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An Inside View of Congressional Campaigning on the Web*

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This paper offers an insider perspective of United States Congressional campaigning by exploring political marketing on the web. We offer theoretical frameworks that predict how campaigns view their websites (e.g., perceptions of likely audiences), how campaigns use their websites (e.g., content posted), and how these views and usages have evolved (or not) over time. We test our predictions with a unique data set from surveys of political marketers involved with the creation and maintenance of congressional campaign websites between 2008 and 2014. Consistent with our expectations, we find uniform views across campaigns about perceived website users (e.g., engaged voters). However, we also find support for our expectation of fundamental differences—between incumbent and non-incumbent campaigns—in what is posted on campaign websites. We also find some, but not many, changes in website usage over time. We conclude that differential marketing motivations result in

campaigns that depart from the normative ideal of engaged dialogues that facilitate representation.

KEYWORDS   *congress, political campaigns, staff, web*

The rise of new media has transformed campaign communications. Campaigns, particularly at the congressional level, have gone from dabbling with websites in the early to mid-1990s, to now routinely launching sites, posting on Facebook, "tweeting," and broadcasting via YouTube (see, e.g., Williams, Aylesworth, and Chapman 2002; Foot et al. 2009; Williams and Gulati 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015; Gulati and Williams 2010, 2013, 2015; Nielsen 2012; Stromer-Galley 2014). Campaigns have fully integrated these technologies into their overall communications strategies—complete with dedicated new media staff (Kreiss 2012)—and research shows that websites in particular have influenced voters and, thus, potentially election outcomes (see, e.g., Gibson and McAllister 2006; Tewksbury 2006; Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton 2011, 367).

Despite the prevalence of new media in campaign communications, scant research explores how campaigns *themselves* view various technologies and how they purport to use them. That is, how do campaigns see themselves marketing their candidates online? We address this question—focusing on United States congressional campaign websites—by studying three basic aspects of political campaigning. First, how do campaigns *view* their websites as a mode of strategic communication? What audiences do they have in mind, who do they expect to visit, and how does the website compare to other media in terms of capturing the campaign's overall message? Second, what do campaigns *do* with their websites? Specifically, what kind of content do they prioritize, how frequently do they "go negative," and how much influence do they give staffers, consultants, and volunteers over the website? Third, have the perceptions and incentives of those who design campaign websites changed over time, from 2008 to 2014? Addressing these questions provides critical insight into how political marketers involved in congressional campaigns view and use websites. That is, we isolate what drives the decisions of individuals who determine how campaign websites are utilized.

In what follows, we put forth theoretical frameworks to address each of the three aforementioned questions. We derive a set of hypotheses, which we test with data from a novel series of surveys collected from those involved with the creation and maintenance of congressional campaign websites between 2008 and 2014.[1] These data are particularly valuable in that they offer new insights into the particular incentives, considerations, and perceptions of those designing the websites. This differs from the bulk of

past work that relies on content analyses of campaign websites (e.g., Foot and Schneider 2006; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2007, 2009), which offers little insight into actual decision making. In the end, we find that the realities of political marketing result in congressional campaign website communications that vastly depart from the normative ideal of engaged dialogues that facilitate promissory representation. Moreover, dislodging these practices may be particularly difficult given the fundamental incentives facing political marketers.

CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN WEBSITES AS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

Our first research question focuses on how campaigns view their websites as strategic communication platforms within the political marketing context. Who do they perceive to be their most likely visitors? Who do they think they are targeting with their website? And to what extent do they believe that their website captures the campaign's overall strategy? We base our theory of how campaigns view their websites on four premises.

First, access to a website requires a deliberate choice and action on the part of the user, and thus, campaigns have limited control over their websites' audiences. Unlike email, Facebook, or Twitter, campaigns cannot simply post a message and know that certain individuals will receive it (Smith 2011; Zickuhr 2013). Second, the frequency with which different types of voters visit is beyond the campaign's control; campaigns can work on drawing audiences using social media (see Chadwick 2013), but ultimately they *cannot* be sure that any particular population will visit the site. Third, any content posted on a campaign's website can potentially reach all voters. This can occur because journalists may publicize the information contained therein, or opposing candidates may use posted information in the campaign thereby making market segmentation more difficult (e.g., Owen 2011; Gruszczynski 2015; see Williams and Gulati 2014 on the concept of market segmentation). Fourth, the web is not only unmediated (i.e., the campaign directly posts information) but it also has near infinite space for information (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009). Of importance, these four premises are realities for *all campaigns* (e.g., no campaign can control who visits its site, any campaign is vulnerable to having posted information spread to voters in general). This observation, along with the four premises, leads straightforwardly to three hypotheses.

- Campaigns, regardless of their characteristics, will perceive engaged and supportive voters as more likely to visit their websites, compared to voters in general, all else constant (hypothesis 1).

This prediction follows the realities that campaigns cannot control who visits, and engaged voters are more likely to *make the choice* to visit any campaign website. Data (analyzed by the authors) from the 2012 American National Election Studies (http://www.electionstudies.org/) reveal significant correlations between both attention to politics and interest in following the campaign with measures of whether a respondent reported ever visiting a candidate website as well as the number of times a respondent reported visiting candidate websites (with correlations ranging between .17 and .20, all of which are significant with $p < .0001$). In addition, supportive voters are more likely to visit a site to reinforce their beliefs (see Lodge and Taber 2013), and journalists also *may* visit to obtain information for stories (e.g., Ireland and Nash 2001, 14–15; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2014).[2]

Our next hypothesis builds on the premise that any web content can reach all voters. We also note an additional observation that campaigns tend to be risk-averse (McDermott, Fowler, and Smirnov 2008; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009, 2014), meaning that they will avoid posting material aimed at very specific groups for fear of alienating other potential audiences and instead aim for broader audiences. Again, these are truisms for all campaigns.

- Campaigns, regardless of their characteristics, will indicate that the targets of their websites are general groups rather than more specific groups. Specifically, they will believe they are targeting voters in general and undecided voters more than engaged voters, supportive voters, and supportive activists, all else constant (hypothesis 2).

Taken together, hypotheses 1 and 2 suggest that campaigns recognize the critical distinction between the frequencies with which particular groups are thought to visit and the target audiences of the websites. Adding our premise about the infinite unmediated informational space of websites to the idea that voters in general are the targets leads to our next prediction.

- Campaigns, regardless of their characteristics, will estimate that their websites are most effective in communicating their overall strategy, relative to other media, all else constant (hypothesis 3).[3]

This is a unique feature of websites since other forms of campaign communication (e.g., television ads, direct mailings, candidate speeches, informal conversations with voters) can be more directly targeted toward specific audiences and are limited in terms of informational content. Further, when compared to coverage that candidates can expect in the news media, websites have the advantage of being unmediated, meaning they enable campaigns to present their overall messages.

HOW CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS USE THE WEB

Lack of control over the audience for campaign websites limits how any campaign can use the web as a strategic tool. Yet, given those limits—which we suggest will generate a focus on voters in general despite the fact that such individuals are not thought to frequently visit the sites—campaigns still maintain the ability to control the *content* posted. It is with respect to content that we expect differentiation based on the type of candidate. Campaign communications must be concerned with motivating voters to cast their votes in favor of their preferred candidates. In order to serve the candidates and their campaigns, strategically targeted communications highlight their preferred considerations so that citizens will use them to make their voting decisions (Druckman 2004). In addition, as discussed, when it comes to their websites, campaigns will prioritize voters in general (and undecided voters) as the main target (hypothesis 2). It is from these underlying ideas that we construct our framework, building on the following premises about congressional elections.

First, most voters pay little attention to congressional campaigns and consequently, second, often base their decisions on cues such as political party or incumbency status (Druckman 2004; Lau and Redlawsk 2006). When it comes to U.S. congressional campaigns, incumbency is a particularly accessible basis for vote choice. In fact, "incumbency is a dominant consideration because incumbents are so consistently successful in winning election —and everyone involved in politics knows it" (Jacobson 2013, 29). All else equal, voters favor incumbents (Gronke 2000, 140–141). This manifests itself in providing incumbents with up to a ten percentage point advantage (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2004, 487; Abramowitz, Alexander, and Gunning 2006; Jacobson 2013; for more fine-tuned estimates, see Hainmueller, Hall, and Snyder 2014). Third, the incumbency advantage largely stems from candidate background characteristics in that voters generally find incumbents appealing because they possess experience in office, are familiar (e.g., have ties to the district), and have provided benefits for the district or state (e.g., organizing events concerning a local issue, casework, pork barrel projects; e.g., Fiorina 1989; Gronke 2000, 142; Jacobson 2013). These premises—that highlight the advantages of incumbents—lead directly to the following prediction.[4]

- Incumbent campaigns, relative to non-incumbent campaigns, will report emphasizing aspects of their candidate's background on their websites, all else constant (hypothesis 4).

Our fourth premise is that incumbent campaigns often minimize engagement so as to push voters in general to rely on the incumbency

cue—that is, many incumbent campaigns want to minimize attention to the race *per se*. This contrasts with non-incumbent campaigns, which face the challenge of getting voters' attention to minimize their reliance on the incumbency cue. A key task for challengers is winning persuadable consumers away from a product to which they might otherwise be drawn (Williams and Gulati 2014). One way to do so is by "going negative." Evidence on the attention-grabbing nature of negativity comes from political psychology research (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Druckman and McDermott 2008), as well as a long line of work in psychology showing that individuals pay more attention and give more weight to negative than to positive information (e.g., Baumeister et al. 2001). This prediction follows.

- Incumbent campaigns, relative to non-incumbent campaigns, will report that they "go negative" on their websites with less frequency, all else constant (hypothesis 5).

A fifth premise concerns non-incumbent campaign behavior once they get voters' attention. When this happens, non-incumbent campaigns must provide voters with distinctive information (see hypothesis 4) to dislodge them from the incumbency bias. They, therefore, will provide more issue information and make more attempts to persuade voters to use distinct information. Whereas incumbent campaigns are expected to provide limited information, non-incumbent campaigns are motivated to give voters more reason to think about going against the status quo. We expect that the political marketers working on these campaigns will recognize this and provide information based on their candidate's status.

