



**For Immediate Release:**

## **Super PACs Dominate Airwaves**

**Outside Spending Groups Air Over 80 Percent of Ads in GOP Primaries; Almost All are Sponsored by Super PACS**

**Big gaps between advertising and polls:  
Pro-Bush ads more than double nearest GOP rival,  
Pro-Cruz ads are rare and Trump noticeably absent,  
Dark money fueling Rubio**

(MIDDLETOWN, CT) **December 15, 2015** – The volume of GOP presidential ads on the airwaves this election year is up by nearly 45 percent over the same period in 2011, but super PACs are even more dominant than they were in previous cycles. These groups sponsored just 1 percent of ads to this point in 2007 and over two-thirds of ads in 2011, but they sponsored 81 percent from January 1 through December 9, 2015 (a 71 percent increase over 2011 and a 12,000 percent increase over 2007).

“The fight for the nomination is no longer about candidates alone in this post-*Citizens United* era,” said Michael Franz, co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project, adding, “The support offered by a super PAC is now a pre-requisite – some might say the foundation – of a candidate’s TV strategy.”

**Table 1: Advertising in GOP Presidential Primaries**

<b>Year</b>		<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Outside Group</b>	<b>Total</b>
2007	Ads Aired	26,186	291	26,477
	Row %	98.9%	1.1%	100.0%
	Cost	\$22.2M	\$137K	\$22.4M
2011	Ads Aired	9,580	20,957	30,567
	Row %	31.3%	68.6%	100.0%
	Cost	\$3.0M	\$14.9M	\$17.9M
2015	Ads Aired	8,527	35,743	44,270
	Row %	19.3%	80.7%	100.0%
	Cost	\$4.8M	\$52.2M	\$57.0M
% volume increase over 2011		-11.0%	70.6%	44.8%
% volume increase over 2007		-67.4%	12,182.8%	67.2%

Figures are from Jan 1 to Dec 9, 2015, and November 27 to December 9, 2015.

Numbers include broadcast television, national network and national cable television.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.

In looking at the air wars on both sides of the aisle, the battle for the GOP nomination—with many more candidates than on the Democratic side—is about twice as intense, both over the cycle-to-date and in the last two weeks. Ads in the Democratic race total about 22,000 (with 4,500 ads between November 27 and December 9), compared to over 44,000 on the Republican side (with 8,000 in the last two weeks).

**Table 2: Ad Spending and Airings**

	<b>Since January 1</b>		<b>Past Two Weeks</b>	
	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Airings</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Airings</b>
Democratic	13.4M	21,907	2.2M	4,583
Republican	57.0M	44,296	9.4M	8,033
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.4M</b>	<b>66,203</b>	<b>11.7M</b>	<b>12,616</b>

Figures are from Jan 1 to Dec 9, 2015, and Nov 27 to Dec 9, 2015.

Numbers include broadcast television, national network and national cable television.

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Jeb Bush and super PACs supporting his campaign have sponsored 15,750 ads on broadcast television, national network and national cable television since January 1, at a cost of almost \$26 million. Meanwhile, Donald Trump has aired no ads, and Ted Cruz has benefited from only 457 ads since the start of the year (through December 9th).

“We’re seeing a big disconnect between advertising volumes and poll numbers on the Republican side so far this year. Bush and his super PAC have spent more than two and a half times his nearest Republican competitor, Marco Rubio, and yet he sags in the polls,” said Travis N. Ridout, co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project. “Meanwhile Donald Trump has aired zero ads and still stands atop the field in national polling, and Ted Cruz, who has aired 34 times fewer ads than Bush, is polling first in many Iowa polls.”

“It’s far too early to call for the death of TV advertising,” said Erika Franklin Fowler, co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project. “The Republican field is still crowded, which makes for a more challenging advertising environment. It is also important to remember that volume isn’t everything. All ads are not created equal; advertising content and the characteristics of the receiving audience matter and will condition their influence.”

