

A C R O  
N Y M

**HOW WE CLOSED THE DIGITAL GAP +  
BUILT A NEW WINNING PLAYBOOK**

# TOPLINES FROM ACRONYM + PACRONYM'S PROGRAMS + INVESTMENTS

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## OVERVIEW

After the 2012 and 2016 elections, Democrats and progressives fell behind their Republican counterparts when it came to engaging voters online.

The innovations of the Obama campaigns slowly became outdated, and the digital talent pipeline on the left grew into a culture of consulting firms that had little incentive to innovate.

Since our founding in 2017, ACRONYM has helped our side close that gap and write a new playbook for building power. Over these past three years, we've taken bold risks, learned from our mistakes and failures, pivoted quickly, tested everything, and shared what we learned to help Democrats flip hundreds of seats from red to blue at every level - from local and state races to the White House.

## 2020 BY THE NUMBERS

- **6** STATES TARGETED FOR PERSUASION + TURNOUT
- **5** STATES FLIPPED AT THE PRESIDENTIAL LEVEL
- **\$65M** RAISED FOR 2020 PROGRAM WORK
- **7,400** UNIQUE ADS LAUNCHED
- **100+** IN-FIELD EXPERIMENTS RAN
- **122,000** VOTER REGISTRATION FORM SUBMITS
- **3.2M** VOTERS OF COLOR REACHED
- **15,000** FWIW NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS

# WE SOUNDED THE ALARM + CLOSED THE DIGITAL SPENDING GAP

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In October 2018, we launched the [FWIW Newsletter](#), a weekly email highlighting digital investment and strategy in the 2020 elections. At the time, we feared that the Trump campaign was building a digital machine that was unmatched in American politics, and we hoped that shedding light and sharing data each week on the Trump campaign's spending would motivate progressive organizations and donors to consider accelerating investment on our side. FWIW became the first and largest competitive spending tracker for digital advertising in the country, and now reaches over 15,000 VIP subscribers each week.

Later, in 2019, we continued to sound the alarm on the Trump campaign's investment online, penning an [op-ed in USA Today](#) with our Board

Member David Plouffe, highlighting the need for an online counterweight while the Democratic Presidential primary contest continued at full steam. As 2020 approached and traditional progressive groups, PACs, and other legacy organizations continued to drag their feet in terms of running programs against the President, we launched our own program to begin communicating with voters early and often.

# WE BUILT THE MOST SOPHISTICATED DIGITAL ADVERTISING PROGRAM IN THE 2020 ELECTION

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Launched in August 2019, our ["Four is Enough" campaign](#) reached swing state voters every single day with content highlighting the President's failures. The \$75 million effort by ACRONYM and our affiliated political action committee PACRONYM focused initially on persuading voters with low levels of political knowledge in Arizona, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, and North Carolina.

Later, we [added Georgia](#) and expanded our program to target low-propensity Democratic leaning voters early with persuasion narratives to deepen their motivation and intent to vote. Overall, our program ran over 100 in-field experiments online, reached 4.1 million voters in

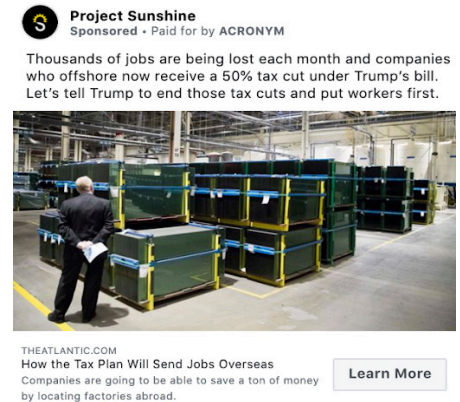
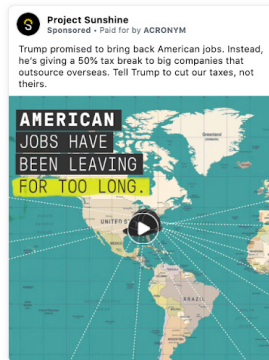
our persuasion audience, and an additional 1.8 million in a turnout audience in the final months of the election.

In addition to our political program, our non-partisan Expand the Electorate campaign filled critical gaps in the online voter registration and mobilization space, reaching millions of voters of color in eight states (Arizona, Georgia, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan) collecting over 120,000 voter registration form submits, sending critical voter chase data to our partners in the states, and helping to turn out millions of new and often neglected voters to vote.

# WE LED WITH OFFENSIVE, TESTED NARRATIVES THAT MOVED THE NEEDLE

Even before the Biden campaign had secured the nomination, ACRONYM + PACRONYM were pushing tested, offensive narratives against the President every day for months.