- Non-incumbent campaigns, relative to incumbent campaigns, will report providing more information (other than background information; see hypothesis 4) on their websites, including issue information and persuasive messages, all else constant (hypothesis 6).

A final premise is that incumbents are also much more likely to have well-developed campaign organizations than either challengers or open seat candidates. Important aspects of the incumbency advantage include, after all, the resources that come from being established representatives of their districts, including the ability to fundraise more easily than potential challengers (Jacobson 2013). Sides et al. (2015, 281) state, "Congressional campaign organizations range widely from bare-bones operations that are run by unpaid volunteers to big organizations that are run by paid professional consultants. Amateurs with no prior political experience … are more likely to have the former, while incumbents often have the latter" (also see Parkin 2010 and Kreiss and Jasinski 2016 concerning professionalization of such staff). This leads to hypotheses 7a and 7b.

- Incumbent campaigns, relative to non-incumbent campaigns, will perceive their campaigns to be more professionalized insofar as they rely more on paid staff members and consultants in designing campaign material (i.e., staff and consultants will have more influence); in contrast, non-incumbent campaigns will report more reliance on volunteers, all else constant (hypothesis 7a).
- Non-incumbent campaigns, relative to incumbent campaigns, will believe that they can use the website for more active campaigning opportunities, given their lack of a professional staff and their need to get voters' attention, all else constant (see hypothesis 6). This includes seeking and coordinating volunteers, raising funds, publicizing campaign events, and mobilizing voting (hypothesis 7b).

CHANGES OVER TIME?

A final question concerns whether the perceptions and/or incentives of those designing campaign websites have changed over time—specifically from 2008 to 2014, which is the time from which we have data (see below). On the one hand, technology available to campaigns has evolved at an extremely rapid pace. The 2000 campaign was defined by email and the emergent web, the 2004 campaign was defined by blogging, the 2008 campaign was defined by Facebook, and the 2012 campaign was defined by Twitter (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/25/business/media/snapchat-election-campaign-news.html?_r=0). Our focus, of course, is on websites, but it is possible that the rise (and fall) of other technologies influence how campaigns use their websites. Further, the optimal use of technologies often takes time (Mullainathan 2007, 97) and thus, when it comes to our incumbent campaign predictions, it is possible that the predicted effects became stronger over time as campaigns developed their web strategies.

On the other hand, our theoretical frameworks are based on assumptions that are invariant over time (e.g., website audiences must deliberately choose to visit a site, incumbent incentives fundamentally differ from non-incumbent incentives); that is, although technologies may have evolved, the constraints and opportunities on campaigns have remained fairly constant over time (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2014). This would suggest no substantial fluctuations over time. We thus do not have hypotheses about change over time and leave it to the data to show whether changes occurred.

CAMPAIGN SURVEY DATA

We test these predictions with data from a series of surveys conducted during each campaign between 2008 and 2014. During each election cycle, we

identified potential respondents by first creating a list of all active, general election, major party congressional candidates. We then searched for their websites and, on these sites, for contact information, such as the names, emails, and phone numbers of possible respondents. In mid-October, we sent an email request either to the specific contact or to the campaign more generally asking for someone "involved in creating and updating the [campaign] website" to complete a brief, confidential survey via Survey-Monkey or email.[5] We repeated our request up to three more times either by email or phone (when available), including a final request in the days immediately following the election.

We sought to contact every campaign over the course of four election cycles. We managed to contact (to our knowledge) the 3,060 campaigns that provided a workable email address or online inquiry form (we exclude those that could not be contacted from our response rate calculation). We received a total of 500 responses from the 3,060 campaigns, leading to an overall response rate of roughly 16%, which is not far off the typical range for these types of web surveys (see Couper 2008, 340). In our analyses, the *N*s are smaller due to item nonresponse. Also, some of our items, which we note below, were only asked on our 2014 survey. It is important to reiterate that all of the responses were given on the promise of anonymity, so we have no way to know exactly which campaigns responded. This means that we are unable to match individual survey results to other measures such as measures of actual website content, fundraising data, or district partisanship. We believe that testing our predictions with a survey of those involved in campaign website design has particular advantages over relying on content analysis data of the websites (e.g., Foot and Schneider 2006; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009). Specifically, it allows us to isolate the expressed motivations of political marketers and assess whether their incentives create campaigns that stray from the normative ideal of engaged and responsive campaigns.

Our specific survey asked questions about the campaign for which the respondent worked, including the candidate's office level (House or Senate), party, gender, and incumbency status. Table 1 reports these results along with the population parameters for each category. The table shows that our sample reflects the actual population of congressional campaigns fairly well in terms of office level (14.84% Senate), party (58.78% Democratic), candidate gender (75.05% male), and incumbency status (52.64% challengers). While there are some discrepancies between our sample and the population, we note that the modes are the same in all categories except candidate status, where we have a disproportionate number of responses from challenger campaigns. Even so, we have sufficient variation to draw inferences about incumbent versus non-incumbent behavior; there are plenty of responses from incumbents and we do not have a clear basis to believe

TABLE 1 Campaign features

		Reported by Campaigns		Population of Campaigns	
		%	*n*	%	*N*
Office level	House	85.16	419	92.28	3,286
	Senate	14.84	73	7.72	275
Candidate party	Democrat	58.78	288	50.43	1,758
	Independent	0.20	1	0.09	3
	Republican	41.02	201	49.48	1,725
Candidate gender	Male	75.05	364	81.88	2,920
	Female	24.95	121	18.12	646
Candidate status	Incumbent	32.52	160	46.53	1,662
	Challenger	52.64	259	40.93	1,462
	Open Seat	14.84	73	12.54	448

Note. Sources for Population Data: Gary Jacobson data on U.S. House campaigns 2008–2014, Cook Political Report Race Ratings for U.S. House and U.S. Senate races 2008–2014, Rutgers University Center for American Women and Politics data 2008–2014.

that incumbents who did respond systematically differ from those who did not (we do recognize this skew is a limitation, however).

To confirm that we received answers from appropriate individuals, we asked respondents an initial screening question in which they indicated the extent to which they were informed about how the content of the site was determined, with higher scores indicating more knowledge. The average response was 6.51 ($SD = 0.97$; $N = 494$) with 69.43% of respondents rating themselves at the very top of our seven-point scale.[6]

Our surveys contained the measures used to test the aforementioned hypotheses. The full questions and related hypotheses are listed in Table 2. The survey asked respondents to indicate their perception of how often an average member of each group (e.g., undecided voters, supporters, journalists) visited the site, on a seven-point scale, with higher scores indicating more frequent visits. Respondents used a similar scale to rate the priority of several groups (e.g., undecided voters, supporters, journalists) in terms of each being a target audience of the website, with higher scores indicating higher priority. We also asked respondents to assess, again with a seven-point scale, how they thought campaign websites compared to other communications (e.g., direct mailings, television ads, candidate speeches) in terms of "capturing the campaign's overall strategy" and to rate the importance of various content goals for the site (e.g., persuading undecided voters, increasing awareness of issue positions, fundraising). Respondents also noted whether their site included any negativity aimed at issues and/or personal characteristics. We later recoded this into a dichotomous measure with 0 for no negativity and 1 for any type of negativity. We added a new question to the survey in 2014 that asked about the influence that volunteers, staff, and consultants had on website development and maintenance.[7] Our survey included a variety of other items tangentially associated with our hypotheses,

TABLE 2 Survey measures, hypotheses, and questions

Measures and Hypotheses	Questions
Perceived Visit Frequency (H1)	Please rate the frequency with which your campaign believes a typical member of each of the following groups visits your website. Please enter a number between 1 and 7 where 1 = never; 4 = once a week; 7 = nearly daily. The groups rated included voters in general, undecided voters, highly engaged voters, journalists, voters who already support the candidate, supportive political activists/strong partisans, bloggers or other online activists, voters who already support the opponent, and non-voters.
Website target (H2)	"Please rate the priority of each of the following groups in terms of it being a target audience for your campaign's website. Please enter a number between 1 and 7 where 1 = *very low priority*, 4 = *medium priority*, and 7 = *very high priority*." The groups rated included voters in general, undecided voters, highly engaged voters, journalists, voters who already support the candidate, supportive political activists/strong partisans, bloggers or other online activists, voters who already support the opponent, and nonvoters.
Effectiveness of medium at capturing overall strategy (H3)	"Please rate the extent to which each of the following forms of communication captures your campaign's 'overall' strategy (e.g., the message your campaign hopes to relay to voters at large, as opposed to more targeted messages). Please enter a number between 1 and 7 where 1 = *does NOT capture overall strategy*, 4 = *moderately captures overall strategy*, and 7 = *fully captures overall strategy*." The media included television ads (if any were produced), mailings, websites, candidate speeches, media campaign coverage, and informal conversations (e.g., between candidate and voters).
Website content goals (H4, H6, H7b)	"Please rate the importance of each of the following goals for your campaign's website. Please enter a number between 1 and 7 where 1 = *very low importance*, 4 = *medium importance*, and 7 = *very high importance*." Goals included increasing awareness of the candidate's issue positions, increasing awareness of the candidate's background, soliciting donations/ fundraising, persuading undecided voters, publicizing campaign events, distributing campaign material, signing up volunteers, getting out the vote, coordinating volunteers, providing information about the opponent's background, and providing information about the opponent's issue positions.
Going negative (H5)	"Does your campaign's website contain any negative content aimed at the opponent? If so, does it focus on issues, personal characteristics, both, or something else? (Please place an X next to only one choice.)" Answer options included no negative content, negative content focused on issues, negative content focused on personal characteristics, negative content focused on both issues and personal characteristics, and negative content focused on something else.
Personnel influence (2014 only) (H7a)	"Please rate the influence that each group has had on the development and maintenance of the campaign website. For each group, please enter a number between 1 and 7 where 1 = *no influence at all*, 4 = *moderate level of influence*, and 7 = *a very high level of influence*." Answer groups included volunteers, staff, consultants, and other.

including the extent to which the site was used to communicate with voters, the frequency with which the site was updated, the perceived originality of the site, and whether the opponent's site contained negativity.