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton has double the ad total of her nearest competitor, Bernie Sanders (13,450 to 7,205). Martin O’Malley and former long-shot candidate Larry Lessig have aired very few ads.

**Table 3: Cost and Count of Ads Favoring Each Candidate (including supportive groups)**

<b>Favored Candidate</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Airings</b>
Bush	25.7M	15,750
Clinton	8.2M	13,450
Sanders	4.2M	7,205
Rubio	9.8M	6,596
Carson	1.5M	4,666
Perry	927K	3,441
Jindal	2.7M	3,413
Kasich	6.3M	3,127
Christie	5.7M	2,718
Graham	1.2M	1,008
Cruz	286K	457
Walker	570K	441
Gilmore	331K	419
Huckabee	331K	417
Lessig	75K	362
O'Malley	160K	197
Paul	371K	127
Pataki	26K	101
Fiorina	134K	88
Biden	266K	20

Figures are from Jan 1 to Dec 9, 2015. Numbers include broadcast television, national network and national cable television.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.

## Right to Rise, Conservative Solutions Project Lead Group Sponsors

Looking more closely at the groups airing ads on the Republican side, we see differences in the number and type of groups advertising on behalf of each candidate—and in how much they are spending. The sole outside group spending on Bush’s behalf, Right to Rise USA, is a full-disclosure super PAC that has spent an estimated \$25 million on over 15,000 ads in support of his candidacy (it has, in fact, sponsored nearly every ad on behalf of Bush), while the most active pro-Marco Rubio group, Conservative Solutions Project, has spent over \$8 million on nearly 5,000 ads to back him.

In a change from the last presidential nomination race, almost all advertising sponsored by outside organizations this cycle is from single-candidate groups.

**Table 4: Outside Group Sponsors in GOP Presidential Race**

Group	Est. Cost (in millions)	Ads	Advocates for...	Type
Right To Rise USA	25.2	15,220	Jeb Bush	super PAC
Conservative Solutions Project	8.1	4,882	Marco Rubio	c4
Opportunity & Freedom PAC	0.9	3,441	Rick Perry	super PAC
Believe Again	2.1	2,409	Bobby Jindal	super PAC
America Leads	5.4	2,391	Chris Christie	super PAC
New Day For America	4.5	1,911	John Kasich	super PAC
New Day Independent Media Committee, Inc	1.4	802	John Kasich	super PAC
Conservative Solutions PAC	0.8	760	Marco Rubio	super PAC
Foundation for a Secure & Prosperous America	0.3	699	.	c4
Security Is Strength PAC	0.9	588	Lindsay Graham	super PAC
Club For Growth	0.7	570	.	PAC
America Next	0.4	539	Bobby Jindal	c4
American Future Project	0.1	465	Bobby Jindal	527
Unintimidated PAC	0.6	441	Scott Walker	super PAC
American Encore	0.1	157	.	c4
America's Liberty PAC	0.4	127	Rand Paul	super PAC
We The People, Not Washington	0.03	101	George Pataki	super PAC
Carly For America Committee	0.1	88	Carly Fiorina	super PAC
Club For Growth Action	0.06	73	.	super PAC
Keep The Promise III PAC	0.04	71	Ted Cruz	super PAC
Keep The Promise I	0.005	7	Ted Cruz	super PAC
American Legacy PAC	0.0003	1	Ben Carson	PAC

Figures are from January 1 to December 9, 2015.

Numbers include broadcast television, national network and national cable television.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project. Group classification by the Center for Responsive Politics.

The bulk of outside group advertising so far in the GOP primary has come from full-disclosure groups. Super PACs, which account for 79 percent of group ads on the air, have dominated the airwaves. Traditional PACs account for 2.1 percent of ad airings, and 527 organizations make up an additional 1.3 percent of airings. 501(c)(4) organizations, sometimes referred to as dark money organizations because they do not disclose their donors publicly, are responsible for nearly 18 percent of ad airings (6,330 ads). Advertising by Conservative Solutions Project – a 501(c)(4) organization supporting Marco Rubio – accounts for 77 percent of all dark money ads in the 2016 Republican primary to date.

