosstab Options

	Inventory Type ×	× ∨
	Spend Platform ×	

Date Groups

By Week	∨

Filters +

CREATIVE	INVENTORY TYPE	SPEND PLATFORM	DEM	TOTAL GOP	DIFF ▾
🖥	30s Video	Google	$33.3k	$378.1k	$-344.7k
🖥	Static	Google	$19.6k	$66.5k	$-46.9k
🖥	6s Video	Google	$5.6k	$42.9k	$-37.3k
🖥	15s Video	Google	$37.3k	$3.5k	$33.8k
🖥	Search	Google	$33.3k	$53.3k	$-20.1k
🖥	60s Video	Google	$17.6k	$500	$17.1k
🖥	TBD	Google	$11.4k	<$100	$11.4k
🖥	>60s Video	Google	$8.3k	<$100	$8.3k

Competitive reporting data can be used by advertisers in a lot of ways: **we recommend relying on the data to regularly track friendly and competitive spend trends to maximize the impact and coverage of your own buys.**

Through an analysis of competitive spend in 2022, we found that 84% of Republican spending on Google is targeted statewide, as compared to only 42% of Democratic spending. Democrats tend to target more granularly, using geographic targeting like ZIPs. This means that Republicans are talking to all voters, while Democrats are only talking to a narrower audience. To compound this trend, often the same ZIPs are targeted by multiple campaigns. Better coordination through tracking competitive data can help spread resources to ensure we are talking to as many voters as possible.

Strategies to Scale and Optimize Campaigns

YouTube campaigns can become increasingly hard to scale, (i.e. deliver their full budget on time) during competitive electoral moments. The strategies below can help to identify opportunities to scale and optimize (improve performance and pace toward delivery goals)in real time:

Budget Strategies
- **Self evaluating campaign pacing:** YouTube's self serve platform lacks tools for evaluating scale, both in that: a) a pacing tool doesn't exist in-platform, and b) tools for managing spend goals don't exist (e.g., daily spend goals or aggressive pacing goals, etc.) In order to track scale, you need to rely on self-calculated daily spend goals, average CPMs, and spend over time. If your campaign is not hitting daily spend goals, the campaign will likely not deliver in-full, and the campaign budget should be shifted or audiences should be expanded.
- **Bidding:** YouTube CPMs will vary by both the ad format (e.g., non-skip vs. bumper) and the targeting details (i.e., a NV campaign will be more expensive than a CA campaign). That said, CPMs for auction

inventory typically fall within standard ranges (e.g., bumper $8-18, skippable $10-20, non-skip $15-25). In order to increase the scale of a YouTube campaign, increasing target CPMs is one strategy to increase the competitiveness of your bids in the auction. However, you will often find that YouTube campaigns have bid ceilings; you can only bid so much higher to increase a program's ability to hit daily spend goals. If this is the case, try adjusting your targeting/inventory approach. We *don't* recommend over-bidding for inventory (e.g., paying more than $40 CPM for YouTube bumper inventory). Instead, expand targeting, or shift budget to other, more scalable formats.

- **Flight dates:** If you set a campaign level budget (rather than daily budget), your YouTube campaigns will always pace evenly, i.e., they will spend the same budget on launch day and Election Day. In order to manage pacing more accurately, manually adjust campaign flights to spend more aggressively at the end, e.g., extend end dates for slower pacing or move up end dates to accelerate pacing. We don't recommend setting a daily budget, as this may lead to overdelivery.

- **Frequency:** Max frequency goals can be set at the YouTube campaign level and should be used to balance ad exposure across light/heavy YouTube consumers. Given YouTube's considerable reach, some viewers will be unlikely to receive more than 1-2 ads total in a week, while others can potentially see hundreds per day, making frequency caps essential to preventing fatigue/overexposure. For political persuasion and mobilization, 7-10 ads per week / 1-3 per day are good benchmarks, but should be considered in the context of the full media plan (on and off YouTube). If ad engagement levels are declining, consider reducing frequency until the next creative swap. If scale is a concern, consider increasing frequency levels by 1-2 per week.

Content Strategies

- **Formats:** Non-skippable video inventory is more competitive and therefore can be more difficult to scale during peak electoral moments (i.e., in the weeks leading up to Election Day). If a program is struggling to scale, consider shifting non-skippable budget to other high impact formats, including skippable in-stream, bumpers, audio, or Shorts (see more on this below).

Measurement Strategies

- **Use Brand Lift results:** Brand Lift can help inform your targeting and creative strategies. See Brand Lift section below for more information on how to make these results actionable.

Inventory and Content Strategy

We recommend incorporating as many YouTube formats as possible to reach more voters and drive more engagement throughout your program. The below tables highlight our recommendations for executing a YouTube-wide program across inventory types and formats.

If your program has limited budget, consider relying more heavily on the YouTube self-serve auction, and/or reserving YouTube Select/YouTube TV inventory only in your higher spend quarters (e.g., Q4 of election year only).

Inventory Strategy

Tap into as many sources of YouTube inventory as is possible for your budget:

	YouTube Auction (self-serve)	YouTube Select	YouTube TV
Description	The entire YouTube ecosystem – across content and devices	Top 5% of popular YouTube channels – across devices	TV streaming service that includes live TV programming
Formats	• Non-skippable in-stream (15s) • Skippable in-stream (3min) • Shorts (30s) • Bumpers (6s) • Audio (15s)	• Non-skippable in-stream (15s, 30s) • Skippable in-stream (3min)	• Non-skippable in-stream (15s, 30s, 60s) • Skippable in-stream (15s, 30s) • Bumpers (6s, mobile only)
Targeting available	• Geo (down to zip code) • Age/Gender • Language • Device • Content (topics, placements, keywords)	• Geo (down to zip code) • Age/Gender • Language • Limited content lineups	• Geo (down to DMA) • Age/Gender • Language • Limited content lineups
% of Budget*	30-50%	25-45%	15-35%
Minimum Requirement	N/A	$35K Per Quarter	$35K Per Quarter
Reserve ads running in...	N/A	Q2/Q3/Q4	Q2/Q3/Q4