RESULTS

We begin our analyses by looking at how campaigns *view* their websites (see hypotheses 1, 2, and 3). In Figure 1, we present the averages and standard deviations from our questions about the perceptions of the frequency of website visits (the black bars) and the primary target audiences (the gray bars) (across all years). As predicted by hypothesis 1, respondents believe that highly engaged voters and, to a lesser extent, supportive voters and supportive activists will access the site most often, while voters in general and undecided voters are thought to visit less frequently. In fact, respondents report that they perceive voters in general and undecided voters visit less frequently than all other groups with the exception of the opponent's voters and nonvoters (e.g., comparing "undecided voters" to "bloggers" gives $t_{417} = 6.906$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test). While we have no way of knowing whether all of these reported perceptions are accurate (i.e., we do not have actual data on website visitors), the perceptions do line up with the aforementioned American National Election Studies data that show that attentive and interested (i.e., engaged) voters are more likely to report visiting campaign websites.

Figure 1 also supports hypothesis 2. Those involved in the creation and maintenance of congressional campaign websites report that voters in general and undecided voters are their desired audiences, even though they are not perceived to be the most likely visitors. These two groups register significantly higher priority scores than all other groups, including highly engaged voters, journalists, and those who support the campaign
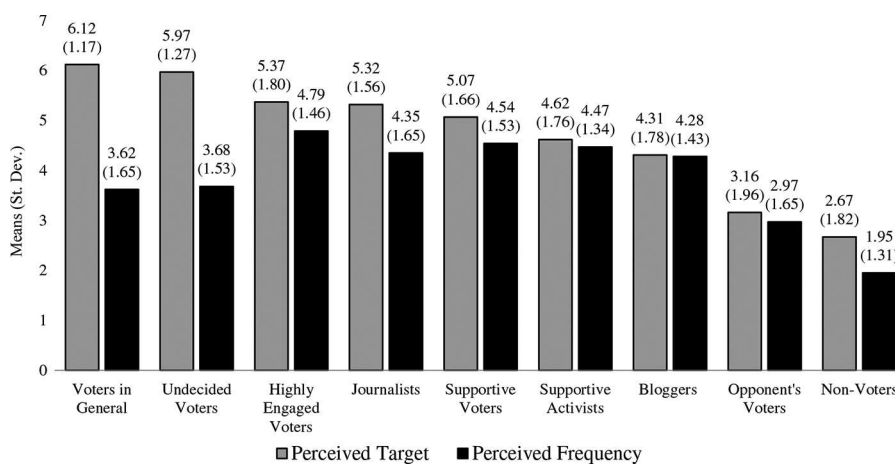

FIGURE 1 Website perceived targets and perceived visitor frequency (2008–2014).

(e.g., comparing "undecided voters" to "highly engaged voters" gives $t_{457} = 6.272$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test). This echoes existing research showing that undecided voters have been a top-rated audience for congressional campaign websites (Stromer-Galley et al. 2003; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009). This result does not mean, however, that campaigns completely ignore other groups, only that these other groups are seen as significantly lower priorities when crafting the campaign website's content. Even so, as we will soon discuss, the fact that voters in general and undecided voters are seen as priorities plays an important role in substantiating the second part of our theoretical framework, concerning what is posted on the web.

That respondents had distinct perceptions about likely visitors and primary targets accentuates the importance of not confounding the perceived frequency of visitors with the intended targets of the website. Certain groups may be seen as more important even if they are believed to visit less often (cf. Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton 2011, 368–369). This strategy also seems to recognize the potential danger of targeting supporters with websites that might alienate some other crucial group of voters. Focusing the website on a broad audience may do little to fire up the base, but it ensures that potentially persuadable voters will not be turned off, even if they do not visit as often. As explained, the importance of journalists is noteworthy given that they may often visit campaign websites to obtain information, which they then translate to broader audiences through news stories (see, e.g., Owen 2011; Gruszczynski 2015).

To test hypothesis 3, we asked respondents to rate how well various forms of communication "capture the campaign's overall strategy." We present the averages and standard deviations in Figure 2, which shows that—as predicted—respondents estimated their websites as being significantly more representative of their overall strategy and message than all other
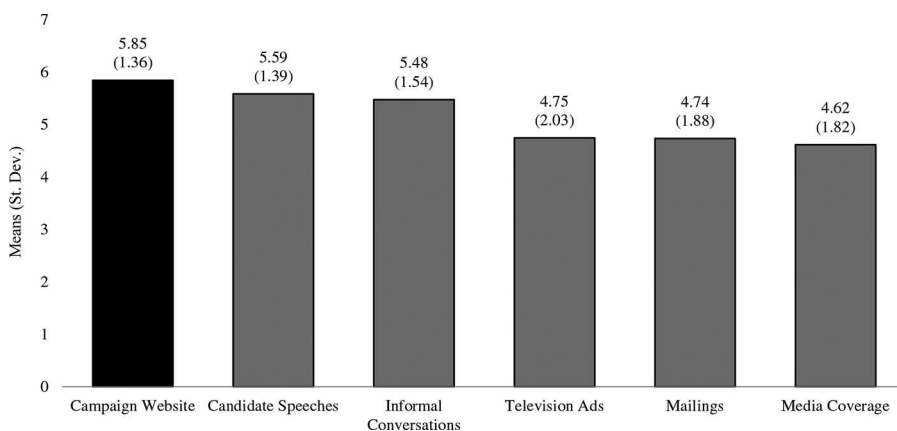

FIGURE 2 Estimated effectiveness of various media in communicating the campaign's overall strategy (2008–2014).

media, including candidate speeches, informal conservations, television ads, direct mailings, and media coverage (e.g., comparing "website" to "candidate speeches" gives $t_{410} = 3.309$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test).[8]

While a campaign's website may be ideal for presenting an overall strategy, it still is constrained in terms of reach, especially to all voters. This is clear in the responses to a question we asked in 2014 about the estimated effectiveness of different media in communicating with voters (on a one-to-seven scale, with seven being *used extensively*). The results in Figure 3 show that websites ranked above the midpoint on our seven-point scale, indicating more than "moderate" use, but that they came in significantly lower than Facebook, Twitter, and email in terms of communicating with voters online (e.g., comparing "website" to "email" gives $t_{85} = -3.477$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test). The distinction appears to be that campaigns see their websites as the place to present broad messages to their target audience—i.e., voters in general—while Facebook, Twitter, and email are used to communicate more directly and extensively with those who have "friended," "followed," or signed up with the campaign—i.e., those who are more likely to be supporters or journalists/bloggers following the campaign closely. As such, campaigns tend to see their websites not so much as a direct communications or messaging tool per se, but more as a general presentation medium.[9] This reflects the constraint of websites as relying on visitors to make clear choices to gain access, as compared to many other media on which campaigns can at least know that messages reach certain voters.

In sum, we find that those involved with the development and maintenance of congressional campaign websites tend to see voters in general and undecided voters as their primary targets, although they sense that others, particularly supporters and journalists, are more likely to visit. They also view their websites as a good place to present their overall campaign
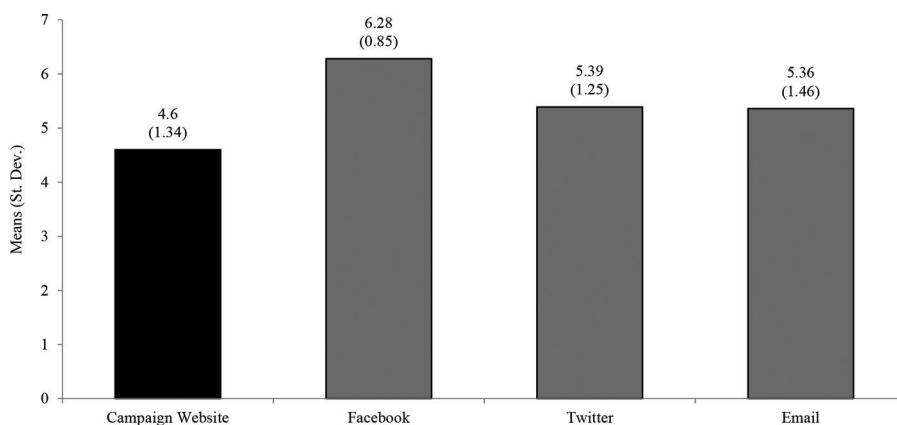

FIGURE 3 Estimated effectiveness of use of various media in communicating with voters (2014).

message—better than television ads, direct mailers, or speeches—although they are perhaps not the most ideal channels for sending direct messages.

Recall that we predicted that these results should be uniform across all types of campaigns. To test this, we conducted a series of nineteen ordered probit analyses using the measures described in Table 1 (as well as year and a measure of self-reported campaign competitiveness coded as "solid," "leaning," or "toss-up") as our independent variables. The results show that there are very few factors that cause campaigns to view their websites differently (see Tables A1, A2, and A3 in the Appendix). The only statistically significant relationships we uncover suggest that Democratic and incumbent campaigns are less likely to target opposition voters, Senate campaigns are more likely to expect journalists to visit, and race competitiveness is positively associated with targeting journalists and with expecting journalists, engaged voters, and supportive voters to visit.

We also find that our control variables for individual campaign years are occasionally significant. For example, campaigns were less likely to perceive engaged voters, supportive voters, and supportive activists as visitors in 2010 and 2014 compared to 2008. This may reflect a midterm election dynamic in which campaigns expected these individuals to be less proactive without a stimulating presidential campaign. Also, respondents thought that bloggers visited their sites more often in 2008 than in any other campaign year under investigation. This makes sense given the increased popularity of blogs in 2008 and the turning point that that election represented in Internet use for presidential and congressional campaigns (see, e.g., Smith 2009). Still, these are the only statistically significant relationships in what is otherwise a vast sea of insignificant results, showing that campaigns clearly have a fairly uniform impression of their websites. The overall point is that campaigns generally target a broad audience, recognizing that they are constrained by the fact that they have limited control over who will actually visit.

This does not mean, however, that all campaigns *use* their websites in the same way. We predicted that incumbency would be the key driving force when it comes to the content goals of the websites and the propensity to "go negative." We also posited that candidate status would drive the relative influence given to staff, volunteers, and consultants.

