Student Analysis: Health Care in Advertising

Mentions of pre-existing conditions and Medicare dominate the discussion; Dems go on offense while GOP attack government intervention in health care

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(MIDDLETOWN, CT) November 6, 2018 - From September 4 to October 1, 2018, 37 percent (236,211 airings) of federal and gubernatorial ad airings mentioned health care. Breaking it down by level of office, health care was mentioned in 46.1 percent (104,849 airings) of U.S. House airings, 36.0 percent (75,985 airings) of Senate airings, and 27.7 percent (55,377 airings) of gubernatorial airings.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of Senate health care ads by state. Competitive races in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Nevada, and West Virginia all saw the highest frequencies of health care-related ads.

FIGURE 1. Health Care Airings by State in Senate Races, Sept. 4 - Oct. 1, 2018
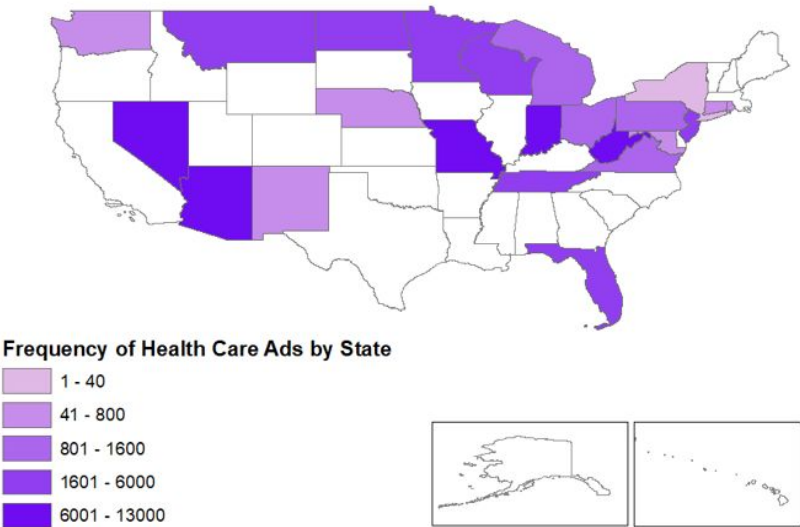
Frequency of Health Care Ads by State
- 1 - 40
- 41 - 800
- 801 - 1600
- 1601 - 6000
- 6001 - 13000

Figures are from Sept 4 through Oct 1, 2018. Numbers include broadcast television.
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.

Indicated in Figure 2, five gubernatorial races had very high frequencies of health care airings. Of the five states with the most health care airings, Florida, Ohio, Oregon and Wisconsin are "toss-up" races according to the Cook Political Report. Illinois, on the other hand, is currently rated by the Cook Political Report as being a likely win for the Democratic candidate.

FIGURE 2. Health Care Airings by State in Gubernatorial Races, Sept. 4 - Oct. 1, 2018
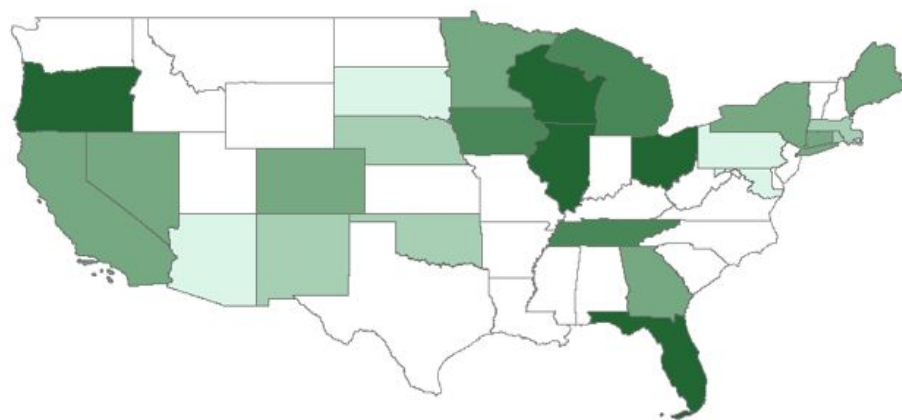
Frequency of Healthcare Ads by State
- 1 - 300
- 301 - 1200
- 1201 - 3000
- 3001 - 4500
- 4501 - 6000
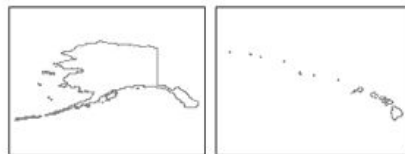
Figures are from Sept 4 through Oct 1,2018. Numbers include broadcast television.
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project.