* Budget breakdown across formats may vary based on inventory availability across target geos and audiences

Content/Format Strategy

Non-skippable 15s in-stream video inventory is the most competitive inventory on the platform, in that it is the longest non-skip format available through the self-serve auction. That said, we recommend using this format alongside all other available formats (see inventory and format recommendations below). **We recommend using a mix of skippable (30-40%) and non-skippable inventory (60-70%) in every program to maximize audience reach and saturation.**

Beyond this, YouTube accepts several video specs, which makes it easy to use ad creative produced for other platforms across YouTube inventory. We recommend testing your vertical video content (9x16), in addition to horizontal video content (16x9), audio spots, longer form ads (30s+), and shorter ads (6s) across different inventory sources to reach more people. **Take advantage of the creative you've produced for other platforms and run it on YouTube to reach more people and drive more impact. If you have limited creative assets available (e.g. only one video size/length), you can still run a comprehensive YouTube program, but will only have access to certain inventory.**

Format	Description	Use Case	% of Budget*	Available via Self Serve Tool
Long form	15s+ video ads	Tell a longer story across skippable ad formats and devices	20-40%	✔
Non-Skip	15s video ads	Take advantage of non-skippable video inventory across devices	40-60%	✔
Bumpers	6s video ads	Deliver succinct, cost-efficient message across non-skippable inventory across devices	10-30%	✔
Shorts	Vertical video ads	Deliver vertical video ads that are optimized toward mobile-first viewing experiences	5-15%	✔
Audio	Audio ads	Compliment your digital radio/audio program to reach people listening to audio on YouTube	5-15%	✔

* Budget breakdown across formats may vary based on inventory availability across target geos and audiences.

Targeting Strategy

Overview

There are many targeting options available on YouTube that can be used in a media plan to most efficiently reach as many audience members as possible. The table below gives a brief summary of the six categories of targeting, and the sections after dive deeper into how each might be best incorporated into a campaign. These targeting tactics are not mutually exclusive, and we discuss how to use them together in the "Layering Tactics" section.

Tactic	Examples	When to Use

Geo	ZIP, Radius	Geographic targeting can be the most efficient approach to reaching your audience when your targets are concentrated in specific areas or ZIPs. In particular, this approach allows you to leverage data from the voter file or census to very intentionally reach and move a well-defined set of voters. ZIPs can be used for any campaign, but radius targeting is only allowed for non-political campaigns.
Contextual	Topics, Channels, Keywords	When audiences are not well organized by ZIP code, or you'd like to target by content consumption patterns, contextual targeting is a useful tactic. This is a way to reach moveable voters by relying on in-platform data, rather than the offline signals available. Who you reach through this tactic is more obscure, but measurement tools on YouTube can help understand your impact.
First-Party	Individuals	First-party targeting on YouTube is only allowed for non-political or c3 campaigns, and it can be a high bar to clear to get this distinction. When available, can be a way to more narrowly target a particular audience. This data can be sourced from the voter-file or based on a tracked behavior such as checking your registration.
Language	Browser settings, Content language	Browser settings, or the language in which the user is viewing the internet, can be used to deliver creative in languages other than English to speakers of that language. Targeting based on the language of the content being consumed is another way to expand the reach of language targeting.
Device	TV, Mobile	You can target YouTube ads across all screens where users are viewing video content: computer, mobile, tablet, and TVs. You can either opt to target ads across all screens to increase reach, or a limited list of screens (e.g., TVs only to boost video completion rates).
Demographic	Gender, Age	For Election Ads, you can target users based on their gender or age. For campaigns that fall outside of the policy, additional targeting options are available, such as household income and parental status.

Geo Targeting

Geographic targeting is a good first tactic for most campaigns, as it allows strategists to find the right balance between scale and audience fidelity. That is, how can we reach as many members of our audience as possible (scale), most efficiently (audience fidelity)?

Our research has shown that high reach tactics are more effective at mobilizing voters than high frequency tactics, making the argument for achieving scale. We embedded an experiment into our 2022 mobilization campaign where one treatment attempted to maximize reach by investing in broader targeting tactics like ZIP targeting, and the other treatment maximized frequency by continuing to invest in a first-party list. The higher reach arm prioritized platforms like YouTube and Hulu, whereas the higher frequency arm had to rely more on platforms where first-party targeting was allowed, like Facebook.

We found that maximizing reach increased turnout more successfully than maximizing frequency, particularly among lower likelihood voters, and voters of color. This pattern held even among members of our first-party list (who received some level of investment in both treatments), suggesting that the pairing of broadcast tactics with a well defined first party audience is a very successful mobilization strategy.

ZIPs can help strategists achieve both scale and audience fidelity. Given that most political campaigns are not able to target using a first-party list on YouTube, ZIPs are the smallest[3] available targeting unit. There is a lot of data available about ZIPs to help select a universe that makes sense for your program. Advertisers can select a set of ZIPs to *include* or *exclude* from their audience. An example of a time exclusion targeting may be useful is a mobilization campaign that wants to avoid delivery to deep Republican areas.

We use two different methodologies for building ZIP universes: (1) Audience Density, where the intention is to reach a specific group of people by selecting ZIPs with the highest population of that audience; and (2) ZIP Characteristics, where ZIPs are selected based on information about the entire ZIP such as average partisanship or turnout scores, or past electoral information.

Which approach practitioners should choose depends on the type of audience a campaign is intended to reach. The funding source of your program will also determine what tools are available for targeting (e.g. a c3 program cannot use partisanship markers).

For campaigns seeking to reach demographic audiences such as Latino or Black voters, audience density can be a good way to identify regions where those voters live. The challenge with this type of definition can be where to set the threshold for inclusion. As an example, we can look at targeting Detroit for three different demographic audiences: Latino voters, Black voters, and College-educated voters.