We first look at the general informational goals of the websites. In Figure 4, we plot the average and standard deviations of the stated importance of each goal.[10] The results show that campaigns generally view their websites as mechanisms to inform and reach undecided and independent voters. Indeed, the highest rated goal is to provide information on the candidate's issue positions, and this significantly exceeds all other goals (e.g., comparing "increasing awareness of candidate's issues positions" to "increasing awareness of candidate's background" gives $t_{433} = 5.853$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test).

The next most important goal—increasing awareness of the candidate's background—does not significantly differ from persuading undecided voters,
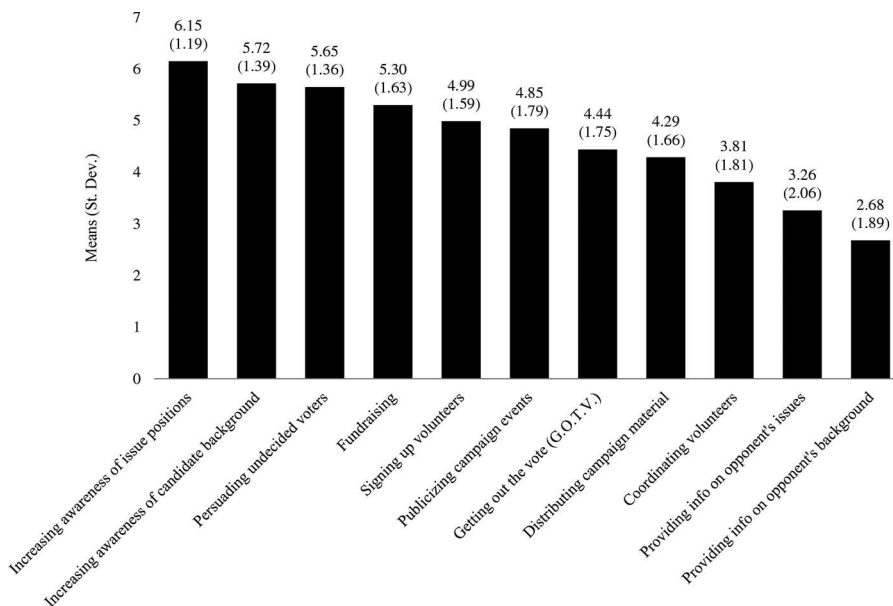
FIGURE 4 Perceived campaign website goals (2008–2014).

but there is significantly less priority given to any goal that may involve mobilization efforts, including raising funds, signing up volunteers, publicizing campaign events, getting out the vote, or distributing material (e.g., comparing "persuading undecided voters" to "fundraising" gives $t_{432} = 3.608$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test). We then see another significant drop down to coordinating volunteers, providing information on the opponent's issue positions, and providing information on the opponent's background (e.g., comparing "distributing campaign material" to "coordinating volunteers" gives $t_{427} = 4.891$, $p = .000$ in a two-tailed test).

These results, while perhaps surprising given how critical web-based mobilization has become for presidential campaigns, cohere with the prior research on congressional races, where it was found that "information was the most prevalent practice and mobilization was the least prevalent practice" (Foot, Schneider, and Dougherty 2007, 94; also see Gulati and Williams 2009; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2014). They also are consonant with the narrative presented above in that campaigns do not appear to view or use their websites as a primary tool for targeting supporters. Their primary goal is to provide information and possibly persuade undecided voters rather than mobilize voters per se, despite the perception that undecided voters are less likely to visit than engaged observers and supporters. This is not to say that mobilization is irrelevant, but only that our survey results suggest that those who design and maintain congressional campaign websites do not count it as a primary goal for this particular campaign tool.

Of more direct interest to us is whether there is variation in these goals. Recall that we predicted in hypotheses 4, 6, and 7b that incumbent campaigns would differ in terms of their perceived goals. It is worth mentioning that our earlier result concerning viewing voters in general and undecided voters as primary website targets substantiates our framework that suggests that incumbent (and non-incumbent) campaigns derive their strategies by targeting the general electorate rather than their staunchest supporters (i.e., hypothesis 2). To test these hypotheses, we again conducted a series of probit analyses (see Table A4 in the Appendix). The results support our expectations. Specifically, incumbent campaigns are much more likely than non-incumbent campaigns to rank increasing awareness of the candidate's background as "very high importance," while non-incumbent campaigns are significantly more likely to prioritize other goals.

Figure 5 presents the predicted probabilities of selecting the "very important" option on our seven-point scale for incumbent and non-incumbent campaigns across all website goals.[11] To be clear, the figure shows the probability of a non-incumbent campaign, all else constant, rating the given goal as being "very important." It also shows that same probability for the incumbent campaign, all else constant. One can compare the probabilities to see the differential effect of candidate status. A line with a negative slope suggests that non-incumbent campaigns are more likely than incumbent campaigns to rank the goal as "very important," while a positive slope suggests that incumbent campaigns are more likely than non-incumbent campaigns to rank the goal as "very important." For example, incumbent campaigns have a 48.5% chance of ranking the promotion of the candidate's background as "very important" compared to a 37.1% probability for non-incumbent campaigns, while the chances that non-incumbent campaigns max out the scale are higher for all other goals, including increasing awareness of issue positions (61.0%–47.6%), persuading undecided voters (38.4%–28.3%), signing up volunteers (22.8%–15.1%), and fundraising (36.9%–23.8%). This supports hypotheses 4 and 6.

Our theory focused on information, persuasion, volunteer coordination, and fundraising; yet, there is a logic to the fact that non-incumbent campaigns place a higher priority on *every* website goal, with the exception of candidate background promotion. Consistent with our explanation of the incumbency advantage, incumbents generally have less incentive to actively campaign (see Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009, 344). In this case, it appears as though campaign website designers follow this logic and believe that it is probably enough for incumbents to remind voters of their background. Non-incumbent campaigns, on the other hand, have to make significantly higher priorities of other goals, such as promoting issue positions, persuading undecided voters, fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and posting any other campaign information (e.g., distributing material, mobilizing messages). This supports hypothesis 7b, which suggested that
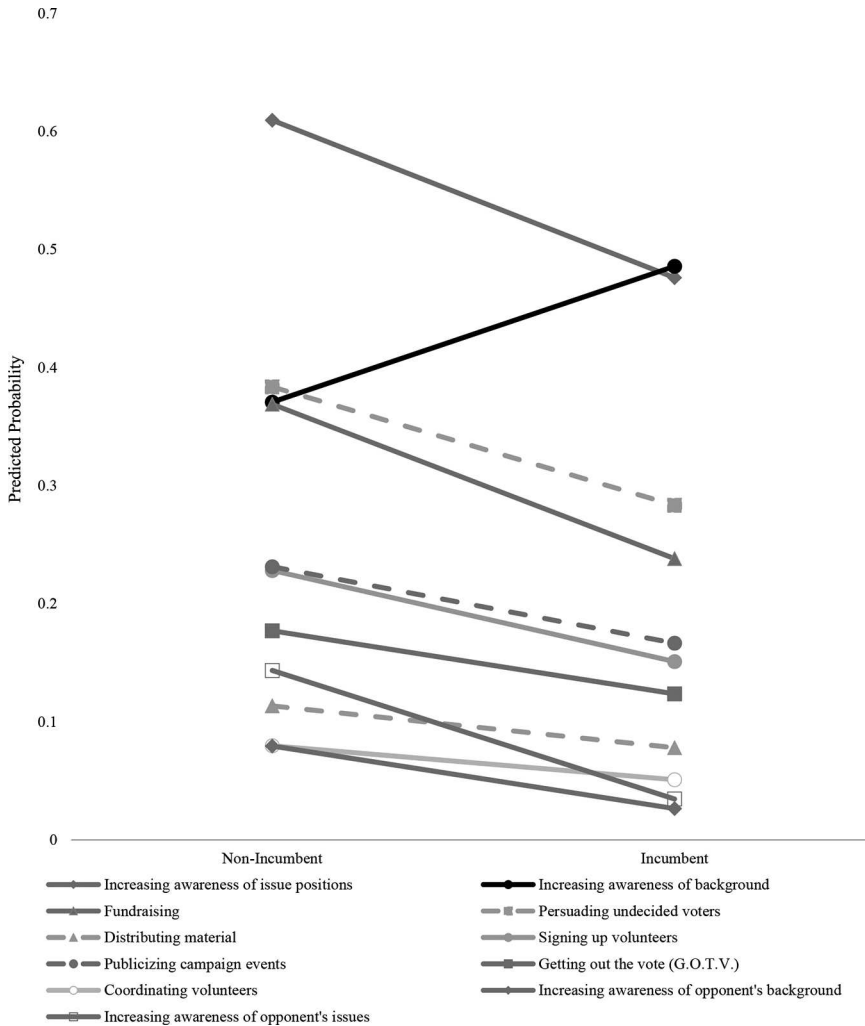
FIGURE 5 Predicted probabilities of perceived "very important" goals.

non-incumbent campaigns would more highly value volunteer recruitment, fundraising, etc.

Aside from the informational content goals, we also predicted that incumbent campaigns would be less likely to "go negative" (hypothesis 5). When asked, 63.0% of respondents told us that their campaign website included negativity focused on personal characteristics, issues, or both. However, non-incumbent campaigns were significantly more likely than incumbent campaigns to report using their website to attack their opponent, according to our probit analysis (see Table A5 in the Appendix).[12] In fact, non-incumbent campaigns have a 77.5% chance of posting negative comments about their opponents on their websites, compared to a 50.0% chance for incumbent campaigns.[13]

Finally, we asked respondents in 2014 to rate, using another seven-point scale, the influence that volunteers, staff, and consultants have on the development and maintenance of their campaign websites. Results show that staff members (5.22) are perceived as significantly more influential than either consultants (4.73) or volunteers (2.44; e.g., comparing "staff" to "consultants" gives $t_{77} = 2.294$, $p = .012$ in a two-tailed test). However, we find once again that incumbent campaigns differ dramatically from non-incumbent campaigns (hypothesis 7a). Specifically, incumbent campaigns are thought to give significantly more influence than non-incumbent campaigns to staffers and consultants while giving less control to volunteers (see Table A5 in the Appendix).

