

Outdrawing the Candidate: A Campaign-Linked Page and the Facebook Campaigns of Trump and Biden in 2020

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Abstract

On Facebook, a presidential campaign is carried by more pages than the candidate's own. I compare 17 pages on the two sides of the 2020 United States presidential campaign: the candidates', running mate's, campaign and party pages, several Trump family pages, and a campaign-linked page and a handful of supporters' pages on Biden's side. The data are 14,634 posts between 1 June and 25 October 2020, collected through CrowdTangle. Trump's own page drew almost eight times the engagement of Biden's (386 million interactions against 49 million). On Trump's side, his page drew 73% of the engagement of the pages I tracked and his family's pages 19%. On Biden's side, his own page drew 31%, and one page drew 54%: *Ridin' With Biden*, an unofficial page whose founders were reported to work with Biden's campaign. It drew more engagement than Biden's own page, supplied 85% of the shares on the Biden-side pages I tracked, and grew from about 190,000 to over a million followers. Its posts were built to be shared: shares made up half its interactions, against a tenth on the candidates' pages, and half its posts ended with a prompt to follow the page "to defeat Trump". Posts that mentioned the opponent drew more angry reactions on both sides. Whether they also drew more engagement depends on how mentions are measured, and the evidence is weak. The findings show how much of a side's presence can sit outside its official pages, and how much depends on which pages one tracks.

Keywords: Facebook; 2020 presidential election; Donald Trump; Joe Biden; satellite campaigns; sharing; engagement

1 Introduction

On Facebook, a presidential campaign is not one page but a set of them. Alongside the candidate's page sit the running mate, the campaign, the party and members of the candidate's family, and beyond them pages run by allies and supporters. Research on campaigning on social media has mostly studied candidates' and parties' own accounts (Stromer-Galley 2014; Kreiss 2016; Bossetta 2018). Less is known about how much of a side's presence sits on the other pages, and what those pages do.

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In October 2020, during the campaign, I compared the two candidates' Facebook pages and found that Trump's drew far more engagement than Biden's (Hotham 2020a). At the time I also followed a set of other pages on both sides. One of them stood out. Ridin' With Biden, an unofficial pro-Biden page created in the spring of 2020, drew more engagement than Biden's own page. After the election it was reported that the page's founders, who also ran Occupy Democrats, had worked with Biden's campaign (Fordham 2020).

This paper uses those pages to ask three questions. How did engagement with the candidates' own pages compare? How was engagement spread across the other pages on each side, and in particular how much did Ridin' With Biden contribute? And what kind of content did that page post, compared with the official pages?

The set of pages is mine, not a census of either side, and I treat the findings about each side's mix of pages as conditional on it. The comparison of the candidates' own pages and the case of Ridin' With Biden do not depend on the selection.

The paper extends my work on the 2016 presidential campaign (Hotham 2026c), the 2020 Senate races (Hotham 2026a) and satellite campaigns in Britain (Hotham 2026b).

2 Background

2.1 Pages beyond the campaign

Digital media lowered the cost of campaigning for people and groups outside the formal campaign. Gibson (2015) described "citizen-initiated campaigning" and Dommett and Temple (2018) "satellite campaigns" run by organisations formally outside a party. In the United States, campaigns have long worked alongside allied organisations, and online the boundary between a campaign and its supporters is loose (Kreiss 2016). Satellite pages can do things the official campaign does not, such as posting more informal or more partisan content, and they can reach audiences the campaign does not.

Research on the 2016 and 2020 elections also found that engagement on Facebook was unevenly distributed across the political spectrum, with right-leaning pages and publishers often drawing more engagement than left-leaning ones (Freelon et al. 2020; Edelson et al. 2021; González-Bailón et al. 2023). Any comparison of two sides' pages therefore depends heavily on which pages are included.

2.2 Sharing and attacks

Studies of political posts on Facebook find that negative and emotionally charged content often draws more engagement (Heiss et al. 2019; Eberl et al. 2020), and that posts about political opponents are more widely shared (Rathje et al. 2021). Candidates' Facebook pages have carried negative messages since at least the early 2010s (Auter and Fine 2016). A page built to spread content widely might be expected to post more about the opponent, and to draw more shares and more anger when it does.

3 Data and methods

3.1 Pages and posts

In October 2020 I exported, through CrowdTangle, all posts by the pages I was following on the presidential campaign (CrowdTangle Team 2020). The export was made on 27 October 2020. I use posts from Monday 1 June to Sunday 25 October 2020, 21 complete weeks covering the summer, the party conventions and the final two months of the campaign. I drop scheduled live-video placeholders, which carry no engagement, and two pages: the Trump Organization’s business page and a small page called “Biden 2020” whose posts were ambiguous between support and parody. That leaves 14,634 posts from 17 pages.

