



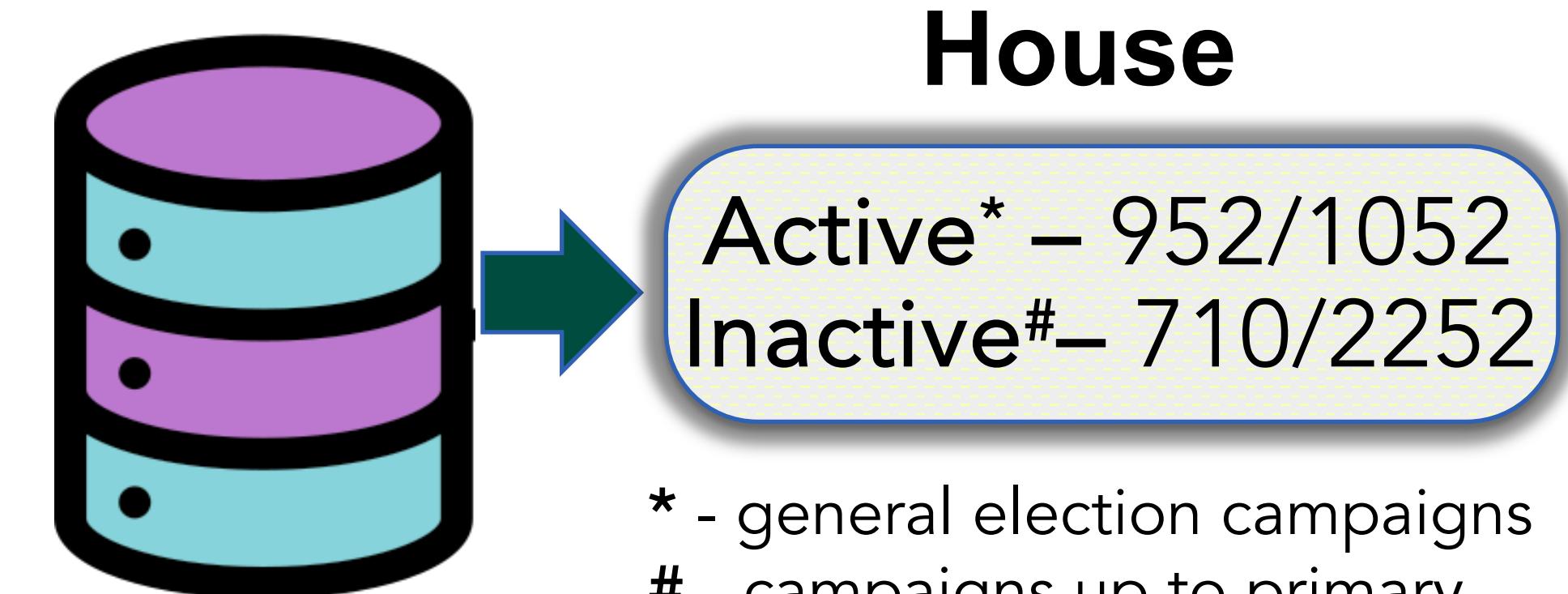
# Understanding the Privacy Practices of Political Campaigns: A Perspective from the 2020 US Election Websites

## Motivation

- Election campaigns collect large volumes of data from various sources for voter profiling.
- They also do so to comply with donor disclosure regulation enforced by the Federal Election Commission (FEC).
- However, as non-profits, they are not regulated under any data privacy laws (e.g. CCPA).

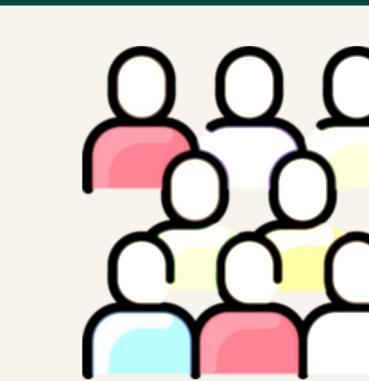


## Dataset



## Methodology

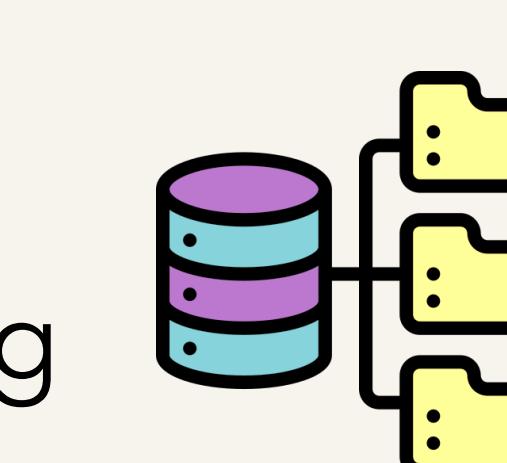
✓ Collect candidates from FEC database.