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Table 1 shows the top five health-care related issues in ads that mention health care.

TABLE 1. Top Five Health Care Issues, Sept. 4 - Oct. 1, 2018

TOP FIVE ISSUES OUT OF ALL HEALTH CARE ADS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Coverage for Pre-existing Conditions	77,105	32.6%
Medicare	46,688	19.8%
Prescription Drug Costs	19,217	8.1%
Government Intervention in Health Care	18,153	7.7%
Funded by Insurance Companies	16,176	6.8%

Numbers include federal and gubernatorial English-language ads aired on broadcast television mentioning health care from September 4 to October 1, 2018.
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

Tables 2 and 3 show top health care-related issues by party affiliation. Though both parties discussed pre-existing conditions and Medicare, pro-Democratic sponsors aired the majority of ads mentioning pre-existing conditions (30.3 percent of these mentions occurred in contrast ads, 58.8 percent occurred in attack ads, and 10.9 percent were promotional). Pro-Republican sponsors also discussed pre-existing conditions, often defending candidates' promises to protect pre-existing conditions.

Republicans and Democrats mentioned Medicare at a similar rate. Many ads from both parties made claims that the policy positions of the opponent would threaten Medicare while the favored candidate would work to protect Medicare. Republicans also made claims that the targeted candidate would end the existing system of Medicare.

Republicans most prominent health care-related issue in federal and gubernatorial ads was government intervention in health care (94.9 percent of these occurred in attack ads).

Ads from pro-Democratic sponsors mostly avoided explicit references to the Republicans' 2017 health care repeal legislation, which includes mentions of Trump Care, the American Health Care Act (AHCA), the Health Care Repeal Bill, or any piece of legislation that attaches Republicans or President Trump's name to the bill. We coded for these references in ads, but they seldom occurred. Democrats instead

appeared to be specifically highlighting provisions of the health care repeal legislation, including loss of coverage of pre-existing conditions and the "age tax".

Even less frequent than mentions of Republican legislative repeal efforts were Democratic mentions of Obamacare or the Affordable Care Act (1.6 percent). Although they are not mentioning the ACA by name, Democrats this election cycle are attacking their opponents for threatening popular provisions of the Affordable Care Act, especially coverage for pre-existing conditions.

TABLE 1. Top Five Issues in Pro-GOP Health Care Ads, Sept. 4 - Oct. 1, 2018

PRO-GOP ISSUES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Government Intervention in Health Care	17,450	28.7%
Medicare	11,991	19.7%
Affordable Care Act/Obamacare	11,892	19.6%
Veterans' Health Care	7,610	12.5%
Coverage for Pre-Existing Conditions	6,262	10.3%

### TABLE 2. Top Five Issues in Pro-Dem Health Care Ads, Sept. 4 - Oct. 1, 2018

PRO-DEM ISSUES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Coverage for Pre-Existing Conditions	70,843	40.8%
Medicare	33,401	19.3%
Prescription Drug Costs	17,904	10.3%
Funded by Insurance Companies	16,176	9.3%
"Age Tax"	16,101	9.3%

Numbers include federal and gubernatorial ads aired on broadcast television mentioning health care from September 4 to October 1, 2018.
Total pro-GOP airings: 60,767; Total pro-Dem airings: 173,516
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

Democrats Go on the Offensive with the Hot Topic of 2018

Democrats are dominating the health care discussion this midterm election cycle. Figure 3 compares the frequency of ad airings mentioning health care versus the ad airings not mentioning health care by party and race. Democrats across all three offices show a fairly even split between health care ads and ads on other topics, which contrasts noticeably with the numbers for Republican ads. Overall, 48 percent of all Democratic ads (173,516 airings) mention health care, compared to only 22.3 percent of Republican ads (60,767). Only 12 percent of Republican gubernatorial advertisements mention health care.