Each map below uses a different threshold to select ZIPs for that audience, and in fact "density" can mean a lot of different things depending on what state and audience a campaign is targeting. It is worth exploring the distribution of your intended audience across the states included in your program to better understand what is a reasonable threshold that optimizes both scale and audience fidelity.
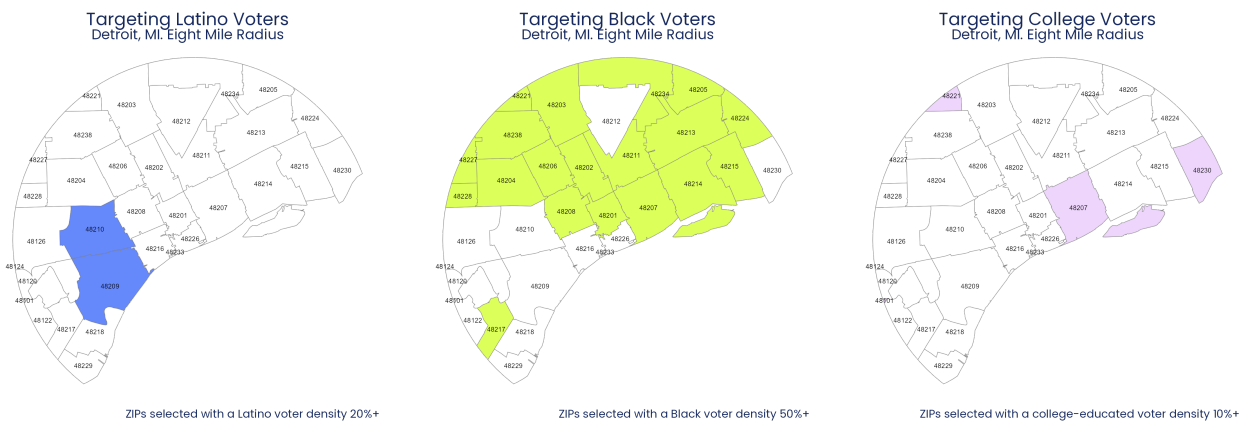

ZIP characteristics can be a good methodology when selecting political universes. For example, a persuasion universe in Phoenix can be chosen in a few different ways: (1) as in the left chart, can select ZIPs with a

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average partisanship score near 50; (2) as in the middle chart, can select ZIPs with a close 2020 presidential margin; (3) can select ZIPs based on how much they have changed election over election.

Targeting Based on Avg. Partisanship Score
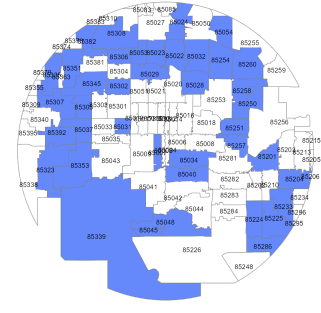Phoenix, Arizona. Twelve Mile Radius
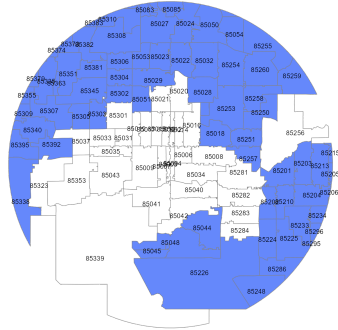
ZIPs selected with Avg. Partisanship Scores Close to 50.

Targeting Based on Presidential Margin in 2020
Phoenix, Arizona. Twelve Mile Radius
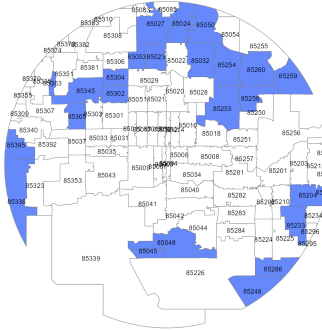
ZIPs selected with Tight 2020 Margins.

Targeting Based on Dem Vote Share Swing
2020 to 2022
Phoenix, Arizona. Twelve Mile Radius

ZIPs selected with Positive Swing if Lean R,
and Negative Swing if Lean D.

ZIPs are defined based on a device's location, and this impacts who you may reach with your program. Mobile devices will likely move in and out of your target ZIPs, and there is no way to filter to only voters that live in a certain ZIP. On the other hand, TVs are not portable, and will remain in their home ZIP.

Targeting by ZIP is also not always accurate. A small percentage of impressions delivered on Google cannot be attributed to a ZIP code at all. Even for the impressions attributed to a ZIP, not all impressions are correctly delivered to the targeted ZIP. Still, research on advertising spend has found that even when geo targeted errors are made, impressions are delivered near the intended ZIP the vast majority of the time.

In some circumstances, ZIPs are too big for the intended audience. In those instances, radius targeting is a great solution. This tactic is only available for campaigns that don't fall under the Election Policy, so there are limits on its use.

When trying to target a concert, sporting event, college campus, or other specific location, it is possible to drop a pin at the center, and specify a radius to target. Any device that enters that radius will be eligible to receive your ad. For instance, if trying to target the Emory campus in Atlanta, radius targeting would be far simpler than attempting to collect the neighboring ZIP codes.

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Targeting the Emory University Campus
Atlanta, GA. Two Mile Radius
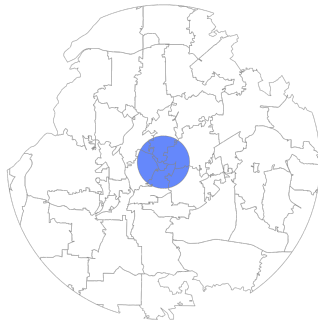
Blue circle shows radius around Emory University. Full map includes
ZIPs in Fulton and Dekalb Counties, within 12 miles of campus.

In addition to ZIP and radius targeting, Google allows for broader geographic targeting such as state, DMA, city, or congressional district level targeting. If you are trying to target an entire city or a congressional district[4], it is best to do so directly rather than attempting to collect the ZIPs that represent that area. DMA targeting can be less useful on digital, given how large and imprecise they can be (crossing state lines, etc), but may be useful paired with other tactics. State-wide targeting is a good option for broadcast campaigns, or as a base when layering other tactics.

