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Georgia's 12th Congressional District, stretching from the South Carolina border to the middle of the state, is covered by four television markets. Because portions of those markets cross district and state borders, a lot of money is wasted broadcasting ads to people in other congressional districts and in South Carolina. For years, this waste has been unavoidable. There are tools for making television ad buys more efficient by targeting the most valuable segments of the electorate, but many campaigns have been slow to use them.



Although it isn't a new problem — television markets and political geographies are rarely perfectly aligned — as campaigns gain access to newer targeting techniques and more information about markets for advertising, the inefficiency is increasingly visible. The proliferation of set-top boxes to which specific commercials can be sent, and similar capabilities for satellite dish systems, make it possible for campaigns to spend smarter.

"Having alternatives to spending a lot of money is a relatively new concept," said Elizabeth Wilner, senior vice president for political advertising at Kantar Media, which tracks

broadcast ad spending. "But there are more options now than there were even a few years ago for more targeting of voters, like local cable and addressable satellite, or using analytics to at least identify cheaper programming through which you can reach the same audiences."

There's no single reason that campaigns are slow to use refined targeting techniques honed during the 2012 election cycle. Partly it is inertia, and partly it is that political ad buyers operate in an inefficient market: They lack easy access to information that would help accurately evaluate what they are buying. That's changing, too, but slowly.

President Obama's campaign used targeting alternatives during the 2012 presidential race. It bought segments of an audience rather than an entire audience, which might contain people a campaign doesn't care about reaching. But in statewide races with large media budgets, segmentation might not be as much of a concern, as viewers in South Carolina living near Charlotte, N.C., could tell you after the barrage of ads in the North Carolina Senate contest.

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For television viewers in areas with competitive House races, not much has changed: Most noncable broadcast advertisements in House races air on just 11 programs, among them the local news, “Wheel of Fortune,” “Jeopardy!” and “The Today Show,” according to an analysis of advertising data by the digital consulting firm Targeted Victory. What many campaigns do is make television buys on the basis of **“Gross Ratings Points,”** a marketing metric that measures the scope of the ad buy but not necessarily the size or composition of its audience.

In Georgia’s 12th District race, where \$5 million — and counting — has been spent by the incumbent Democrat, John Barrow, and Rick Allen, the Republican challenger, there has been very little cable advertising. Cable doesn’t offer the range of spots that broadcast does. Local or regional cable companies might have only one or two spots an hour available because national advertisers take most of the inventory. Other Georgia campaigns, including those of contested Senate races and the governor’s election, compete for those spots.

Cable buys are also concentrated: 90 percent of cable spending in House races goes to 20 networks that account for a little more than a quarter of overall cable viewership. “A problem with buying local cable is that there’s a lot more inventory in local affiliate broadcast,” said Carol Davidsen, the director of integration and media targeting for the 2012 Obama campaign, where she led the effort to deliver ads to specific portions of the television audience. “For a local election, it’s too expensive for national cable. Where can you go? Back to broadcast.”

Cable and satellite also suffer from information inefficiencies. Broadcast stations are required to post online reports on political ad buys, but cable and satellite operators are not. In August, the Federal Communications Commission said it would **seek public comment on expanding the requirement to them.** Such disclosures would not only provide greater transparency to the public, but would also give ad buyers more accurate information about the markets they seek to enter. Knowing the actual market price for unconventional ad buys — those that aren’t just on the usual list of programs — should make campaigns more confident in their spending decisions.

For a campaign to take advantage of more targeting options would require either that campaigns maintain their own data and infrastructure, as the Obama campaign did, or use vendors that have already assembled voter data and television viewing habits. “Without the political data tied to the buy, campaigns are not even sure they are actually targeting the right swing audience needed to actually win,” said Zac Moffatt, co-founder of Targeted Victory, which offers a targeting service geared toward Republican campaigns that don’t have a statewide budget.

