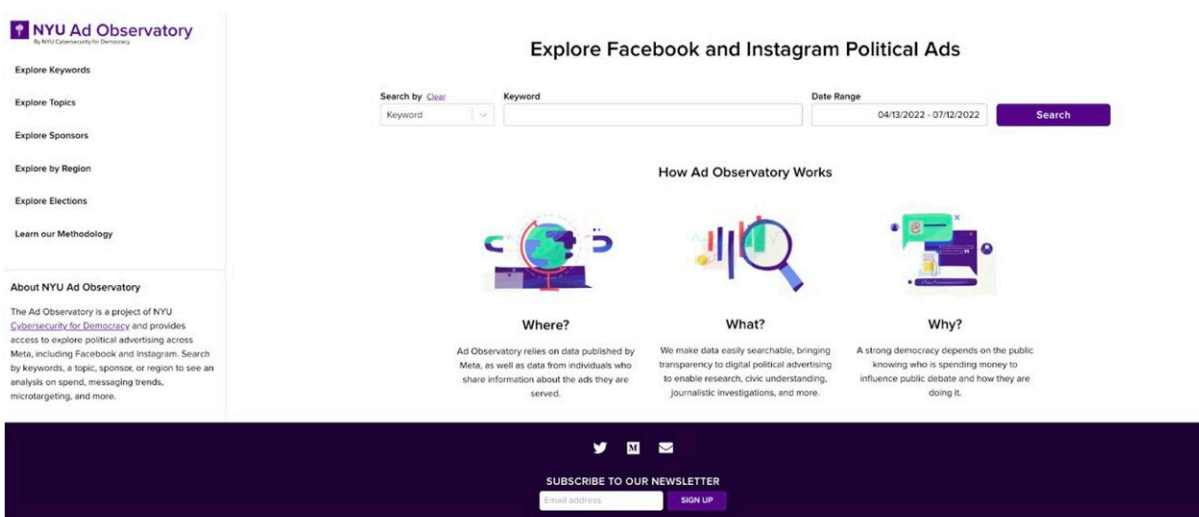


New, enhanced AdObservatory.org provides transparency and insights on digital political spending

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Ad Observatory dashboard: AdObservatory.org

A screenshot of the enhanced Ad Observatory dashboard, where researchers and journalists can search for digital political ad spending. Credit: NYU Cybersecurity for Democracy

Ahead of the U.S. midterm elections, [projected](#) to draw some \$1.2 billion in digital political spending, NYU Cybersecurity for Democracy (C4D) at the NYU Tandon School of Engineering today launched a new, enhanced version of Ad Observatory—AdObservatory.org—available in both English and Spanish, with increased search functionality.

This public, free dashboard provides journalists and researchers with the ability to search digital political ad spending across Meta (formerly Facebook) properties, see visualizations of spending patterns, and search researched topics such as abortion, guns, and immigration. C4D unveiled the new site today in conjunction with the [NABJ/NAHJ annual convention in Las Vegas](#).

This updated version of Ad Observatory builds on the project's success in the 2020 elections, when the site was used by dozens of researchers and journalists to identify [spending](#) by [political candidates](#), demonstrate [shortcomings](#) in Facebook's transparency, and to research investigations about [scams](#) and [political extremism](#). For this new version of Ad Observatory, the C4D team met with journalists and researchers to find out what kinds of questions they want to answer that they can't find with other tools. An interest in Spanish-language ads topped the list, as did the need for data visualizations providing insights on the messaging within the ads, via topics and keyword searches.

"We know that in 2020, Spanish-language political misinformation popped up as a major problem on [digital platforms](#), but that transparency tools were not tuned to be able to capture it," said Laura Edelson, co-director of NYU Cybersecurity for Democracy, and postdoctoral researcher in Computer Science at NYU's Tandon School of Engineering. "With this new version of Ad Observatory, journalists and researchers can track and analyze trends with both English and Spanish-language political ads."

"The lack of transparency on political advertising on Meta and other digital platforms means that the public is vulnerable in ways that we don't even understand sufficiently," said C4D co-director Damon McCoy. "With Ad Observatory we're shining some light in corners so that researchers and [journalists](#) can find these weak spots and suggest ways to make online spaces safer."

In recent elections, political advertisers have increasingly turned to digital platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, to influence voters; in 2020, one out of five campaign dollars [was spent](#) on digital ads. In the absence of [mandated transparency](#), the public remains vulnerable to decisions by private platforms on what information they make public and how they do it.

More information: For more details, please visit:
https://cybersecurityfordemocracy.org/ad_observatory

Provided by NYU Tandon School of Engineering

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