I assign each page to a side and a role (Table 1). On Trump’s side are the candidate (Donald J. Trump), the campaign (Team Trump), the House Republicans, five family pages (Donald Trump Jr., Ivanka Trump, Eric Trump, Lara Trump and the First Lady) and one small parody page mocking Biden (Biden Memes). On Biden’s side are the candidate (Joe Biden), the running mate (Kamala Harris), family (Dr. Jill Biden), the party (Democratic Party), a campaign-linked page (Ridin’ With Biden), an allied group’s page (America Votes For Biden, which posted only from October) and two small supporters’ pages.

The set is not balanced. Trump’s side has five family pages to Biden’s one, and the House Republicans’ page is not the counterpart of the Democratic Party’s. Several relevant pages are missing, including Mike Pence’s, the Republican National Committee’s and any large pro-Trump supporters’ or allied pages, which certainly existed. I therefore lead with comparisons that do not depend on the selection, and report the mix of each side as a description of these pages only.

3.2 Measures

Engagement is the sum of likes, comments, shares and reactions on a post, recorded at the time of export. I report shares separately, and love, haha and angry reactions as shares of all likes and reactions. Engagement per follower divides a post’s engagement by the page’s followers at the time of posting.

I flag posts that mention the opponent: “Biden” or “Kamala” on Trump’s side, and “Trump” on Biden’s side, in the post text, link text, description or the text read from images. Half of Ridin’ With Biden’s posts end with a standard prompt to follow the page “to defeat Trump” or similar. I remove this prompt before flagging and record it as a separate indicator. Because the text read from images is available for some pages more than others, I also report a version using the post message alone.

3.3 Analysis

To compare posts that mention the opponent with other posts, I regress the logarithm of engagement on the opponent flag, the follow-prompt indicator, a video indicator and flags for posts about Covid-19, voting, law and order and the economy, with page and week fixed effects, separately for each side. These are within-page comparisons and are descriptive. There are only eight or nine pages on each side, so I report wild cluster bootstrap p -values clustered by page (Cameron et al. 2008) alongside conventional ones, and I estimate the same model page by page.

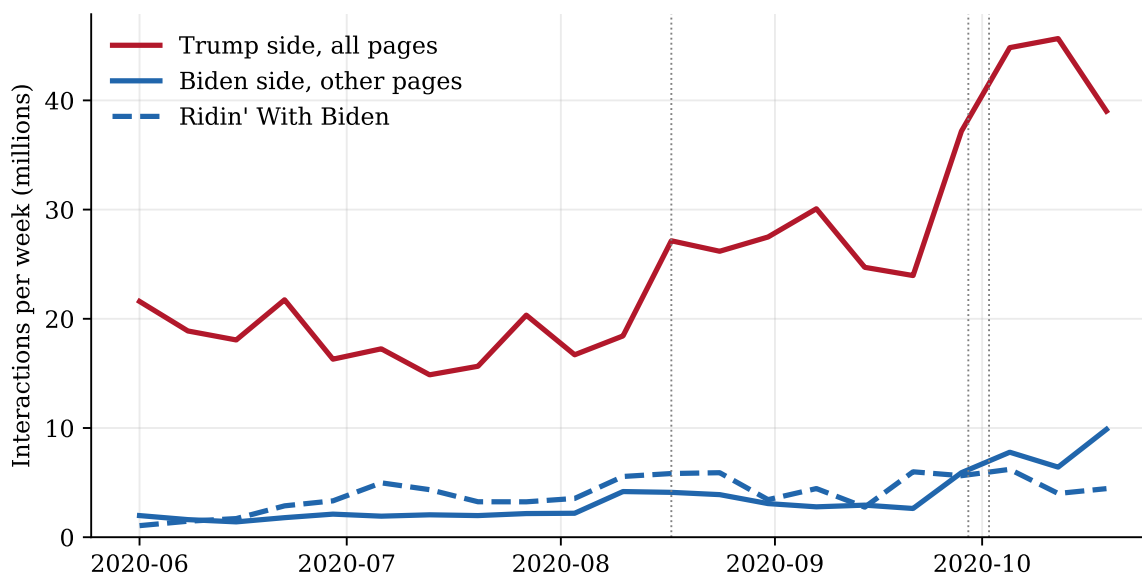


Figure 1. Weekly interactions on the pages tracked, 1 June to 25 October 2020. Dotted lines mark the start of the Democratic convention, the first debate and Trump’s Covid-19 diagnosis.