“It’s noteworthy that Conservative Solutions Project is spending far more than Rubio’s super PAC,” said Michael Franz, co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project. “Rubio is the only candidate who is being backed by a dark money sponsor to such a high degree.”

**Table 5: Outside Group Ads in GOP Primary by Type**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Disclose Donors?</b>	<b>Ad Volume</b>	<b>Est. Cost (in millions)</b>	<b>% of group volume</b>
PAC	Yes	749	1.1	2.1%
Super PAC	Yes	28,430	42.4	79.0%
c4	No	6,330	9.0	17.6%
527	Yes	465	0.1	1.3%
		<b>35,974</b>	<b>52.6</b>	

Figures are from Jan 1 to Dec 9, 2015. Numbers include broadcast television, national network and national cable television.

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“These new data add clarity to the emerging picture of how money is getting into the 2016 elections,” said Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics. “It is coming mostly from nominally independent groups that exist only to raise unlimited funds in support of a single candidate, and for the first time ever, these de facto extensions of the campaigns aren’t just super PACs. They now include 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations that don’t disclose their donors to the public.”

## Ad Campaign Remains Positive

To date, very few ads have been negative. Indeed, of the 66,203 ads aired in both parties’ races for the nominations, 84 percent have promoted a candidate as opposed to attacking a candidate or comparing one candidate against others.

**Table 6: Tone of Race by Party and Sponsorship**

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Contrast</b>	<b>Airings</b>
Democratic candidates	99.2%	0.0%	0.8%	21,459
Republican candidates	92.3%	0.0%	7.7%	8,527
Democratic groups	4.5%	51.6%	44.0%	448
Republican groups	73.6%	4.5%	21.9%	35,769
<b>All groups and sponsors</b>	<b>83.9%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>13.4%</b>	<b>66,203</b>

Figures are from Jan 1 to Dec 9, 2015. Numbers include broadcast television, national network and national cable television.

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## Boston/Manchester, Des Moines See Most Advertising

The Boston/Manchester media market tops the list for presidential advertising, clocking in at 18,882 airings at an estimated cost of \$31.3M. Des Moines, Iowa, is in second with just over 11,000 airings year-to-date. Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is third with nearly 9,500 airings. Other early primary states receiving advertising are South Carolina and Nevada.

**Table 7: Top Media Markets in Presidential Nomination Race by Airings**

<b>Market</b>	<b>Est. Cost (in millions)</b>	<b>Airings</b>
Boston, MA/Manchester, NH	31.4	18,882
Des Moines, IA	7.0	11,042
Cedar Rapids, IA	4.5	9,447
Sioux City, IA	2.8	4,901
Charleston, SC	2.1	3,180
Burlington, VT	2.0	3,029
Davenport, IA	1.6	2,775
Columbia, SC	2.3	2,598
Greenville, SC	3.4	2,051
Myrtle Beach, SC	1.3	1,939
Rochester, MN	0.5	1,619
Portland, ME	0.4	925
Ottumwa, IA	0.07	416
Las Vegas, NV	0.3	398
Reno, NV	0.06	311
Omaha, NE	0.2	292
Augusta, GA	0.09	241
Savannah, GA	0.08	229
Charlotte, NC	0.2	181

Figures are from January 1 to December 9, 2015. Numbers include broadcast television.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.

Table 8 focuses on advertising in the past two weeks (since November 27) and reveals some differences in the strategies employed by the candidates. For instance, almost all ads supporting Bush have been paid for by his super PAC, while Rubio's campaign has sponsored just over half of airings supporting him. On the Democratic side, all advertising over the past two weeks has been sponsored by the campaigns; groups have refrained from advertising.