Geographic targeting can help practitioners be very intentional about how they spend their budget against their intended audience. With all the data available about ZIPs, programs can be as targeted as makes sense for a campaign's goal. However, ZIPs are not the only targeting tactic available on YouTube, and should be one important element of a broader targeting strategy.

Contextual Targeting

Platforms have more and more information on their users, and leveraging this data can be key to successfully targeting a campaign. YouTube offers a few different ways to target contextually: (1) Topics, which target YouTube *videos* based on their content; (2) Video Lineups, which are buckets of YouTube *channels* based on what their content generally consists of; and (3) keywords, which works similar to Google Search, by targeting viewers based on what they are *searching* to view on YouTube, or what the videos they are watching are tagged as. Video Lineups, also referred to as "Channel Lineups" or "YouTube Dynamic Lineups" can be made custom by the advertiser, i.e., you can select exactly which channels to target, or rely on the existing Video Lineups created by Google.

Contextual targeting can be more efficient in reaching your intended audience when your audience is not condensed into particular geographic regions. It can also be a good way to expand reach beyond your core ZIP universe.

We ran an experiment in August 2023 to better understand what contextual buckets YouTube has to offer, and what audience each was able to reach. We tested 10 contextual buckets across our six battleground states,

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[4] Google has updated CDs to reflect the current lines post-2020 redistricting.

and intend to continue testing more to build our understanding of the contextual landscape on YouTube. All 10 were pre-defined sets of channel lineups. In fact, there are thousands more pre-defined contextual buckets to test, and endless custom lineups to explore. We pursued each content bucket based on a set of three theories: (1) testing the places on YouTube where people are spending the most time (e.g., Gaming); (2) testing pre-built lineups to reach particular demographic audiences (e.g., Black Cultural Affinity); or (3) approaching people consuming politically-adjacent or education-based content (e.g. Right-Wing[5], or Self Help). We found success in buckets fitting all three theories, proving persuadable voters can be reached through this targeting tactic. We used a set of persuasion ZIP codes as our baseline when comparing the performance of the contextual buckets (targeted statewide).

When evaluating the performance of a given contextual bucket, we look at a few different things. First, we look at absolute lift and headroom lift as measured by Brand Lift, a YouTube measurement tool. Absolute lift compares the treatment group to a control group for each contextual bucket. Headroom lift normalizes the baselines, allowing for a comparison across contextual buckets. The chart below reports the headroom lift for each contextual bucket we've tested.
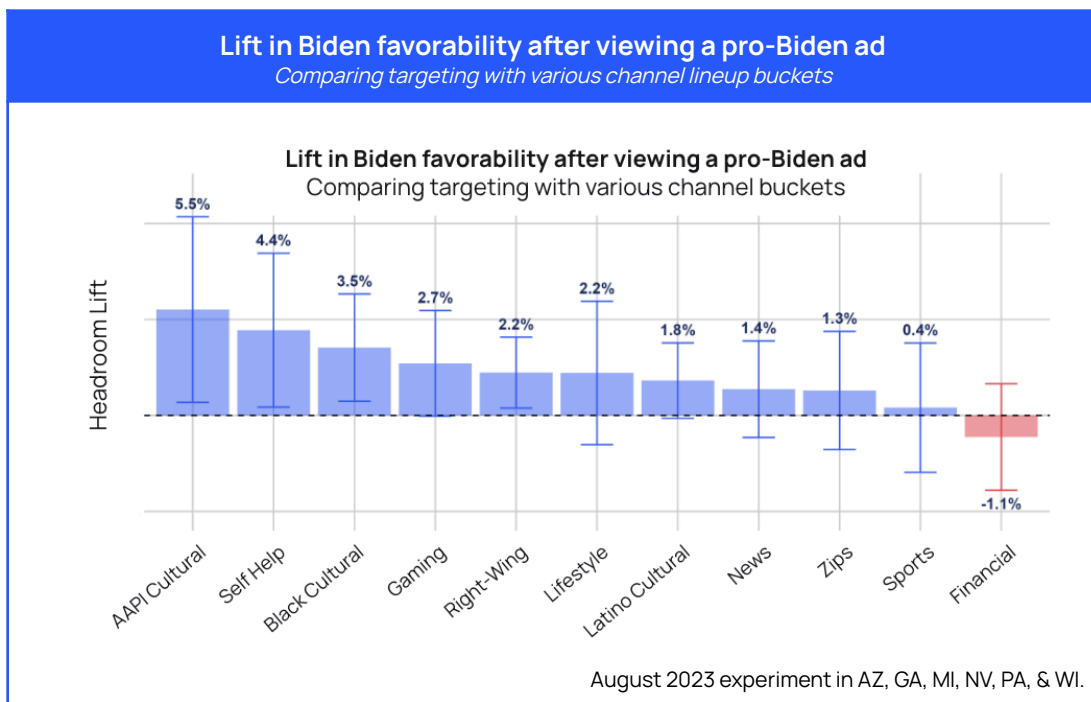
Treatment effects are not the only factor to consider when planning. The size of each contextual bucket's reach also plays a role in how many voters can be persuaded or mobilized with your program. The next chart shows the number of lifted users that originate from each bucket alongside the amount of overall reach the bucket generated. This chart can be thought of as a measure of efficiency. Bigger contextual buckets like Black Cultural Affinity, Gaming, and Right Wing content drive both the higher shares of reach as well as the

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[5] The Right-Wing content bucket represents right-leaning news content (e.g. Fox News) and an additional set of related channels for scale.