The different probabilities of perceiving each group as "highly influential" are graphed in Figure 6 (interpretation is similar to that described above, concerning Figure 5), where non-incumbent campaigns see themselves as much more egalitarian than incumbent campaigns when it comes to producing and maintaining websites. Whereas each of the three groups has a roughly equal, albeit relatively low, probability of being ranked as "highly influential" on non-incumbent campaigns, volunteers have almost no chance of being seen as "highly influential" on incumbent campaigns. As we expected, incumbent campaigns appear to have a much more professionalized approach to using their websites (see Sides et al. 2015, 281).
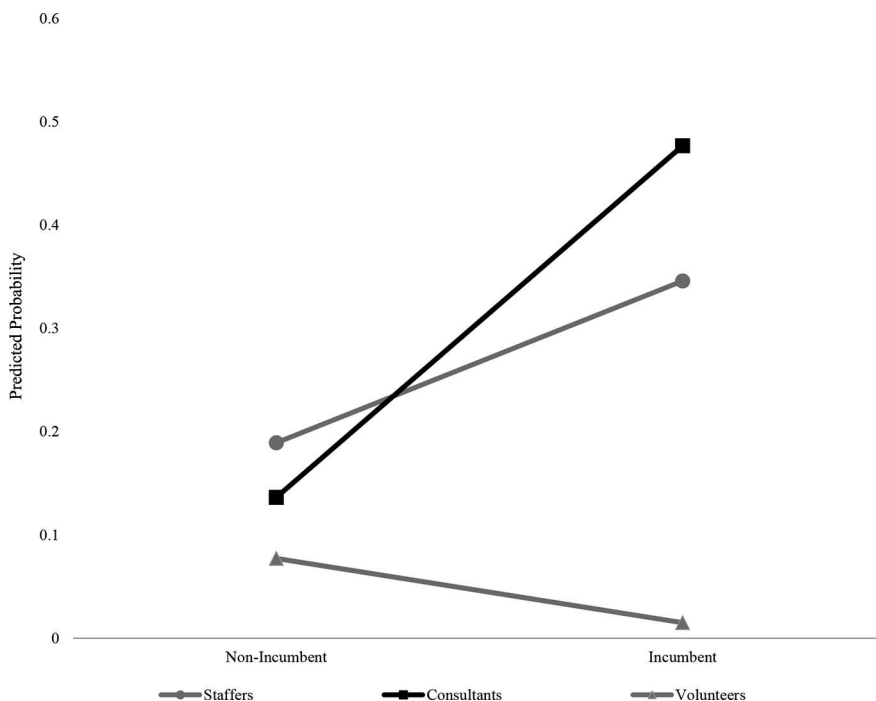

FIGURE 6 Predicted probabilities of perceived "very high" influence (2014).

One finding of note from all of the regressions themselves (e.g., in the appendices) is that office status (i.e., Senate) is rarely significant. This may seem surprising at first glance, given that such campaigns often have more advanced technological capabilities, more funds, and greater professionalization. We suspect that the lack of consistent effects reflects that the technology on which we focus—websites—has incredibly low start-up costs and thus even low-funded campaigns or less professional campaigns can launch a website easily. Indeed, by 2008, virtually every campaign had a website (Williams and Gulati 2014). Moreover, our measures do not isolate the technological sophistication of the sites; other work that explores variations in technology finds that professionalism (hired consultants) and funds affect technological options on websites, leading to more advanced technologies (e.g., personalized interactions, multimedia; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2014). Our focus on audience and content thus is quite different than consideration of specific technologies.

YEAR-BY-YEAR RESULTS

As noted, we find some fluctuations across years in main effects (e.g., midterm election dynamic in perceptions of website visitors). This does not mean, however, that the general pattern of results (*relative comparisons*) changed over time. We explore trends over time by graphically presenting our main results for each year independently. Space constraints prevent us from presenting the exact regression models (that include statistical analyses) for these results, all of which are available from the authors. The particular year-by-year results are in Figures 7 through 10.
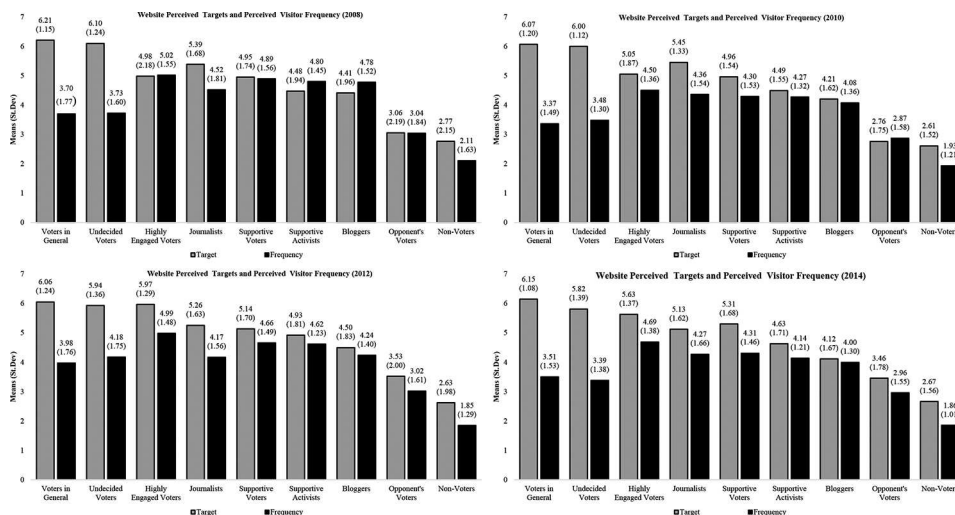
FIGURE 7 Website perceived targets and perceived visitor frequency by year.
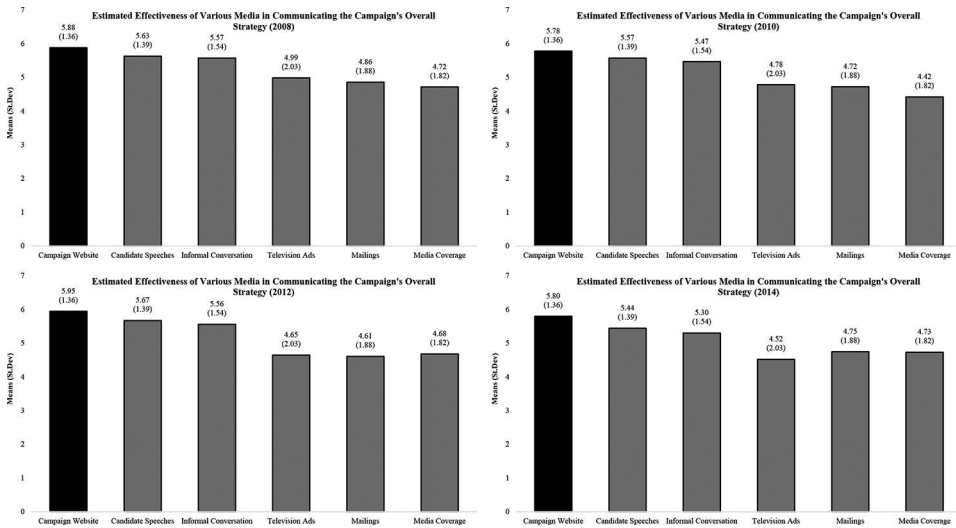
FIGURE 8 Estimated effectiveness of various media in communicating the campaign's overall strategy by year.

The results offer a bit of a mixed picture across hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 holds for every year, with engaged and supportive voters being seen as more likely to visit than voters in general and undecided voters (see Figure 7). Hypothesis 2 also generally holds with a few exceptions—highly engaged voters were targeted at an unusually high rate in 2012 and a somewhat high rate in 2014, meaning that those mean scores approach those for voters in
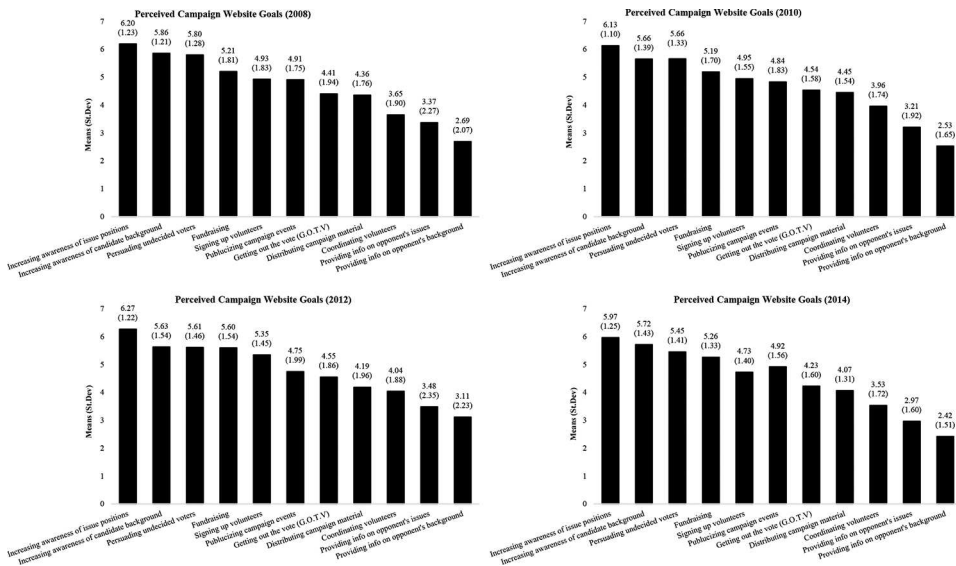
FIGURE 9 Perceived campaign website goals by year.

general and undecided voters (see Figure 7). In results available from the authors, we find that a few more variables become significant in explaining audience frequency and targets (i.e., analyses akin to Tables A1 and A2), but nothing that systematically (consistently) violates general uniformity across campaigns.