From educating voters about Trump's corporate tax cuts and threats of repealing healthcare to even highlighting Trump's reckless assassination of a top Iranian general in January, our organization was leading the way in proactively messaging to voters the narratives we wanted to break through online ...and then the pandemic hit.

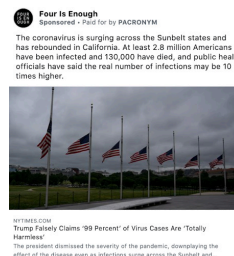


## CORONAVIRUS

At the end of February 2020, we were the [first organization to hold Trump accountable](#) on his failed response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time, prominent Democratic strategists and the leaders of other PACs [publicly](#) and privately criticized our decision to do so - but our judgement was right. During a short time period in March and April that proved

to be a critical persuasion window for public perception of the virus, testing showed our COVID-related advertising significantly moved soft Republican voters' support away from the President. Several weeks after the launch of our coronavirus advertising wave, other groups like Priorities USA and the Biden campaign [followed suit](#).



## MADAM VICE PRESIDENT

This summer, we recognized that Joe Biden’s eventual selection of a running mate could pose a serious opportunity or liability to our prospects in November. We quickly built a [partnership with EMILY’s List WOMEN VOTE!, Black PAC, and Planned Parenthood Votes](#) to coordinate \$10M in digital ads to lift up and positively define Kamala Harris and her candidacy in the face of racist and misogynistic attacks. Together, we ran dozens of ads to favorably introduce Senator

Harris and her record to distinct segments of voters, and our testing later showed that several waves of our advertising increased Harris’ favorability and enthusiasm to vote for the ticket among infrequent, progressive voters.



## BOOSTED NEWS

One key tool our programs used to reach voters online was [paying to place trusted, mainstream news content](#) on Facebook. In 2018, our team ran an [experiment](#) with the Analyst Institute that found “boosting” news articles to voters on Facebook was a powerful tactic for persuasion - and one that could

cause less backlash than traditional political ads. We doubled down on [that tactic](#) this cycle, and found that particularly among voters with low levels of political knowledge, news was more effective (and cheaper) than traditional political ads.

## REDEFINING POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Our team also worked to redefine political advertising this cycle, integrating culturally competent, emotionally (or at least LOL) triggering content to meet voters where they are.

The Newman PSA went viral, earning over 6 million views, and over 3.5 million people watched our “Cheat Sheet for the Voting Booth” web series.

We partnered with legendary Veep showrunner and Seinfeld producer David Mandel to produce a [light-hearted PSA](#) on vote-by-mail, and we launched a [web series](#) with comedian Ilana Glazer to reach younger voters and increase enthusiasm for the Biden-Harris ticket.



# WE DROVE INNOVATION ON THE LEFT + BUILT NEW PROGRESSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

From day one, our mission at ACRONYM has been to build power and digital infrastructure for the progressive movement. In an industry where billions of dollars are spent cycle after cycle on short-term strategies and short-lived political gains, we are constantly identifying ways to build on and share our program learnings, and to invest in nimble and sustainable tools, tactics and media infrastructure that we hope can help deliver long-term power for the progressive movement:

## BRINGING AD-BUYING IN-HOUSE

After a 2016 cycle dominated by consultant-driven programs, we evangelized an in-house approach to media buying.

ACRONYM was the first national political organization to bring our entire digital media and creative team in-house, a model which was later replicated by the DCCC, Priorities USA, and national presidential campaigns like those of Elizabeth Warren, Pete Buttigieg,

Andrew Yang, and to a large extent, Joe Biden.

We have long argued that this makes programs more nimble, more responsive, more cost-effective, more accountable, and ultimately more impactful. It's exciting to see how this has quickly become the new standard in digital politics on the left.

## MEASURING PERSUASION

Barometer, our in-house measurement team, raised the bar for how campaigns and organizations can and should measure the impact of digital advertising.

Our measurement work was profiled this year in the [New York Times](#), [WIRED](#), and [Fast Company](#), and over 100 in-field experiments, primarily on Facebook, yielded invaluable insights that helped optimize our programs.

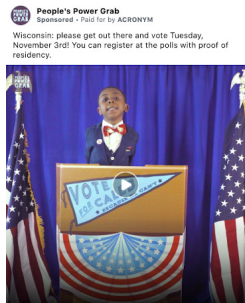
As part of that effort, our team built DOROTHY, [a framework that discovered correlation between Facebook engagement and the persuasiveness of ads](#), and used machine

learning to more efficiently deploy persuasive content online.