4 Findings

4.1 Trump’s page drew almost eight times as much as Biden’s

Trump’s own page drew 386 million interactions from 3,024 posts between June and October 2020, and Biden’s 49 million from 1,112 posts: a ratio of 7.8 to one. Trump’s page had about 30 million followers, Biden’s between 1.9 and 3.3 million. Across all the pages I tracked, Trump’s side drew 526 million interactions and Biden’s 157 million, a ratio of 3.4 to one, but that ratio depends on the selection: across the official pages alone it is 7.6, and excluding family pages it is 2.7.

The gap widened in absolute terms as the campaign went on (Figure 1). In the final eight weeks the pages on Trump’s side drew 34 million interactions a week and those on Biden’s 10 million. Engagement on Trump’s side was more concentrated: the top 1% of posts drew 16% of its engagement, against 7% on Biden’s side.

4.2 Where each side’s engagement came from

On Trump’s side, Trump’s page drew 73% of the engagement on the pages I tracked, his family’s pages 19% and Team Trump 7% (Figure 2). Donald Trump Jr.’s page alone drew 74 million interactions, more than Biden’s own page.

On Biden’s side, Biden’s page drew 31% and Harris’s 11%. Ridin’ With Biden drew 54%: 84 million interactions, more than Biden’s own page. The Democratic Party’s page drew 1%, and the allied group’s and supporters’ pages 2% between them. Ridin’ With Biden’s share fell from 60% in the summer to 47% in the final eight weeks, as engagement with Biden’s and Harris’s pages rose after the conventions.

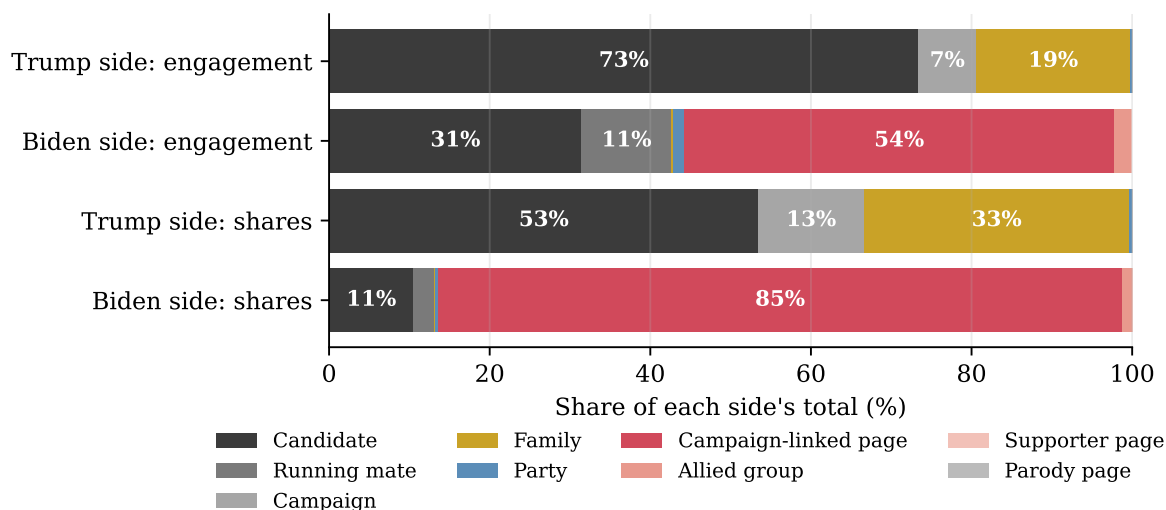


Figure 2. Where engagement and shares came from on each side, among the pages tracked, 1 June to 25 October 2020. The mix depends on which pages are included; see the text.

4.3 A page built to be shared

Ridin' With Biden was different from the official pages in three ways. First, it was built for sharing. Shares made up 49% of its interactions, against 7% on Trump's page and 10% on Biden's, and it supplied 85% of the shares on the Biden-side pages I tracked. Its posts were shared 41 million times, more than the 28 million shares of Trump's own page.

Second, it grew fast and its audience was unusually active. It had about 190,000 followers at the start of June and just over a million by late October. Its median post drew about 45 interactions per thousand followers at the time of posting, against 26 on Donald Trump Jr.'s page, 12 on Biden's and 2 on Trump's. Third, it posted about Trump. Excluding the follow prompt, 64% of its posts mentioned Trump in their text or images (32% in the message text alone), against 32% of Biden's own posts and 23% of Harris's. Half its posts ended with the prompt to follow the page "to defeat Trump".