When it comes to hypothesis 3, concerning websites serving as the most effective form of communication of a campaign's overall strategy, the results replicate each year, although candidate speeches approached the level of
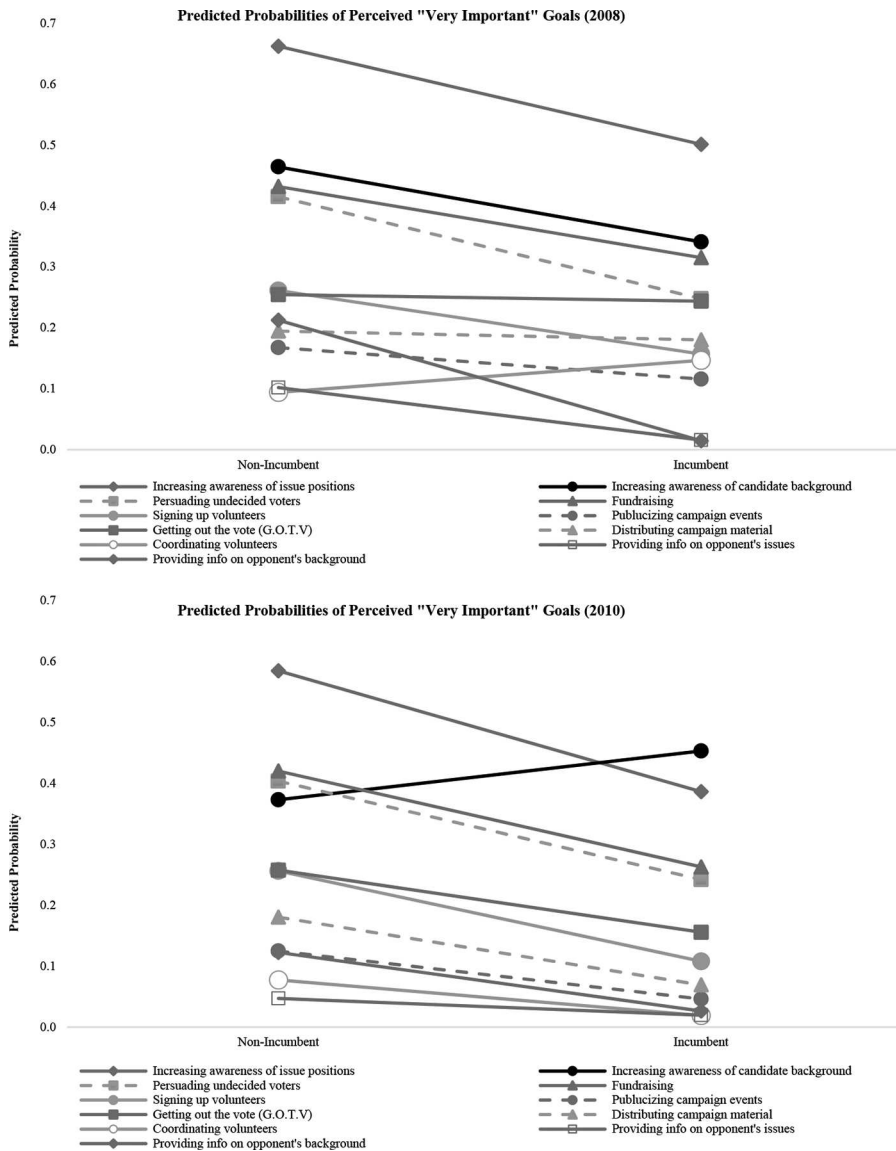
FIGURE 10 Predicted probabilities of perceived "very important" goals by year.
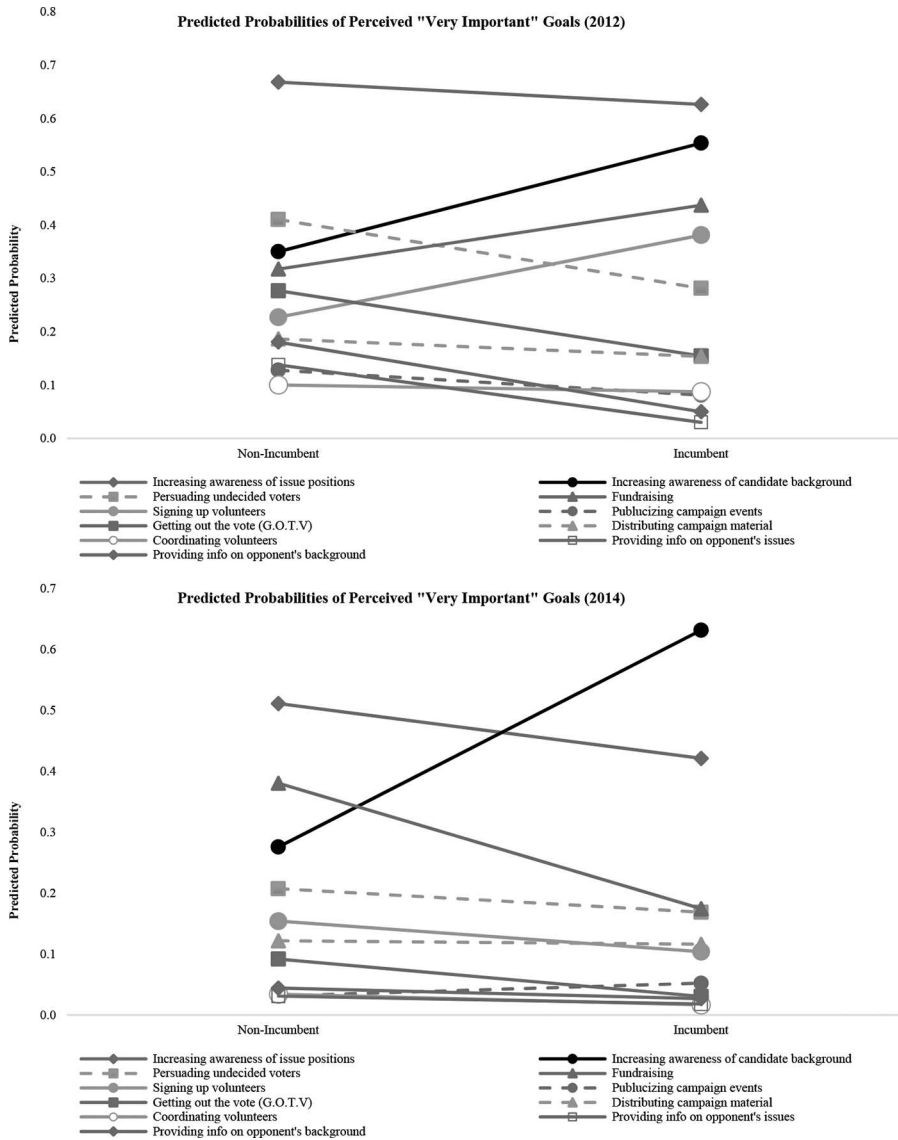
FIGURE 10 Continued

websites in 2008 and 2010 (but were still at least very close to statistically distinct every year; see Figure 8). As with Table A3, though, no other variables are significant in explaining this perception (see results available from the authors). Hypothesis 5 concerning non-incumbents and negativity is also supported over time (although it is not quite significant in 2014), as is displayed in Table A6 in the paper's Appendix.

Figure 9 shows the same general ordering of campaign goals year to year. Perhaps the most notable year-by-year differences (from the aggregate

results) are in Figure 10, which demonstrates the probabilities of incumbents and non-incumbents favoring different goals (hypotheses 4, 6, 7b). Hypothesis 4 predicted that incumbents significantly emphasize background information more than non-incumbents. We find, in Figure 10, that with the exception of 2008, the movement is in the correct direction, with incumbents being more likely to do so; while it is only statistically significant in 2014, it monotonically approaches statistical significance (in the expected direction) from 2008 to 2010 to 2012 to 2014. Similarly, for hypothesis 6 (e. g., non-incumbents post more issue information, persuasive messages), we find that the movements are in the expected direction but many fall short of statistical significance (see results available from the authors). Year-by-year results for hypothesis 7b (i.e., non-incumbents actively campaign more) also are a bit mixed, although they never reach statistical significance in the opposite direction than predicted.

Our sense is that these consistently trending but not necessarily statistically significant results, when it comes to incumbent versus non-incumbent behavior, reflect a loss of statistical power when the data are broken out into years. We also believe they suggest some learning over time, such as incumbent campaigns in 2008 not paying particular attention to their candidates' background but then shifting in the expected direction in later years, as noted. They also might reflect some campaign specific dynamics: For example, we see signing up volunteers and fundraising as more of an incumbent campaign strategy in 2012, possibly reflecting congressional campaigns piggybacking on Obama's mobilization efforts.

Even so, the results over time paint a fairly stable picture, at least in the direction of the hypotheses (and with strong support for hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 5 nearly every year). It may, given the rise of other technologies, appear surprising that congressional campaigns did not more dramatically change their approach to their campaign websites. We suspect that the stability offers further evidence for our hypotheses, insofar as our underlying premises were time-invariant: Campaigns cannot control who visits and how often they visit, the web offers enormous unmediated space that could potentially be relayed to any voter, and incumbent and non-incumbent incentives hold for any election. These realities also were largely evident from the start of campaign websites, and so there was not a great amount of learning that would generate change over time (other than perhaps the 2008 incumbency-background result). That said, the lack of complete support accentuates the need for additional theorizing. We also note that there may have been greater changes pre-2008, which we miss since our data begin in 2008 (see Smith 2009; Issenberg 2012; Kreiss 2012 on 2008 being a key year for web campaigning). However, the overall picture is one of stability over time.

One final point concerns whether the rise of other technologies should have altered candidate behavior. For example, would campaigns (e.g., non-incumbent campaigns) move away from coordinating and mobilizing on

their websites due to the rise of new technologies that may more effectively do this? Our sense is that these new technologies may have replaced reliance on campaign websites as the primary way to coordinate and mobilize. This is what Figure 3 suggests. Nonetheless, for non-incumbent campaigns that are trying to use these techniques, websites may still be a primary medium used to achieve campaign goals (i.e., these goals are primary and candidates still use whatever technology they can).