FIGURE 3. Health Care Mentions by Party and Race, Sept. 4 - Oct. 1, 2018
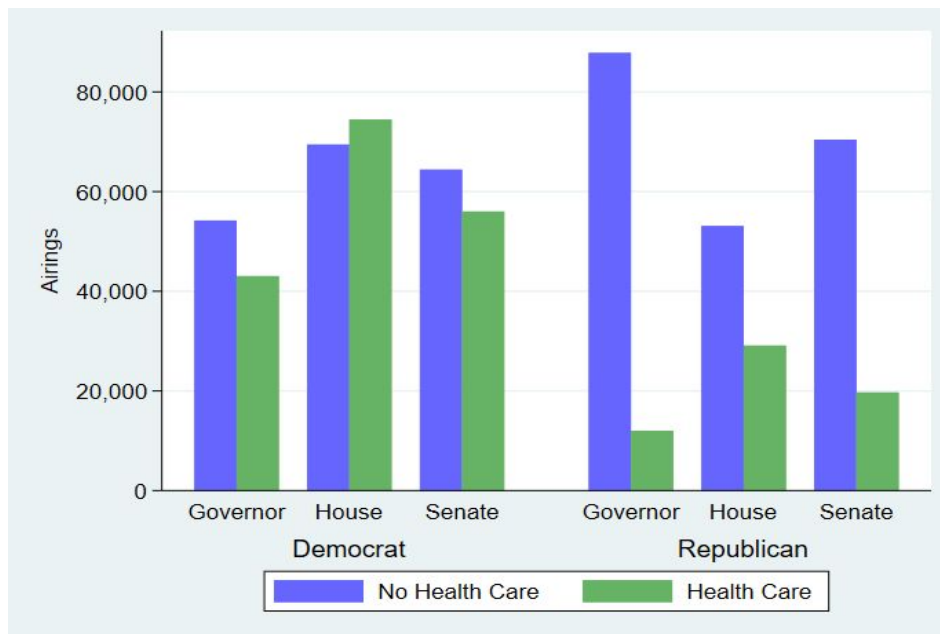
Numbers include English-language ads aired on broadcast television for Governor, U.S. House, and U.S. Senate races from September 4 to October 1, 2018.
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Data reported here from Kantar Media/CMAG do not cover local cable buys, only broadcast television, national network and national cable buys.

Data in this report covers U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and gubernatorial English-language ad airings from September 4 to October 1, 2018. The data was analyzed as a part of a WMP lab course (GOVT378) in the Department of Government at Wesleyan University. Our student team conducted an in-depth content analysis of federal and gubernatorial ads aired during the time period above and identified by Kantar Media/CMAG as mentioning health care. We developed a codebook to assess the health care content and rigorously tested its reliability through an iterative process using Cohen's kappa (and a doubled-coded sample of 112 creatives). Our team successfully coded all 560 unique ad creatives from this period. All content features discussed in this report achieved intercoder reliability of at least 0.70. GIS maps created by Ayanna Joseph '19.

The **Wesleyan Media Project (WMP)** provides real-time tracking and analysis of political 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, associate professor of government at Wesleyan University, Michael M. Franz, professor of government at Bowdoin College and Travis N. Ridout, professor of political science at Washington State University. WMP staff include Laura Baum (Project Manager), Dolly Haddad (Project Coordinator) and Matthew Motta (Research Associate). Elizaveta Kravchenko '19 serves as the course assistant for Gov378, the WMP lab course.

The **Wesleyan Media Project** is supported by Wesleyan University and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Data are provided by Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project. WMP is partnering again this year with the Center for Responsive Politics, to provide added information on outside group disclosure.

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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