What about online targeting? It’s also a work in progress, and no one is suggesting that it will replace television anytime soon. The potential for fraud, doubts about the effectiveness of targeting methods and online users’ aversions to clicking on ads have made it easier for campaigns to hold back on online spending, even though some of the same issues occur in television advertising. That, too, is changing. In addition to **Targeted Victory’s tool** for Republicans, there is **DemocraticAds.com**, by online firm DSPolitical, aimed at local and state races. Such platforms, which allow campaigns to choose and assemble a target audience without having to gather the relevant data piecemeal, take some of the power away from traditional ad buyers, but also require a certain amount of knowledge of the data that underlies the systems.

The advent of stand-alone streaming services like the kind CBS announced last week raises the possibility of coordinating advertising buys across platforms. Viewers might see the same campaign ad whether they watched a show on television or on a tablet. Companies like Verizon or Comcast, which provide both television and Internet, can identify which of their customers have both services and possess data on how they consume media. Making that information available to marketers to improve advertising targeting would be appealing to campaigns, but it could raise privacy concerns among

subscribers.

Even without the online component, the level of detail that is available about television viewership, combined with detailed political data and some demographic context, is changing the market for political advertising. The tradition of relying on Gross Ratings Points, while still a fixture in many campaigns, is no longer the force it was. "A thousand G.R.P.s a week, and you're O.K.," said Ms. Wilner of Kantar Media. "That's not really the case now. I see that rule of thumb going away." – *New York Times*

Does your TV-watching reflect your politics? Those who buy and place political ads think it does. And, as viewing habits continue to disperse among hundreds of cable choices, political parties and groups behind so-called independent expenditures are increasingly targeting ad buys to specific channels. This is the new TV campaign.

Cable is cheaper and offers niche programming. When that's coupled with advances in technology, as in "we know what you're watching," guess what? You're in an election cycle in which more political money is being spent on cable than ever before. It's nowhere near what's spent on network. Broadcast channels command between 80 percent and 90 percent of the billions of political TV dollars spent nationally.

But cable buys are getting bigger, and the focus is on placement. A new national study first reported last week in the *Washington Post* details such placement. It tells us something about who's watching what and maybe confirms some stereotypes about who tends to vote with which party. You won't be surprised to learn that the study found Republicans place most of their cable ads on channels appealing to men while Democratic placement tends to be on channels appealing to women and young people.

That's because on cable, the game is get the base. It's also no shock that the vast majority of ads on Fox News (84 percent) are Republican or that most of the political ads on MSNBC (85 percent) are Democratic. Both these news sources are known for ideological slants and for reinforcing the views of the majority of their viewers. (They are also the two best reasons to watch political debates on C-SPAN, where no one tells you what to think or, afterward, who won.)

The study in question was done by Echelons Insights, a Washington-based GOP digital- and ad-strategy firm. It looked at 512,000 ads this year, at buying across top cable channels and at how each political side targets viewers. Echelon's Patrick Ruffini tells me his firm's review reflects "just about what you'd expect" in terms of demographic targets for both parties. But while traditional placement for political ads tends to be around regular broadcast newscasts - on the theory that's what likely voters are watching - cable-buying isn't following tradition. That's especially true this year, a midterm election year when voter turnout is lower than in presidential years and when poll after poll suggests record-low voter interest.

So cable is used to chase the base, to go after, as it were, one's own people. Guess where that effort's happening? The most partisan channels in terms of placement are not Fox and MSNBC. They are the Golf Channel, where 93 percent of ads are Republican, and the E! Network, where 94 percent are Democratic. Other heavy GOP placements are on the History Channel, ESPN2 and the Discovery Channel. Other top Democratic placements are on Comedy Central, BET and Lifetime. So Republicans like golf and history; Democrats like celebs and humor. Who knew?

And, say campaign consultants who spoke on background because they're involved in current races, the cable buys in the first half of the year were aimed at voters in contested primaries, and cable buys after that are aimed at spurring turnout. One finding that shows a semblance of similarity between political parties? The cable channel with the closest shared buy is FX. Guess everybody likes "Justified," "The Americans," "Louie" and "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia." I was hoping the big share would be on USA

and the Food Network, you know, America and apple pie. But then those channels didn't offer "Archer" or "Fargo." – *Philadelphia Daily News*



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