CONCLUSIONS

This study is the first to extensively analyze what campaigns themselves say about their websites. It shows that political marketers who work on congressional campaigns have fairly uniform perceptions of who is likely to visit (e.g., engaged voters) and who is being targeted by the website (e.g., voters in general). They also sense that their websites are better at presenting the campaign's overall message to a potentially general audience than they are at communicating direct messages to those who have established a tighter connection with the campaign. At the same time, campaigns *use* their websites in different ways depending on their candidate's status in the race. While incumbent campaigns are content to promote their candidate's background, non-incumbent campaigns more actively pursue all other website goals, including issue promotion, fundraising, and volunteer recruitment. Non-incumbent campaigns are also motivated by political realities to "go negative" more often on their sites, and they give volunteers relatively more control over the site.

We find some, but not many, changes over time. We suspect that stability for some of our expectations reflects the long-standing technological limits and campaign status that fundamentally shape strategy. That said, as mentioned, the changes we do find demand more detailed analyses of year-by-year contextual effects. Going forward, we may see more changes as well if websites start to create more highly developed links with other social media—only time will tell and for this reason it is important to continue studies such as ours. This latter point gets to some of the limitations of our study. First, communication technologies have evolved at a remarkable pace, and an obvious question, which was beyond our purview, concerns the relationship between campaign websites and social media. Our results reported in Figure 3 highlight the importance of exploring these connections. Second, as noted in Table 1, our sample is slightly skewed and it is plausible that a wider variance of campaigns would have produced different results, although such differences would have been counter to our expectations.

Third, our reliance on self-reports could have generated some biases. It is for this reason that our results should be read as relative comparisons

(e.g., across target audiences, between incumbent and non-incumbent campaigns), rather than as absolute values (e.g., exact probability differences between incumbent and non-incumbent campaigns). Unless there was a systematic bias in self-reports, such relative comparisons are unaffected by biased self-reports, unless such biases differ across campaign types (e.g., incumbent campaigns offer more biased answers than non-incumbent campaigns). We have no reason to think there was such systematic bias. Indeed, our results have face validity because the perceptions of the respondents cohere with content analyses of actual congressional campaign websites. For example, incumbent campaigns emphasize their candidates' background, while non-incumbent campaigns focus on issues and "going negative" (e.g., Foot and Schneider 2006; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009, 2010); indeed, Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2010, 96) report that there is about an 82% chance that non-incumbents "go negative" on their website, which is very close to our survey finding of 77.5%.

That our work moved beyond what is posted to isolate how political marketers themselves perceive and use their websites is an important advance. Indeed, our results suggest that despite some initial optimism when sites first launched, they have done little to alter incentives that would generate engagement either with voters or other campaigns. Differential motivations, made clear in our results, mean that incumbent and non-incumbent campaigns focus on distinct content that minimizes engagement over particular issues or candidate features, preventing engaged dialogue (see Riker 1996; Simon 2002). Our findings also raise questions about how promissory representation works since there is an avoidance of issue engagement by the very candidates most likely to be elected: incumbents (Mansbridge 2003). In sum, we have isolated elements that influence web marketing and the implications for democratic deliberation are not promising. Dislodging these practices may be particularly difficult given the fundamental incentives facing political marketers.

NOTES

1. Our work follows others who have conducted similar surveys (e.g., Stromer-Galley et al. 2003; Foot and Schneider 2006) or interviews (e.g., Kreiss 2012); however, we present a more updated and larger data set with a distinct focus.

2. Our focus is variation across *candidates*, and thus it may be that in more competitive races, there are generally more frequent visits by all potential audiences but the relative proportion of visits by audience will remain the same.

3. As mentioned above, this does not mean that the inherent capacities of websites free campaigns from rhetorical and political constraints, just that they are more likely to see their websites, as compared to other media, as a better venue for promoting their overall campaign message, especially to a general audience of voters.

4. Our predictions in this section echo extant work by identifying incumbency-challenger status as a critical determinant of campaign behavior over a range of strategies (Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton 2011, 82–88; Jacobson 2013, 105–113).

5. In cases in which we could not locate contact information, we would—if available—submit a message directly to the campaign on its website (i.e., an online inquiry).

6. As noted, we implemented the survey during four distinct election campaigns. Given the anonymity of the respondents, we have no way to know whether any (or how many) respondents completed the survey in multiple years. What we do know, however, is that respondents reported being highly informed about website constructions, as just noted. In addition, while Nyhan and Montgomery (2015) show that consultants tend to work only for one party or another, we are unaware of evidence concerning using the same consultants over multiple years. Also, note that many campaigns relied on volunteers (as reported below) who may be even more likely to rotate. Most important, we phrased our questions in terms of what "the campaign" is doing so our presumption is that respondents, regardless of whether they had previously participated in a survey, answered in ways that reflect the current campaign on which they work. In the end, though, we do recognize this limitation—an unavoidable reality as anonymity was likely critical to ensure responses.

7. Other potential sources of influence include state parties, national parties, or other politicians, but we did not measure these.

8. We also asked respondents how often other campaign material included the site's URL. We find that respondents estimated that an average of 91.26% of other campaign material (e.g., television ads, direct mailers) included the campaign website address. This further suggests that campaigns see their websites as an informational hub and ideal place to present their overall message to voters at large. Campaigns continue to drive traffic to these general sources of campaign information.

9. This is not to say, however, that campaigns see their websites as static or unoriginal "brochures" (see Foot et al. 2003; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2007). To assess this, we also included measures that gauged how often the websites were updated and assessed the originality of the websites (the latter was asked only on our 2014 survey). We find that the majority of campaigns view their websites as fairly dynamic, updating information every few days (35.73%) or even daily (27.84%). The vast majority (72.62%) of our 2014 respondents also described their campaign websites as more than moderately original or unique (when asked to rank them on a seven-point scale from *not at all original* to *very original* the average is 4.34, $SD = 1.52$, $N = 84$). All of this suggests that campaigns have a specific way of looking at their websites when it comes to presenting information and communicating with voters. They typically see their websites as a platform for presenting an original and dynamic overview of their campaign message while relying more heavily on social media for direct communication to those who have established a connection with the campaign.

10. Figure 4 does not include the goal of "collecting data for analysis of campaign goals and strategies" since we only collected data on that goal in 2014. In 2014, the mean value for that goal was 4.49 ($SD = 1.92$; $n = 183$).

11. To compute these values, we set all other independent variables to their mean and reran our models using *Clarify*.

12. Logically, we also find that respondents from incumbent campaigns are more likely (82.88%) than those from non-incumbent campaigns (53.38%) to complain about negativity on their opponent's website.

13. We also find that race competitiveness is associated with a greater probability of going negative. Here we see that negativity has a 97.7% probability of showing up on candidate websites in toss-up races, compared to a 79.7% probability in leaning races and a 36.0% probability in races solidly favoring one party or the other. Both of our negativity findings follow past research on the content of congressional campaign websites and reconfirm that, unlike candidates who are relatively safe (often including incumbents), those who are coming from behind or find themselves in tight races are more likely to draw contrasts with their opponents (see Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2010).

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APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL RESULTS

TABLE A1 Campaign website targets

	Voters in General	Undecided Voters	Engaged Voters	Journalists	Supportive Voters	Supportive Activists	Bloggers	Opp. Voters	Non-voters
Incumbent	−.149 (.116)	−.093 (.115)	−.146 (.111)	.066 (.109)	.109 (.109)	−.150 (.107)	−.096 (.107)	−.217** (.110)	−.086 (.111)
Senate	−.004 (.153)	−.028 (.154)	−.020 (.148)	−.099 (.142)	−.202 (.143)	−.202 (.141)	−.124 (.142)	−.223 (.146)	−.041 (.146)
Female	−.061 (.021)	.062 (.127)	−.083 (.122)	.134 (.120)	.141 (.120)	.032 (.117)	.041 (.117)	−.009 (.120)	−.046 (.121)
Democratic	−.125 (.112)	.043 (.110)	.080 (.107)	.141 (.104)	.120 (.104)	.097 (.103)	.062 (.102)	−.173* (.105)	−.006 (.107)
2010	.144 (.870)	−.138 (.143)	.016 (.135)	.006 (.134)	−.015 (.132)	−.004 (.131)	−.162 (.131)	−.123 (.136)	.0383 (.138)
2012	−.118 (.154)	−.165 (.153)	.530*** (.149)	−.130 (.142)	.096 (.142)	.186 (.140)	−.054 (.140)	.230 (.143)	−.087 (.149)
2014	−.055 (.159)	−.229 (.157)	.283* (.151)	−.201 (.147)	.212 (.149)	.077 (.145)	−.237 (.146)	.272* (.148)	.156 (.151)
Competitiveness	.066 (.074)	.105 (.073)	−.101 (.070)	.128* (.068)	−.004 (.068)	−.084 (.067)	−.008 (.067)	−.006 (.068)	.071 (.070)
Log likelihood	−573.733	−606.797	−740.173	−761.227	−778.314	−830.732	−843.439	−812.480	−747.357
N	450	450	451	451	445	450	448	450	444

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard error in parentheses.

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$ for two-tailed tests.

The coefficients and standard errors for τ_1 through τ_6 are (reading across the table): for model 1, −2.895 (.369), −2.417 (.258), −1.981 (.217), −1.166 (.192), −.699 (.188), −.117 (.187); for model 2, −2.432 (.273), −2.242 (.245), −1.755 (.207), −.931 (.189), −.428 (.186), .063 (.185); for model 3, −1.765 (.197), −1.281 (.187), −1.071 (.185), −.675 (.182), −.168 (.179), .273 (.178); for model 4, −1.810 (.209), −1.208 (.185), −.855 (.180), −.317 (.176), .196 (.175), .889 (.177); for model 5, −1.819 (.206), −1.279 (.185), −.781 (.177), −.176 (.174), .276 (.174), .767 (.176); for model 6, −1.773 (.189), −1.209 (.179), −.760 (.175), −.248 (.173), .334 (.173), .777 (.174); for model 7, −1.550 (.184), −1.088 (.177), −.623 (.175), −.018 (.173), .470 (.173), .943 (.177); for model 8, −1.773 (.189), −1.210 (.178), −.760 (.175), −.248 (.173), .334 (.173), .777 (.174); for model 9, −.244 (.181), .300 (.182), .634 (.183), 1.123 (.186), 1.373 (.189), 1.647 (.194).

