

# [***Brad Parscale helped Trump win in 2016 using Facebook ads. Now he’s back, and an AI evangelist***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYN-H5D1-DYMD-6075-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Donald Trump’s former campaign manager looked squarely into the camera and promised his viewers they were about to witness a bold new era in ***politics***.

“You’re going to see some of the most amazing new technology in artificial intelligence that’s going to replace polling in the future across the country,” said Brad Parscale in a dimly lit promotional video accentuated by hypnotic beats.

Parscale, the digital campaign operative who helped engineer Trump’s 2016 presidential victory, vows that [*his new, AI-powered platform*](https://apnews.com/article/ai-trump-campaign-2024-election-brad-parscale-8c25c16a50a15fd1959ffe95b73f1d66) will dramatically overhaul not just polling but also campaigning. His AI-powered tools, he has boasted, will outperform big tech companies and usher in a wave of conservative victories worldwide.

It’s not the first time Parscale has proclaimed that new technologies will boost right-wing campaigns. He was the digital guru who teamed up with scandal-plagued [*Cambridge Analytica*](https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-political-action-committees-elections-campaigns-42a5705b23bbbc780083f57b071bbcb0) and helped propel Trump to the White House eight years ago. In 2020, [*he had a public blowup*](https://apnews.com/trump-replaces-campaign-manager-amid-sinking-poll-numbers-b6c7104b6b6de2d512bec8afd9f4f6bb) then a private falling out with his old boss after the Capitol riot. Now he’s back, playing an under-the-radar role to help Trump, the presumptive GOP nominee, in his race against Democratic President Joe Biden.

Parscale says his company, [*Campaign Nucleus*](https://campaignnucleus.com/) can use AI to help generate customized emails, parse oceans of data to gauge voter sentiment and find persuadable voters, then amplify the social media posts of “anti-woke” influencers, according to an Associated Press review of Parscale’s public statements, his company websites, slide decks, marketing materials and other documents not previously made public.

Since last year, Campaign Nucleus and other Parscale-linked companies have been paid more than $2.2 million by the Trump campaign, the [*Republican National Committee*](https://gop.com/) and their related political action and fundraising committees, campaign finance records show.

While his firms have received only a small piece of Trump’s total digital spending, Parscale remains close to top Republicans, as well as senior officials at the campaign and at the RNC, according to a GOP operative familiar with Parscale’s role who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal dynamics.

Lara Trump, the RNC’s new co-chair and Trump’s daughter-in-law, once worked as a consultant to a company co-owned by Parscale. And U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson's campaign recently hired Campaign Nucleus, campaign finance records show.

Parscale, however, is not involved in day-to-day Trump campaign operations, the GOP operative said.

Parscale’s ability to use AI to micro target supporters and tap them for campaign cash could prove critical for Trump’s campaign and other fundraising organizations. They have seen a falloff in contributions from smaller donors and a surge in spending — at least $77 million so far — on attorneys defending [*the former president in a slew of criminal and civil cases*](https://apnews.com/projects/trump-investigations-civil-criminal-tracker/).

Beyond Trump, Parscale has said he’s harnessed AI to supercharge conservative candidates and causes across the globe, including in Israel, the Balkans and Brazil.

**NEW AI-POWERED CAMPAIGN TOOLS**

Parscale is hardly alone [*in using machine learning*](https://apnews.com/article/artificial-intelligence-guidelines-ap-news-532b417395df6a9e2aed57fd63ad416a) to try to give candidates an edge by predicting, pinpointing and motivating likely supporters to vote and donate money. Politicians at all levels are experimenting with chatbots and other generative AI tools to write speeches, ad copy and fundraising appeals.

Some Democrats have voiced concern over being outmaneuvered by Republicans on AI, much like they were on social media advertising eight years ago. So far, the Biden campaign and other Democrats said they are [*using AI to help them find and motivate voters*](https://apnews.com/article/ai-biden-campaign-democrats-2024-election-520f22de269ba1eff24d1544ca38d569) and to better identify and defeat disinformation.

Election experts say they are concerned about AI’s potential to upend elections around the world through convincing deepfakes and other content that could mislead voters. Free and low-cost generative AI services have grown in sophistication, and officials worry they can be used to smear a candidate or steer voters to avoid the polls, eroding the public’s trust in what they see and hear.

Parscale has the financial backing to experiment to see what works in ways that other AI evangelists may not. That is thanks, in part, to his association with a Texas billionaire who is among the state’s most influential political donors.

Parscale did not respond to multiple messages from AP seeking comment. The RNC declined comment as well.

**AI IS ‘SO SCARY’**

Trump has called artificial intelligence “ [*so scary*](https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/donald-trump-calls-cbdcs-artificial-073824995.html#:~:text=Former%20president%20and%20Republican%20front,change%20the%20tide%20of%20war.) " and "dangerous." His campaign, which has shied away from highlighting Parscale's role, said in an emailed statement that it did not “engage or utilize” tools supplied by any AI company.