most lifted users. However, some small buckets such as AAPI Cultural and Self Help outperform their smaller reach by representing a large number of lifted users. Similarly, some larger content buckets like News underperform their reach with a smaller share of lifted users. It is worth considering both the balance of scale and effectiveness when determining what contextual buckets to include in your plans.
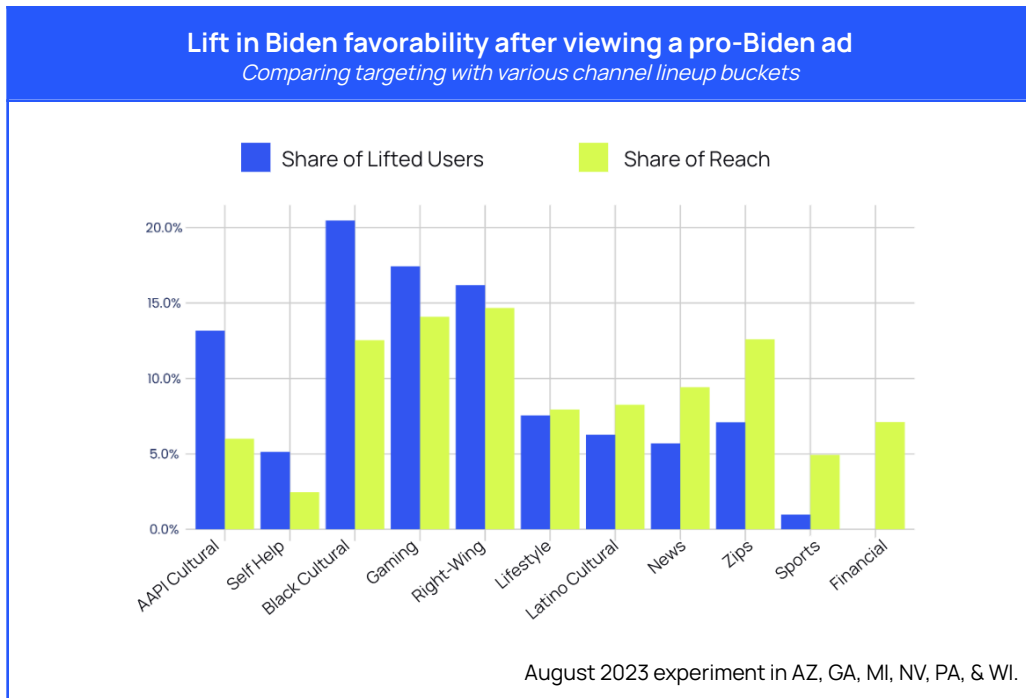
In addition, targeting a bucket like Right Wing can help combat the misinformation being shared in those ecosystems. Targeting lineups designed for particular audiences can help efficiently reach those voters when they are not as concentrated geographically in a state. A particular lineup might be relevant if the campaign is targeted at a particular issue (e.g., the climate). YouTube offers a lot of options for contextual targeting that can be explored to best suit a given campaign.

Using Brand Lift and other audience data available on YouTube, we were able to verify after the experiment: which videos we reached, which voters we reached, and which voters we persuaded.

Contextual Targeting Experiment Results: Lineup Examples		
	AAPI Cultural Affinity	Black Cultural Affinity
Common topics	Music videos	Music videos
Distinct topics	Cooking, K-Pop	Hip-Hop, R&B

Who did we reach?	ZIPs with high % of AAPI voters Skewed female Skewed younger (18-34)	ZIPs with high % of people of color Skewed male Skewed younger (18-34)
Who did we persuade?	Skewed male Skewed younger (18-34)	Skewed female Skewed older (45+)
Top video examples	 **ILLIT (아일릿) 'SUPER REAL ME' Brand Film**	 **USHER - Boyfriend (Official Music Video)**

Our experimentation with contextual buckets is not designed with the goal of selecting and recommending the top lineups for every organization, but instead an ongoing process to understand how best to reach persuadable voters. To carry out this process within your own campaigns, we would suggest using the first week of a campaign to test a few different contextual buckets that may be relevant to your audience or message, and using Brand Lift and reach measures to determine which to select for the remainder of the plan.
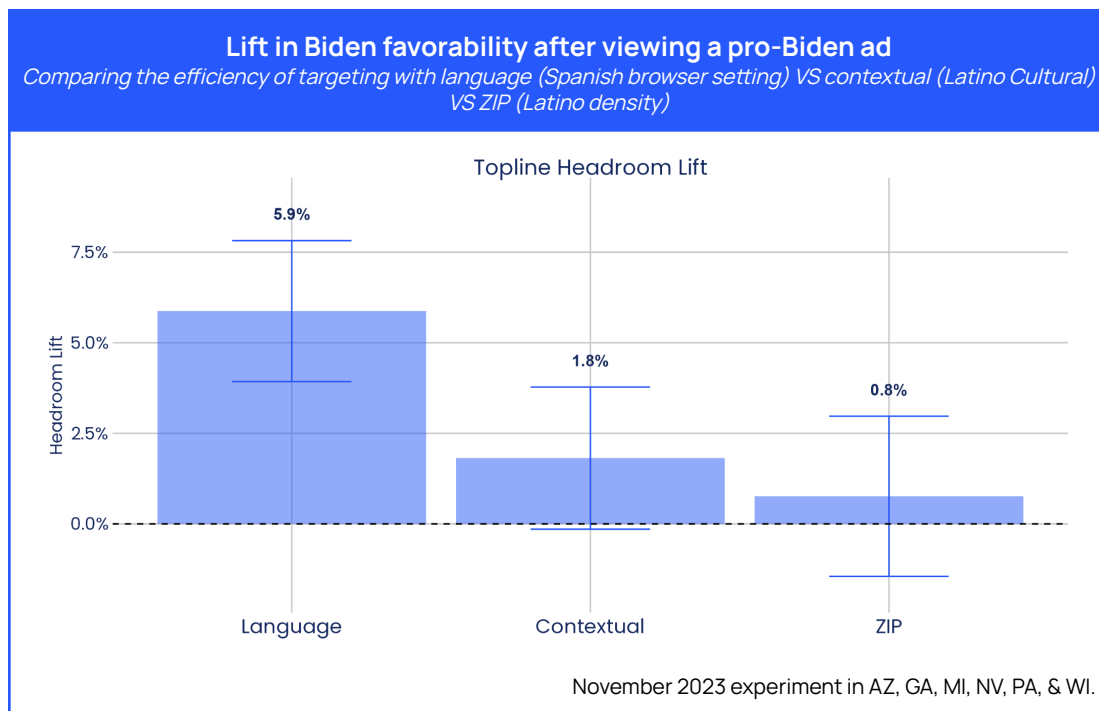
First-Party Targeting