TABLE A2 Campaign website visitors

	Voters in General	Undecided Voters	Engaged Voters	Journalists	Supportive Voters	Supportive Activists	Bloggers	Opp. Voters	Non–voters
Incumbent	−.069 (.112)	−.108 (.111)	.044 (.111)	−.013 (.111)	−.168 (.111)	−.033 (.112)	−.032 (.111)	.140 (.112)	−.180 (.123)
Senate	−.076 (.145)	.038 (.144)	−.049 (.144)	.292** (.144)	−.159 (.143)	.062 (.144)	.041 (.143)	−.025 (.144)	.001 (.156)
Female	−.112 (.122)	−.122 (.122)	−.101 (.121)	.012 (.120)	.002 (.120)	.056 (.121)	.050 (.121)	.048 (.122)	−.036 (.132)
Democratic	−.158 (.107)	−.121 (.106)	−.152 (.107)	.053 (.106)	−.103 (.106)	−.148 (.106)	−.145 (.106)	−.040 (.107)	.071 (.117)
2010	−.154 (.136)	−.126 (.135)	−.403*** (.136)	−.145 (.135)	−.403*** (.135)	−.406*** (.136)	−.537*** (.137)	−.083 (.136)	−.076 (.148)
2012	.165 (.149)	.290* (.149)	−.055 (.149)	−.217 (.148)	−.217 (.147)	−.142 (.148)	−.401*** (.148)	.022 (.149)	−.229 (.164)
2014	−.051 (.153)	−.182 (.152)	−.267* (.153)	−.120 (.152)	−.367** (.152)	−.462*** (.153)	−.543*** (.153)	−.013 (.153)	−.056 (.165)
Competitiveness	.047 (.070)	.101 (.069)	.159*** (.070)	.279*** (.070)	.145** (.070)	.069 (.069)	.099 (.069)	.093 (.070)	.100 (.075)
Log likelihood	−704.015	−700.666	−703.479	−750.043	−730.575	−687.017	−704.480	−715.407	−542.653
N	413	413	414	414	416	414	414	415	413

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard error in parentheses.

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$ for two–tailed tests.

The coefficients and standard errors for τ_1 through τ_6 are (reading across the table): for model 1, −2.006 (.211), −.638 (.182), .071 (.181), .653 (.183), .885 (.185), 1.183 (.188); for model 2, −1.892 (.210), −.722 (.181), .093 (.181), .798 (.183), 1.084 (.186), 1.477 (.192); for model 3, −2.885 (.360), −1.607 (.195), −.903 (.184), −.181 (.180), .469 (.181), 1.014 (.185); for model 4, −1.593 (.208), −.541 (.181), −.004 (.180), .524 (.182), 1.096 (.184), 1.700 (.190); for model 5, −2.510 (.250), −1.374 (.187), −.815 (.126), −.122 (.181), .473 (.181), 1.080 (.185); for model 6, −3.044 (.352), −1.656 (.194), −.953 (.185), −.127 (.181), .577 (.182) 1.274 (.190); for model 7, −2.655 (.253), −1.506 (.190), −.851 (.184), −.063 (.181), .613 (.182), 1.190 (.189); for model 8, −.834 (.185), .349 (1.071), .204 (.182), 1.110 (.188), 1.413 (.191), .204 (.182), 1.814 (.200); for model 8, .116 (.198), .785 (.201), 1.186 (.205), 1.746 (.215), 2.113 (.23), 2.281 (.246).

TABLE A3 Overall strategy

	Capture Overall Strategy
Incumbent	−.085 (.118)
Senate	.015 (.153)
Female	.032 (.129)
Democratic	−.053 (.114)
2010	−.140 (.145)
2012	.019 (.160)
2014	−.143 (.161)
Competitiveness	.036 (.074)
Log likelihood	−600.730
N	411

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard error in parentheses.

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$ for two-tailed tests.

The coefficients and standard errors for τ_1 through τ_6 are −2.386 (.254), −1.986 (.219), −1.567 (.204), −1.014 (.198), −.531 (.196), .101 (.194).

TABLE A4 Campaign website content goals

	Promote Issues	Promote Background	Fundraise	Persuade	Distribute Material	Sign Up Volunteers	Publicize Campaign Events	GOTV	Coord. Volunteer	Opp. Volunteer background	Opp. issue
Incumbent	−.339***	.296**	−.385***	−.284**	−.223**	−.292***	−.231**	−.232**	−.231**	−.537***	−.759***
	(.120)	(.117)	(.113)	(.115)	(.111)	(.111)	(.111)	(.110)	(.111)	(.119)	(.118)
Senate	−.068	.066	−.349**	−.129	.052	−.186	.010	−.036	.009	.227	.156
	(.157)	(.151)	(.146)	(.147)	(.144)	(.144)	(.143)	(.143)	(.142)	(.146)	(.145)
Female	−.157	.089	.140	−.130	.093	−.014	.110	−.024	−.082	−.094	−.102
	(.131)	(.126)	(.123)	(.122)	(.119)	(.119)	(.120)	(.118)	(.119)	(.124)	(.123)
Democratic	−.103	−.073	−.053	−.069	−.077	−.048	−.142	−.183*	−.159	−.095	.043
	(.117)	(.111)	(.108)	(.109)	(.105)	(.106)	(.106)	(.105)	(.106)	(.111)	(.109)
2010	−.084	−.171	−.017	−.087	.035	.021	−.058	.078	.171	.022	.010
	(.149)	(.140)	(.138)	(.139)	(.133)	(.134)	(.134)	(.133)	(.133)	(.141)	(.138)
2012	.067	−.154	.115	−.191	−.197	.194	−.119	.044	.161	.185	−.035
	(.167)	(.154)	(.153)	(.152)	(.146)	(.149)	(.148)	(.147)	(.147)	(.154)	(.153)
2014	−.181	−.118	−.056	−.235	−.226	−.150	−.051	−.048	−.078	.028	−.026
	(.164)	(.157)	(.152)	(.154)	(.148)	(.149)	(.149)	(.149)	(.149)	(.157)	(.155)
Competitiveness	.054	.021	−.013	.085	−.051	.010	.032	.064	.017	.110	.107
	(.077)	(.072)	(.071)	(.072)	(.069)	(.069)	(.069)	(.069)	(.069)	(.072)	(.070)
Log likelihood	−522.553	−638.936	−706.893	−649.791	−774.199	−745.644	−775.791	−787.347	−794.413	−698.148	−754.589
N	425	424	423	425	423	424	424	423	420	422	422

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard error in parentheses.

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$ for two–tailed tests.

The coefficients and standard errors for τ_1 through τ_6 are (reading across the table): for model 1, −2.839 (.310), −2.500 (.259), −2.127 (.229), −1.367 (.205), −.864 (.200), −.345 (.197); for model 2, −2.855 (.366), −1.890 (.216), −1.427 (.198), −.853 (.189), −.278 (.186), .248 (.186); for model 3, −2.329 (.224), −1.693 (.197), −1.307 (.190), −.692 (.184), −.217 (.182), .276 (.182); for model 4, −2.688 (.277), −2.074 (.216), −1.715 (.202), −.952 (.189), −.414 (.186), .232 (.185); for model 5, 1.788 (.194), −1.211 (.185), −.851 (.183), −.090 (.180), .429 (.180), 1.027 (.184); for model 6, −2.067 (.209), −1.589 (.192), −1.059 (.184), −.469 (.180), .082 (.179), .722 (.181); for model 7, −1.726 (.194), −1.107 (.183), −.593 (.181), .002 (.179), .467 (.179), .951 (.181); for model 8, −1.286 (.186), −.697 (.181), −.181 (.179), .307 (.179), .683 (.181), 1.407 (.191); for model 9, −.302 (.185), .298 (.187), .669 (.188), .949 (.188), 1.241 (.190), 1.616 (.196); for model 10, −.616 (.184), −.214 (.184), .235 (.184), .591 (.184), .890 (.185), 1.268 (.188).

GOTV = Get out the vote.

TABLE A5 Negativity and influence

	"Go Negative"	Staffers	Consultants	Volunteers
Incumbent	−.750*** (.155)	.478** (.242)	1.061*** (.256)	−.806*** (.255)
Senate	.250 (.221)	.035 (.331)	.218 (.325)	.185 (.334)
Female	.011 (.181)	−.104 (.268)	.267 (.284)	−.200 (.282)
Democratic	−.002 (.155)	−.247 (.248)	−.034 (.260)	.112 (.254)
2010	.370* (.200)			
2012	−.119 (.202)			
2014	−.060 (.211)			
Competitiveness	1.192*** (.119)	.383** (.160)	.029 (.160)	−.030 (.158)
Log likelihood	−193.585	−131.661	−138.673	−120.854
N	434	83	81	83

Note. Entries are probit (for "Go Negative") and ordered probit coefficients with standard error in parentheses.

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$ for two−tailed tests.

The coefficients and standard errors for τ_1 through τ_6 are (reading across the table): for model 2, −.923 (.386), −.831 (.380), −.673 (.372), .033 (.362), .770 (.375), 1.366 (.385); for model 3, −.693 (.379), −.506 (.374), −.100 (.371), .377 (.373), .787 (.379), 1.263 (.392); for model 4, −.641 (.366), −.008 (.361), .645 (.370), 1.232 (.401), 1.339 (.410), 1.462 (.421).

TABLE A6 Negativity by year

	Negativity			
	2008	2010	2012	2014
Incumbent	−1.149*** (.315)	−0.815** (.287)	−1.007* (.394)	−0.402 (.332)
Senate	1.324* (.546)	−0.253 (.365)	0.0270 (.599)	0.399 (.481)
Female	0.526 (.370)	−0.351 (.325)	−0.476 (.440)	0.0125 (.397)
Democratic	−0.253 (.273)	−0.103 (.311)	0.380 (.370)	0.372 (.359)
Competitiveness	0.669** (.218)	1.133*** (.223)	1.881*** (.306)	1.285*** (.264)
Log likelihood	122	126	104	86
N	−57.23	−50.31	−36.44	−39.30

Note. Entries are probit coefficients with standard error in parentheses.

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$ for two-tailed tests.