4.4 Posts that mentioned the opponent

Posts that mentioned the opponent drew more anger on both sides. Compared with other posts on the same page in the same week, they had a higher share of angry reactions: 3.8 percentage points on Trump's side and 6.8 on Biden's (Table 2).

Whether they also drew more engagement is less clear. On Biden's side, posts mentioning Trump drew about 26% more engagement than other posts on the same page ($p = 0.003$ with page-clustered errors, but $p = 0.07$ with the wild cluster bootstrap), and about 60% more shares. The estimate is similar excluding Ridin' With Biden. But with the message-text measure, or in a count model, the difference in engagement is close to zero. On Trump's side, posts mentioning Biden drew about 11% less engagement overall, but this was not significant, and it varied by page (Figure 3): posts about Biden drew 12% more engagement on Trump's own page but less on Team Trump's and Donald Trump Jr.'s. Posts about law and order drew about a quarter more engagement on Trump's side and no more on Biden's.

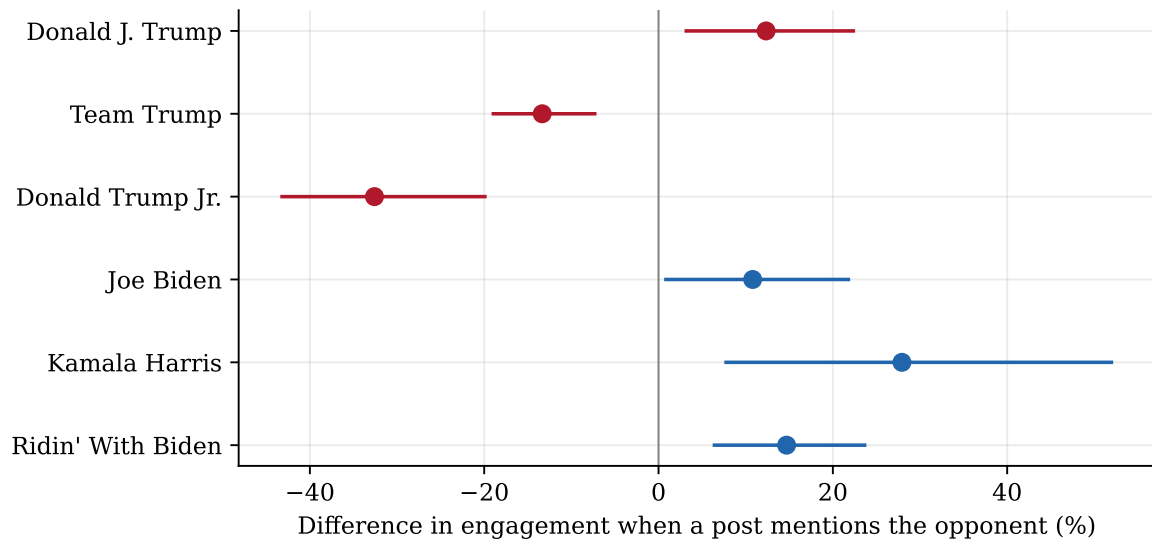


Figure 3. Difference in engagement for posts that mention the opponent, compared with other posts on the same page in the same week, controlling for video, the follow prompt and topic. Points with 95% intervals (heteroskedasticity-robust).

5 Discussion

5.1 How much sits outside the official pages

The clearest finding concerns Ridin’ With Biden. A page outside the formal campaign, reported to have worked with it, drew more engagement than the candidate and supplied most of the sharing among the Biden-side pages I tracked. It did so with a distinctive format: shareable posts, often about Trump, with a standard prompt to follow the page. This resembles what satellite organisations do in Britain, where I found that Momentum did jobs that Labour’s own pages did not (Hotham 2026b). In 2020, the satellite’s job on Facebook was spreading content.

On Trump’s side, the pages I tracked drew engagement mainly through Trump himself and his family. I did not track pro-Trump supporters’ or allied pages, which were plentiful and highly engaged in 2020 (Edelson et al. 2021), so I cannot say whether Trump’s side relied less on such pages. What I can say is that among official pages Trump’s side drew far more engagement, and that on Biden’s side one campaign-linked page carried more of the load than the candidate.

5.2 What engagement does and does not show

Biden won the election despite drawing far less engagement on Facebook. Engagement measures how a page’s existing audience responded, not how many voters were persuaded, and Trump’s large, loyal following could produce large numbers without reaching new people. CrowdTangle also records engagement but not reach, and some of these pages may have promoted their posts with paid advertising. The findings describe how the pages were used, not whether they worked.