**Table 8: Candidate and Group Airings (Past Two Weeks)**

<b>Favored Candidate</b>	<b>Candidate</b>		<b>Outside Groups</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Airings</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Airings</b>	<b>Airings</b>
Bush	175K	128	4.6M	2,427	<b>2,555</b>
Rubio	833K	932	813K	760	<b>1,692</b>
Carson	357K	1,048			<b>1,048</b>
Kasich	327K	414	335K	192	<b>606</b>
Graham	331K	420			<b>420</b>
Gilmore	331K	419			<b>419</b>
Huckabee	331K	417			<b>417</b>
Christie			605K	322	<b>322</b>
Cruz	119K	244			<b>244</b>
Fiorina			134K	88	<b>88</b>
Clinton	1.0M	2,041			<b>2,041</b>
Sanders	1.2M	2,508			<b>2,508</b>

Figures are from November 27 to December 9, 2015. Numbers include broadcast television.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.

## Obamacare Recedes from Candidate Attention

No single issue dominates the Republican race. Table 9 shows the three issues most often mentioned in advertising by candidates and the super PACs and other groups that support them. While Bush, Kasich and Paul have focused on issues of the budget, taxes and jobs, Cruz, Graham and Rubio have focused on international affairs. Perry, Jindal and Carson also frequently mentioned immigration. Obamacare, by contrast, is much less often mentioned: only in ads favoring Cruz is it among the top three issue mentions.

**Table 9: Top Issue Mentions by Candidate and Supporting Groups**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Top Issue</b>	<b>2nd Issue</b>	<b>3rd Issue</b>
Bush	Taxes	Jobs	Budget
Carson	Budget	Immigration	Defense
Christie	Anti-Obama	Intl. Affairs	Public Safety
Cruz	Intl. Affairs	Anti-Obama	Anti-ACA
Graham	Intl. Affairs	Public Safety	Libya
Huckabee	Faith	Anti-Obama	Intl. Affairs
Jindal	Faith	Immigration	Public Safety & Intl. Affairs
Kasich	Budget	Jobs	Taxes
Paul	Budget	Taxes	Economy
Perry	Immigration	Faith	Jobs
Rubio	Intl. Affairs	Defense	Taxes
Walker	Taxes	Budget	Unions

Data based on analysis of ads aired from January 1 to December 9, 2015.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.



## About This Report

Data reported here do not cover local cable buys, only broadcast television, national network and national cable buys. All cost estimates are precisely that: estimates. Disclosure categorization information on outside groups comes from the Center for Responsive Politics.

The Wesleyan Media Project provides real-time tracking and analysis of all political television advertising in an effort to increase transparency in elections. Housed in Wesleyan's Quantitative Analysis Center – part of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life – the Wesleyan Media Project is the successor to the Wisconsin Advertising Project, which disbanded in 2009. It is directed by Erika Franklin Fowler, assistant professor of government at Wesleyan University, Michael M. Franz, associate professor of government at Bowdoin College and Travis N. Ridout, professor of political science at Washington State University. Laura Baum is the Project Manager.

The Wesleyan Media Project is supported by grants from The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Wesleyan University. Data are provided by Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project using Academiclip, a web-based coding tool. The Wesleyan Media Project is partnering this year with both the Center for Responsive Politics, to provide added information on outside group disclosure, and Ace Metrix, to assess ad effectiveness.

**The Center for Responsive Politics** is the nation's premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. Nonpartisan, independent and nonprofit, the organization aims to create a more educated voter, an involved citizenry and a more transparent and responsive government. CRP's award-winning website, OpenSecrets.org, is the most comprehensive resource available anywhere for federal campaign contribution and lobbying data and analysis.

Periodic releases of data will be posted on the project's website and dispersed via Twitter @wesmediaproject. To be added to our email update list, click [here](#).

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### About Wesleyan University

Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Conn., is known for the excellence of its academic and co-curricular programs. With more than 2,900 undergraduates and 200 graduate students, Wesleyan is dedicated to providing a liberal arts education characterized by boldness, rigor and practical idealism. For more, visit [www.wesleyan.edu](http://www.wesleyan.edu).

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