“The campaign uses a set of proprietary algorithmic tools, like many other campaigns across the country, to help deliver emails more efficiently and prevent sign-up lists from being populated by false information,” said campaign spokesman Steven Cheung.

While political consultants often hype their tactics to land new contracts, they can also be intensely secretive about the details of that work to avoid assisting rivals. That makes it difficult to precisely track how Parscale is deploying AI for the Trump campaign, or more broadly.

Parscale has said Campaign Nucleus can send voters customized emails and use data analytics to predict voters’ feelings. The platform can also amplify “anti-woke” influencers who have large followings on social media, according to his company’s documents and videos.

Parscale said his company also can use artificial intelligence to create “stunning web pages in seconds” that produce content that looks like a media outlet, according to a presentation he gave last month at a political conference, where he was not advertised in advance as a speaker.

“Empower your team to create their own news,” said another slide, according to the presentation viewed by AP.

Soon, Parscale says, his company will deploy an app that harnesses AI to assist campaigns in collecting absentee ballots in the same way DoorDash or Grubhub drivers pick up dinners from restaurants and deliver them to customers.

Chris Wilson, a Republican strategist who recently worked for a SuperPAC backing Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis’ failed presidential bid, said he has seen Campaign Nucleus’ platform and was “envious” of its capabilities and simplicity.

“Somebody could download Nucleus, start working with it and really begin to use it,” said Wilson.

Other political consultants, however, called Parscale’s AI-infused sales pitch largely a rehash of what campaigns already have mastered through data scraping, ad testing and modeling to predict voter behavior.

“Some of this stuff is just simply not new, it’s been around for a long time. The only thing new is that we’re just calling it AI,” said Amanda Elliott, a GOP digital strategist.

**FROM UNKNOWN TO TRUMP CONFIDANT**

Parscale, a relatively unknown web designer in San Antonio, got his start working for Trump when he was hired to build a web presence for the business mogul’s family business.

That led to a job on the future president’s 2016 campaign. He was one of its first hires and spearheaded an ambitious and unorthodox digital initiative that relied on an extensive database of social media accounts and content to target voters with Facebook ads.

“I pretty much used Facebook to get Trump elected in 2016,” Parscale said in a 2022 podcast interview.

To better target Facebook users, in particular, the campaign teamed up with Cambridge Analytica, a British datamining firm bankrolled by Robert Mercer, a wealthy and influential GOP donor. After the election, Cambridge Analytica dissolved, facing investigations over its role in a breach of 87 million Facebook accounts.

Following Trump’s surprise win, Parscale’s influence grew. He was promoted to manage Trump's reelection bid and enjoyed celebrity status. A towering figure at 6 feet, 8 inches with a Viking-style beard, Parscale was frequently spotted at campaign rallies taking selfies with Trump supporters and signing autographs.

Parscale was replaced as campaign manager not long after a rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, drew an unexpectedly small crowd, enraging Trump.

His personal life unraveled, culminating in a standoff with police at his Florida home after his wife reported he had multiple firearms and was threatening to hurt himself. One of the responding officers reported he saw bruising on the arms of Parscale’s wife. Parscale complied with a court order to turn in his firearms and was not charged in connection with the incident.

Parscale briefly decided to quit ***politics*** and privately expressed regret for associating with Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot. In a text to a former campaign colleague, he wrote he felt “guilty for helping him win” in 2016, according to the House committee that investigated the Capitol attack.

His disgust didn’t last long. Campaign Nucleus set up Trump’s [*website*](https://www.45office.com/about) after Silicon Valley tech companies throttled his access to their platforms.

By the summer of 2022, Parscale had resumed complimenting his old boss on a podcast popular among GOP politicos.

“With President Trump, he really was the guy driving the message. He was the chief strategist of his own political uprising and management,” Parscale said. “I think what the family recognized was: I had done everything that really the campaign needs to do.”

**PARSCALE’S PLATFORM**

Trump’s 2024 campaign website now links directly to Parscale’s company and displays that it’s “Powered by Nucleus,” as Parscale often refers to his new firm. The campaign and its related political action and campaign committees have paid Campaign Nucleus more than $800,000 since early 2023, according to Federal Election Commission filings.

Two other companies — Dyspatchit Email and Text Services and BCVM Services — are listed on campaign finance records as being located at the same Florida address used by Campaign Nucleus. The firms, which are registered in Delaware and whose ownership is unclear, have received $1.4 million from the Trump campaign and related entities, FEC records show.

When an AP reporter last month visited Campaign Nucleus’ small, unmarked office in a tony section of Fort Lauderdale, an employee said she did not know anything about Dyspatchit or BCVM.

“We don’t talk to reporters,” the employee said.

The three companies have been paid to host websites, send emails, provide fundraising software and provide digital consulting, FEC records show.

Parscale markets Campaign Nucleus as a one-stop shop for conservative candidates who want to automate tasks usually done by campaign workers or volunteers.