6 Limitations

The pages are those I chose to follow in 2020, not a census, and the set is unbalanced between the sides. The totals and mixes by side are conditional on it. Ridin’ With Biden’s links to the campaign are taken from press reports (Fordham 2020), not from the data. The opponent flags are word lists and depend on the text available, which varies between pages. The estimates for posts mentioning the opponent are sensitive to how mentions are measured and rest on few pages, so I treat them as suggestive. Engagement was recorded on 27 October 2020, so the final week’s posts had less time to accumulate engagement; dropping that week changes little.

7 Conclusion

In the 2020 presidential campaign, Trump’s own Facebook page drew almost eight times the engagement of Biden’s. On Biden’s side, a campaign-linked page drew more engagement than Biden himself, supplied most of the side’s sharing among the pages I tracked, and posted mostly about Trump. Studying the candidates’ pages alone would miss much of what happened on Biden’s side of Facebook, and comparing the sides as a whole depends on knowing which pages belong to each.

Provenance and AI use

The data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis (Hotham 2021). Early descriptive results were published in *The Conversation* during the campaign (Hotham 2020b). The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

The analysis code and drafts of the text were prepared with the assistance of an AI system (Claude, by Anthropic), which was also used to review drafts. I checked the analysis and the text and take responsibility for both.

Data availability

Weekly interactions by page and the page-level totals are deposited with this preprint. Post texts are not shared, in line with the terms under which the data were collected.

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A Appendix

Table 1. Pages tracked, 1 June to 25 October 2020. Interactions in millions; median interactions per post; shares as a share of interactions; per follower is median interactions per thousand followers at posting; love and angry as shares of likes and reactions; opp. is the share of posts mentioning the opponent (all text, follow prompt removed).

Page	Role	Posts	Interactions (m)	Median	Shares (%)	Per follower	Love (%)	Angry (%)	Opp. (%)
<i>Trump side</i>									
Donald J. Trump	Candidate	3,024	386.1	64,914	7	2.2	14.0	1.5	15
Donald Trump Jr.	Family	896	74.2	59,986	21	26.4	13.1	3.2	19
Team Trump	Campaign	4,745	37.6	3,872	18	3.8	16.0	1.9	28
Ivanka Trump	Family	208	18.6	54,274	6	8.2	18.4	0.1	1
First Lady Melania Trump	Family	95	4.9	39,399	7	16.3	24.3	0.1	0
Eric Trump	Family	118	3.1	17,398	16	25.9	20.5	0.8	14
House Republicans	Party	565	1.2	1,236	14	3.1	6.6	15.8	1
Lara Trump	Family	111	0.2	1,085	8	5.4	23.4	0.6	2
Biden Memes	Parody page	82	0.0	68	39	1.5	1.2	0.7	34
<i>Biden side</i>									
Ridin' With Biden	Campaign-linked page	2,026	84.0	32,406	49	45.2	11.8	6.0	64
Joe Biden	Candidate	1,112	49.3	29,842	10	12.2	18.5	2.3	32
Kamala Harris	Running mate	599	17.5	19,109	7	13.5	20.9	5.8	23
America Votes For Biden	Allied group	165	3.4	14,829	17	39.4	10.2	4.7	36
Democratic Party	Party	682	2.1	1,716	8	1.1	13.1	8.6	26
Dr. Jill Biden	Family	109	0.4	2,108	11	32.5	28.8	0.1	2
Joe Biden 2020	Supporter page	22	0.1	2,162	5	27.9	20.0	0.2	32
Motivational Biden	Supporter page	75	0.0	323	14	3.4	10.2	3.5	49

Table 2. Posts mentioning the opponent compared with other posts on the same page in the same week. Coefficients on the opponent flag with page-clustered standard errors; all models include the follow-prompt, video and topic indicators and page and week fixed effects.

	Trump side	Biden side
Log engagement (main)	-0.12 (0.07)	0.23** (0.05)
Log engagement, message text only	-0.06 (0.11)	0.04 (0.09)
Engagement, Poisson count model	-0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.02)
Log shares	0.24* (0.09)	0.49*** (0.05)
Shares, Poisson count model	0.26 (0.17)	0.17** (0.05)
Log engagement, final eight weeks	-0.12 (0.09)	0.18* (0.07)
Angry share of reactions (points)	3.81*** (0.74)	6.81* (2.01)
Main, wild cluster bootstrap p	0.42	0.07
Main, excluding Team Trump / Ridin' With Biden	-0.02 (0.14)	0.20 (0.08)
Difference between sides (pooled)	0.38** (0.12)	
Posts	9,844	4,790

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (conventional page-clustered).