First-party targeting on YouTube has its limits, but can be a helpful tactic to reach a specific audience with a higher degree of fidelity than other available tactics. YouTube only allows first-party targeting when an ad campaign does not fall under the Elections Policy. Beyond this limitation, match rates on the platform typically range from 50-60%, resulting in less than 50% audience reach. Additionally, targeting a narrower audience can incur higher CPMs.

When possible to use this tactic, first-party targeting can help boost frequency among the highest value targets in your audience. Our research suggests that this tactic is best used alongside more broadcast strategies like geo targeting in order to produce a "surround-sound" style effect. Our 2022 mobilization experiment compared high-reach tactics and high-frequency tactics to see which more successfully drove turnout. Both treatment groups included a shared "baseline" set of tactics, which included a first-party list. We found that even members on the first party list within the high-reach treatment voted at higher rates than members on the high-frequency treatment, even though the high-frequency treatment was more first-party heavy. That finding shows that continuing to heavy-up on first-party tactics is less effective than pairing first-party tactics with higher-reach tactics, e.g., ZIP targeting.

Language Targeting

We can think of language targeting in two ways: 1) user browser settings, or 2) language of the content being consumed. The former is the most straightforward, and currently only option for most inventory on YouTube. In this scenario, users who have set up their browser to be in a different language (e.g., Spanish), can be targeted, no matter what they are watching on YouTube. In the latter, any person consuming content in Spanish, for example, could be targeted with an ad. This latter option is currently only available to directly buy across YouTube Select inventory, but Google is working on making this possible across all inventory. At present, advertisers could build a custom list of Spanish channels to target to approach language targeting in this fashion.

We have found success adding Spanish Language browser setting targeting to programs designed for Latinos. A Latino targeting experiment that we ran in conjunction with our partners at Somos Votantes and Equis in November 2023 found that Spanish Language targeting had the highest lift on Biden Favorability as measured on Brand Lift. This experiment was run in our six battleground states. The other two targeting tactics tested in this experiment were defined as follows: (1) ZIPs were selected based on Latino density; (2) Contextual used the Latino Contextual Bucket defined by Google that includes "Spanish Language Gaming" and "News (Mexico)" lineups, among others.

Lift in Biden favorability after viewing a pro-Biden ad
Comparing the efficiency of targeting with language (Spanish browser setting) VS contextual (Latino Cultural) VS ZIP (Latino density)

Topline Headroom Lift

November 2023 experiment in AZ, GA, MI, NV, PA, & WI.

One trend we noticed in our experiment was the way delivery was split by device varied across treatments. Of the impressions served in our Spanish Language treatment, two-thirds were delivered to a mobile device. In contrast, the ZIP treatment delivered a majority of its impressions to a TV. It is possible that users are more likely to change their language browser settings on a personal device, like a phone, rather than a shared device, like a TV, and thereby targeting by language may inadvertently alter the device composition of a

campaign. This is worth paying attention to in order to ensure a campaign is buying the appropriate formats for the device a user may be viewing an ad from.

We are also interested in testing other languages (Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese) to see their capacity to reach persuadable voters on YouTube.

Device Targeting

You can target YouTube ads across all screens where users are viewing video content: computer, mobile, tablet, and TVs. In 2023, we ran a YouTube program in 6 presidential battleground states targeted to all devices and saw the following delivery: 43% on mobile, 40% on TVs, 9% on computers, 8% on tablets. If you run campaigns targeted to *all* devices, you'll probably find similar trends. We generally recommend targeting all devices when running YouTube campaigns to increase reach by finding voters on whatever screens they are consuming videos. That said, device-specific targeting decisions can accomplish a few things:

- **Boosting engagement rates:** Prioritizing TV-heavy impressions will boost overall VCR across a YouTube campaign (less skipping happens at the TV level).
- **Being audience specific:** Prioritizing device types that over-index for certain audiences (e.g., reaching young people or Latinos on mobile devices).
- **Better aligning creative:** Aligning ad formats with ad-viewing experience (e.g., running vertical video content on mobile devices only or running 30s ads on TV screens only).

While not essential to build a YouTube strategy around device targeting, the data that YouTube campaigns provide at the device level may help inform creative or targeting strategies for future campaigns.

Demographic Targeting

For the demographics that YouTube allows to be targeted directly (age and gender), demographic targeting is the best choice. YouTube has predefined age buckets that can be applied alone, or layered onto any other tactic: 18-24; 25-34; 35-44, etc.

Other tactics can be layered on top should the audience be too large, e.g., targeting all young voters in the battleground may be beyond a program's budget. For instance, age demographic targeting could be paired with a set of persuasion ZIPs to reach young voters in need of persuasion messaging.

Layering Tactics

Deploying multiple tactics in a media plan can help you maximize reach on YouTube. When thinking about which tactics to include, and how to ensure they work best together, there are a few things we would recommend considering:

1. Where is your audience? What do you know about how they behave?
2. Is your goal to expand or narrow your audience? How much spend on non-audience members are you willing to accept in order to reach as many audience members as possible?

Targeting tactics can be deployed as "inclusive" layers or "exclusive" layers. Inclusive layering broadens targeting, e.g., targeting both Gaming content and persuasion ZIPs would reach voters who are either watching gaming content *OR* live in your ZIPs. Exclusive layering further narrows targeting, e.g., only reaching people who are watching gaming content *AND* live within your ZIPs. Based on your goal (expansion or narrowing), you can apply your tactics as inclusive or exclusive layers.