We can confidently say we built the most nimble persuasion measurement platform on the left - and in the process made our learnings available to hundreds of progressive organizations.

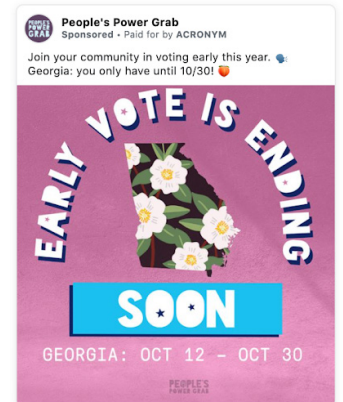
## ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION

When the pandemic caught many traditional voter registration programs who rely on in-person tactics off-guard, our Expand the Electorate program was already registering thousands of voters online. Our voter registration team was not only able to quickly scale this program, but worked with state and national partners to pass along new voter leads brought in by our ads to grassroots organizations on the ground in real time across our target states.



Through [Peoples Power Grab](#) we drove over 120,000 voter registration form submits in key states, primarily of young voters of color, and saw thousands more check

their registration or make a plan to vote. Our proprietary voter registration tool, called ACRONYM Citizen, moved first time voters down the funnel from registration to making a plan, and then our team worked with local organizations on the ground to “chase” those voters through Election Day. Research consistently shows that investing in registration builds a voting bloc for cycles to come - not just for short term gains - and that’s what we call infrastructure.



## GROWING THE TALENT PIPELINE

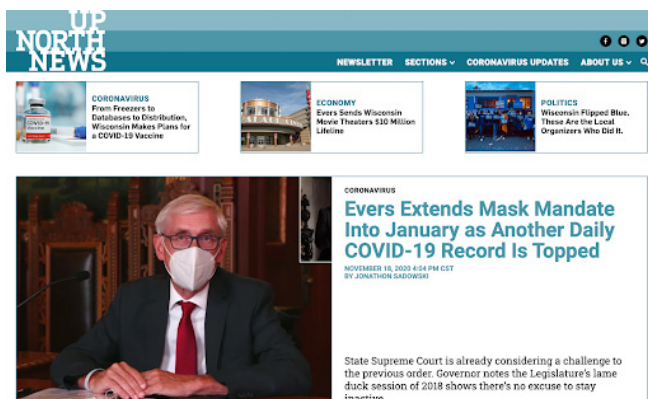
We spent the past three years helping create a new generation of digital-first strategists and organizers that will run progressive campaigns and programs for cycles to come.

Through resources like our [Digital Tools Assessment](#), partnerships on [trainings](#) with groups like Arena, and various [thought leadership](#) products, we invested in helping build a bench of talent and a culture of

creativity, testing and learning on our side that will allow us to stay ahead of the innovation curve.

# COUNTERING DISINFORMATION ONLINE

Moving beyond short term, cyclical investments in one-way political advertising, we set our sights early on countering the right-wing media that dominates our politics and has effectively deteriorated social trust among tens of millions of Americans, posing a growing and grave threat to our democracy. Through our investment in Courier Newsroom, ACRONYM has helped incubate the first progressive and online local news network in the country.



Operating 8 newsrooms staffed by over 60 full-time reporters, editors, and social content producers, Courier and its affiliates counter misinformation in the social media feeds of millions of voters every single day with fact and values-driven news, entertainment and multimedia content.

[For progressives to win and stay ahead](#) in the online information wars, we must counter lies with truth, communicate to Americans about what their government is doing for them beyond election cycles, and invest in long-term solutions [to combat the growing threat of conservative misinformation](#). This might be the most important thing we can collectively invest in if we want to build long term power and progress.

# LOOKING AHEAD

How did a young and insurgent organization do all of this? We took bold risks, scaled what we found to work, failed fast what didn't, learned from our mistakes - and shared everything we learned generously with others. We know we are only as effective as our allies and our partners in the progressive movement - and nothing makes us more proud of what we have accomplished than seeing others take what we learned and take it that next step farther.

Election cycles come and go - but our work doesn't stop on Election Day. As a movement, it is imperative that we double down on the strategies, infrastructure, and the newly elected

Democratic majority the Trump era helped us to build these past four years. Together, we have secured the opportunity to make transformational change at every level of our government, so no, there are no laurels for us to rest on. The work must continue, and continue to evolve to meet the moment, and so our work and team at ACRONYM will do the same. We don't know exactly what the future holds, but we look forward to meeting it with a fierce sense of humility, purpose, creativity, and power, together.

**- The ACRONYM Team.**