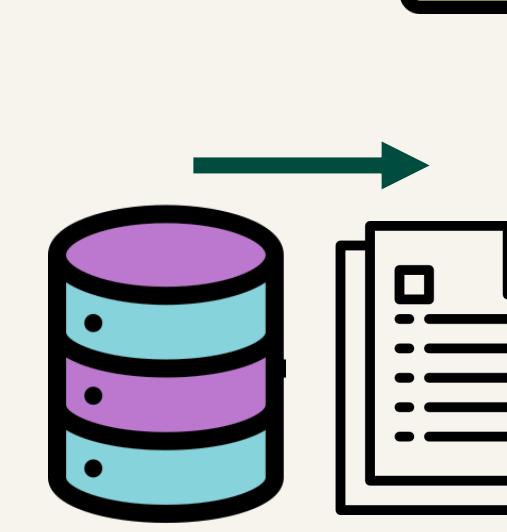
✓ Find candidate's Ballotpedia profile using search attributes like name and state.



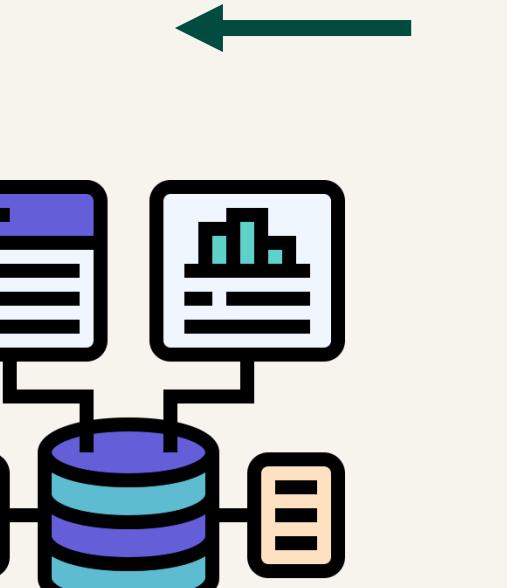
✓ Extract candidate's web URL and save their website to our local database using a website crawler.



✓ Extract data types collected by each website, their privacy policies, URLs for further analysis.



✓ Analyze the security and privacy practices and aggregate results.



Fully automated

Semi-automated

## Security Findings

687/1504 (45.7%)

have trackers but no privacy policy.

168 (8.2%) did not use HTTPS, 86 of which collect PII.

38 websites were hosted outside the U.S.

Authors: Kaushal Kafle<sup>1</sup>@, Prianka Mandal<sup>1</sup>, Kapil Singh<sup>2</sup>, Benjamin Andow<sup>3</sup>, Adwait Nadkarni<sup>1</sup>

Affiliation: 1 – William & Mary, 2 – IBM Research, 3 – Google

Contact: @ – kkafle@wm.edu



## Observations

- Current lawmakers (144 election winners, 9 incumbents) did not have a website privacy policy.
- 56/153 (36.6%) of the lawmakers serve in privacy-related committees, which help formulate privacy laws.

## Campaign Responses

- We received 20 wide-ranging responses during our finding disclosure.
- Reasons for not having a privacy policy included lack of expertise, campaign no longer being active (although the website still was), and a lack of federal law asking for one, with one candidate even asking us to convince their party for change.
- Campaigns also asked us for privacy policy templates in their responses, revealing a lack of resources and technical know-how.

## Lessons

- Proper disclosure of data collection/sharing required to inform users how their data is used.
- Voter data is vulnerable to current and future exploits, as no campaign discusses what happens to collected data once campaign concludes.
- Campaigns must allocate resources to enhance their privacy practices.