Efficiency, or how much "waste" you are willing to accept, may also influence whether you decide to layer inclusively or exclusively. In order to reach an audience through any of these tactics, some amount of money will be spent on non-targets, since no option available on most of YouTube is able to offer 100% fidelity to your audience. There is also the question of whether you might expect backlash among non-audience members. In our creative testing, polling, and experimental research, we have not seen much evidence for backlash. That is, generally messages that work overall, generally perform well among each subgroup. However, should backlash be a concern, efficiency with your targeting becomes paramount.

For each tactic, the spend per target you could expect would work differently. ZIPs with an average audience density of 20%, for example, would result in 80% of a media budget being spent on non-targets. A possible solution for this would be to add an exclusive layer, e.g., a contextual targeting tactic, that over-indexes with your intended audience. Layering tactics in this fashion may drive down opportunities to scale, and cause CPMs to rise, but could be ultimately worth it if audience fidelity is the main goal.

However, reaching as many audience members as possible will require some amount of spend against non-targets. Inclusive layering can help expand reach in a more efficient way. For instance, ZIP targeting can be used to reach the geographic areas where your audience is most concentrated. Contextual targeting can help expand beyond those ZIPs by using what you know about your audience's content consumption habits to find other targets statewide.

We recommend considering how best to fit multiple targeting tactics into plans to most effectively reach as many of your audience members as possible.

Measurement Tools

Media Metrics

Google provides advertisers with a comprehensive set of real-time reporting metrics in their dashboard to help evaluate the success of campaigns. This list of metrics includes campaign program results related to reach/frequency, impressions, video views, clicks, and costs. Metrics should be evaluated as directional to a program's success, rather than indicative of impact on offline outcomes (see Brand Lift section below for more information). They can also be used to evaluate the value and cost efficiency of YouTube as part of a broader digital program.

These metrics can also be evaluated across different levels of YouTube programs (campaign level, ad groups, ads, videos), across demographic parameters (age, gender, household income, parental status), across content-based targeting parameters (topics, keywords, placements), and locations.

- **Reach metrics:** Use *impressions*[6], *reach*[7], and *frequency*[8] to evaluate how well your program is saturating your target audience. YouTube is largely a reach-first platform, meaning your program will prioritize high reach over high frequency. Narrow audiences or increase investments to drive higher frequency per target.
- **Click metrics:** Use *clicks* and *CTR (Click-Through-Rate)* to evaluate relative engagement by audience and creative.
- **Video view metrics:** Use *video completes (played to 100%) and average watch time* to evaluate relative video engagement by audience and creative. Note that YouTube inventory is largely non-skippable, which will typically produce *VCR (Video-Completion-Rate)* 90%+, and is therefore less helpful at evaluating relative performance.
- **Cost metrics:** Use *CPM (Cost-per-1000-Impressions)* to evaluate how expensive your audience is to reach (adjust bids accordingly to scale better in the auction). Use *CPCV (Cost-per-Completed-View)* and *CPC (Cost-per-Click)* to evaluate cost efficiency of media, compared to other inventory sources.

Consider these questions when evaluating media metrics - these can help you **optimize toward more effective targeting strategies, creative flights, or formats:**

- Does your reach align with your initial projections? Are you hitting a target frequency that will saturate your audience? Is it time to rotate in a new flight of creative?
- Is one audience engaging with ad creative at a higher rate (CTR, VCR)? Are all audiences engaging with one flight of creative at a higher rate (CTR, VCR)?
- Is your VCR lower than expected? Is there room to shift some budget to non-skippable video inventory?
- Is your average CPM lower or higher than expected? Does it make sense to increase your target bit to spend more aggressively in the auction?
- How do your metrics on YouTube compare to the metrics you're seeing on other platforms?

Brand Lift

Google provides a free measurement tool, Brand Lift, to any advertiser that is whitelisted for the tool[9], and recommends a low spend threshold of $10,000 in in-stream video spend on their platform[10]. Advertisers can

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[6]An impression is measured by every instance your ad is served.

[7] Reach on YouTube is the total number of people who saw an ad in YouTube campaigns over a given period. This metric uses cross-device statistical models to measure the total reach of an ad by adjusting for cases when people may see the same ad on different devices or when multiple people share one device. These models are calculated at the country level.

[8] Frequency is the average number of times a unique user was shown your ad over a given time period.

[9]Reach out to your Google representative to get whitelisted for YouTube measurement opportunities.

[10] Your brand lift study on YouTube will be eligible to measure lift as long as it meets the required budget ($10K for USA campaigns) during a **10-day period** after the study start date. You can also spend all of the required budget in 3 days and get survey results. Meeting the

select from a set of politically-oriented questions (e.g "Which of the following candidates do you have a positive opinion of?" or "How likely are you to vote in the November election?") and measure the impact of their program using a political KPI. Media metrics are useful for measuring reach and engagement, but Brand Lift can help practitioners understand if their program is successfully moving their audience on the metric that more directly relates to an offline action (voting).

There are two measurements of lift that can be useful for evaluation: 1) Absolute Lift, and 2) Headroom Lift. Absolute Lift is the difference (lift) in percentages of people who selected the preferred response (e.g., Joe Biden) between the control and exposed group. This number is the lift directly attributable to your media. Headroom Lift is useful when comparing different tactics or messages because it normalizes baselines.[11] With Absolute Lift and total reach, you can also calculate the number of people you lifted as a result of your program.