The company says it has helped its clients raise $119 million and has sent nearly 14 billion emails on their behalf, according to a promotional video.

At his recent appearance at the political conference, Parscale presented a slide that said Campaign Nucleus had raised three times as much as tech giant Salesforce in head-to-head tests for email fundraising.

Campaign Nucleus specializes in mining information from a politician’s supporters, according to a recent presentation slide.

For example, when someone signs up to attend an event, Nucleus uses AI to analyze reams of personal data to assign that person a numerical score. Attendees who have been to past events receive a high score, for example, ranking them as most likely to show up, according to a company video posted online.

Campaign Nucleus also can track where people who sign up live and can send them customized emails asking for donations or solicit their help on the campaign, the video shows.

Parscale said two years ago in a podcast that he had received more than 10,000 requests about Campaign Nucleus from nearly every country with a conservative party. More recently, he said his team has been active in multiple countries, including in India and Israel, where he’s been “helping over there a lot with the war with Hamas.”

The company says it has offices in Texas, Florida and North Carolina and has been on a recruiting tear. Recent job listings have included U.S. and Latin America-based intelligence analysts to use AI for framing messages and generating content, as well as a marketer to “coordinate influencer campaigns.”

Campaign Nucleus has also entered into partnerships with other companies with an AI focus. In 2022, the firm announced it was teaming up with Phunware, a Texas-based company that built a cellphone app for Trump’s 2020 bid that allowed staff to monitor the movements of his millions of supporters and mobilize their social networks.

Since then, Phunware obtained a patent for what a company official described as “experiential AI” that can locate people’s cellphones geographically, predict their travel patterns and influence their consumer behavior.

Phunware did not answer specific questions about the partnership with Nucleus, saying the company's client engagements were confidential.

“However, it is well-known that we developed the 2020 Trump campaign app in collaboration with Campaign Nucleus. We have had discussions with Trump campaign leadership about potentially developing their app for the 2024 election," said spokeswoman Christina Lockwood.

**PARSCALE’S VISION**

Last year, Parscale bought property in Midland, Texas, in the heart of the nation’s highest-producing oil and gas fields. It is also the hometown of Tim Dunn, a billionaire born-again evangelical who is among the state’s most influential political donors.

Over the years, the organizations and campaigns Dunn has funded have pushed Texas ***politics*** further to the right and driven successful challenges to unseat incumbent Republican officials deemed too centrist.

In April 2023, Dunn invested $5 million in a company called AiAdvertising that once bought one of Parscale’s firms under a previous corporate name. The San Antonio-based ad firm also announced that Parscale was joining as a strategic adviser, to be paid $120,000 in stock and a monthly salary of $10,000.

“Boom!” Parscale tweeted. “(AiAdvertising) finally automated the full stack of technologies used in the 2016 election that changed the world.”

In June, AiAdvertising added two key national figures to its board: Texas investor Thomas Hicks Jr. – former co-chair of the RNC and longtime hunting buddy of Donald Trump Jr. -- and former GOP congressman Jim Renacci. In December, Dunn also gave $5 million to MAGA Inc., a pro-Trump super PAC and Campaign Nucleus client. And in January, SEC filings show Dunn provided AiAdvertising an additional $2.5 million via his investment company. A company press release said the cash infusion would help it “generate more engaging, higher-impact campaigns.”

Dunn declined to comment, although in an October episode of his podcast he elaborated on how his political work is driven by his faith.

“Jesus won’t be on the ballot, OK? Now, eventually, he’s going to take over the government and we can look forward to that,” Dunn told listeners. “In the meanwhile, we’re going to have to settle.”

In business filings, [*AiAdvertising*](https://www.aiadvertising.com/) said it has developed AI-created “personas” to determine what messages will resonate emotionally with its customers’ target audience. Parscale said last year in a promotional video that Campaign Nucleus was using AI models in a similar way.

“We actually understand what the American people want to hear,” Parscale said.

AiAdvertising did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Parscale occasionally offers glimpses of the AI future he envisions. Casting himself as an outsider to the Republican establishment, he has said he sees AI as a way to undercut elite Washington consultants, whom he described as political parasites.

In January, Parscale told a crowd assembled at a grassroots Christian event at a church in Pasadena, California, that their movement needed “to have our own AI, from creative large language models and creative imagery, we need to reach our own audiences with our own distribution, our own email systems, our own texting systems, our own ability to place TV ads, and lastly we need to have our own influencers.”

To make his point plain, he turned to a metaphor that relied on a decidedly 19th-century technology.

“We must not rely on any of their rails,” he said, referring to mainstream media and companies. “This is building our own train tracks.”

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Burke reported from San Francisco. AP National Political Writer Steve Peoples and Courtney Subramanian in Washington and Associated Press researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this report.

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This story is part of an Associated Press series, “The AI Campaign,” that explores the influence of artificial intelligence in the 2024 election cycle.

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