Google will automatically sort your impressions into treatment and control groups. YouTube users are served your survey question within the app, as in the screenshot below.
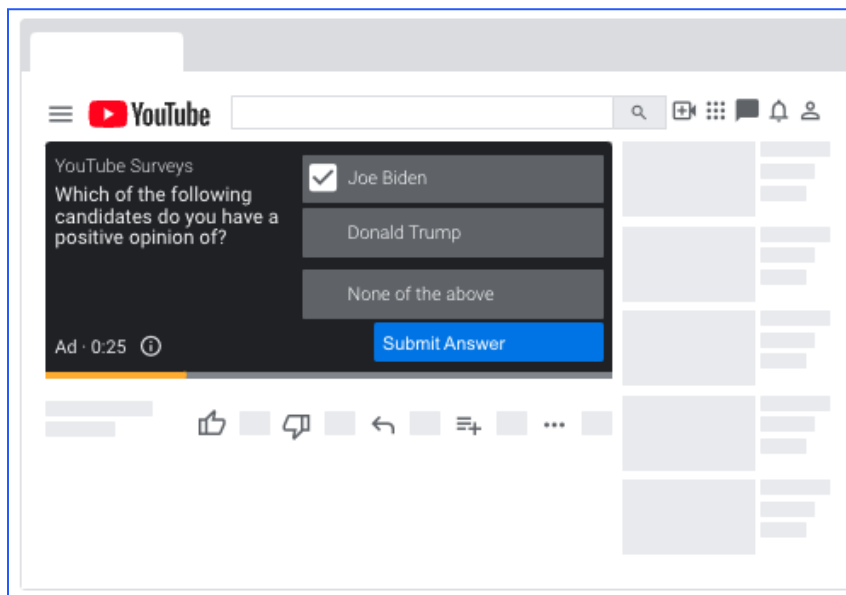
We recommend using Brand Lift in two ways: 1) to experiment with tactics, and 2) to measure the success of your program in-flight.

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minimum budget requirement increases—but doesn't guarantee—the chances of getting results for your Brand Lift study. Brand Lift study results depend on other factors (such as how many users your campaign reaches).

[11] A baseline is the percentage of people within your control group that selected the preferred response (e.g., Joe Biden). Some audiences have higher baselines than others, making lift harder to achieve. "Headroom'' is the amount of total lift possible over a baseline, e.g., for an audience with a baseline of 60%, the available headroom would be 40%. Headroom lift thereby calculates how much of that maximum potential lift (40%) was captured by your program.

Brand Lift makes it very easy to experiment with different tactics on YouTube. As discussed earlier, we have used Brand Lift to study the ability for different contextual buckets to reach persuadable voters, and the success of different Latino targeting methods in reaching persuadable voters. Brand Lift can be applied to your campaigns to help experiment with different tactics or messages with a relatively low budget of $10,000 per item tested.

This tool can also be used as an in-flight measure of the success of your program. This approach should be treated with some caution, as Brand Lift results will fluctuate over time. However, Brand Lift is one of few options to assess whether your campaign is moving voters in a positive or negative direction. Two things we have done to make in-flight Brand Lift measurement more useful are:

1. **Wait for enough sample size to make a decision.** We want to ensure that we are not over-reacting to negative effects by pulling something down before truly letting it scale.
2. **Consider potential action steps pre-campaign.** Is there an alternate creative that can be swapped in if you are registering negative lift? Is it possible the creative is reaching the wrong audience, and actually you should reconsider your targeting tactics?

We recommend adding Brand Lift to your campaigns to measure the offline impact of your program, and help inform future decision making or enable experimentation.

Target Frequency Testing

As mentioned above, YouTube ad campaigns are structured to optimize for high reach rather than high frequency. Because of this, boosting average ad frequency per target typically requires a higher investment level, compared to other ad platforms. As a solution to this, Google offers a target frequency optimization tool, which allows advertisers to optimize auction-based video campaigns toward higher frequency with target audiences. We recommend building these campaigns when high frequency is a priority for a program (e.g., when YouTube is the only inventory source where certain voters are being reached). Within each campaign, advertisers can assign a target frequency goal (e.g., 6 ads per week per target). The campaigns will decrease overall reach, as it prioritizes targets more likely to spend additional time on YouTube (therefore receiving higher frequency than the average person).

We recommend adding Brand Lift studies to target frequency campaigns to validate theories around higher frequency boosting persuasion/turnout effects. Campaigns should still hit recommended spend thresholds of $10K per campaign.

Search Lift

Search Lift is a free Google product that allows advertisers to measure the impact of YouTube programs on online search behavior. The product uses organic search data to determine if targets exposed to YouTube ads are more likely to search for specific terms, compared to people who didn't see the ad. Users are randomly assigned to either the exposed group (shown the ad) or the control group (not shown the ad). Search activity

from these two groups is compared to gauge how the ad affected search behavior. Google recommends choosing 5, fairly specific keywords that align with your ad creative and are likely outcomes of users viewing ads. Results can be broken out by parameters like device, keyword, region.

In the absence of a paid search lift product (i.e., one that measures the impact of search ads), we recommend adding Search Lift testing to all YouTube campaigns (it's free, there is no minimum spend threshold, and doing so has no impact on scale). Search Lift is particularly useful for voter mobilization campaigns where YouTube ads are explicitly telling voters to take search related actions, like finding their polling place, checking voter registration, or learning about Election Day.

Conclusion

YouTube is one of the best places to invest to reach persuasion & mobilization audiences, both because of how many voters are on the platform, and how much time they're spending on it.

Advertisers may have reservations about using YouTube because of first-party targeting limitations. However, there are many other targeting capabilities that can reach a particular audience. YouTube can be used as part of a broadcast strategy designed to reach as many voters as possible, or as part of a narrowcast strategy that is attempting to only reach a particular set of voters.

There are many tools on YouTube to help plan and measure programs. Experimenting with the inventory available across the YouTube ecosystem will help you run more comprehensive programs. The strategies we've discussed in this playbook can help advertisers engage with voters more efficiently and effectively, and achieve better scale at the height of the election cycle.

As mentioned above, while this playbook focuses on YouTube advertising specifically, we believe that smart persuasion and mobilization programs require a comprehensive mix of inventory sources. You should ultimately build your media strategy based on your own program goals.

It can be difficult to know where to start given how large YouTube is. We are here to help partners navigate the various options available to them on this incredibly important platform! Please reach out to trainings@priorities.org with any questions.