Website Biography Text and Electoral Performance

This report summarizes an exploratory study of campaign website biography pages and their relationship to electoral performance. Using the CampaignView dataset of 5,114 candidate-cycle biography narratives, we evaluated whether measurable attributes of biography text are associated with four outcomes: primary win, general win, primary vote share, and general vote share.

The core finding is that biography pages appear to function primarily as credibility and competence signals, not as persuasion essays. As a result, the most informative relationships are nonlinear. Instead of "more is better" or "simpler is better," the data show consistent penalties at the extremes: biographies that are clearly too short, too long, or too easy to read tend to be associated with weaker electoral performance.

Because the analysis is correlational, results should be interpreted as associations, not causal effects. Still, the patterns are strong enough to support a set of practical, evidence-based recommendations for campaign digital strategy.

Our Approach

To understand whether a campaign's biography page is just "nice to have" or whether it signals something real, we used the CampaignView collection of candidate biography pages from campaign websites. Think of it as a snapshot of the "About the Candidate" text voters and donors actually encounter online.

This data includes a little over five thousand biographies, representing candidates across multiple election cycles. Some candidates show up more than once, since many run again in later years. For every biography, the text is paired with what happened in the election: whether the candidate won the primary, whether they made it to the general, and how they performed at the ballot box when results were available.

What We Measured

We focused on features of biography writing that are easy to observe and compare across thousands of campaigns, and that map to real choices campaigns make when they build a website.

Some of the features were straightforward:

- **How long the biography is:** a thin paragraph versus a full narrative.
- **How it reads:** not "good or bad," but whether the writing is more like a newspaper profile or more like simple slogans

Other features reflect style and presentation:

- **How the candidate speaks on the page:** whether it's written as "I" (first-person), "we," or in the third person ("She served...", "He grew up...").
- **The emotional tone:** whether the language leans positive, negative, or neutral overall.

And a few capture whether the biography sounds generic or specific:

- **How "template-like" the writing is:** does it sound like dozens of other bios, or does it contain distinctive language and concrete detail that makes it feel like it belongs to one specific person.

Controlling For Obvious Advantages

It would be misleading to compare biography pages without accounting for basic realities of politics. Incumbents usually win more often than challengers. Well-known candidates usually perform better than first-time candidates. Some districts are naturally easier for one party than the other.

So when we looked for relationships between biography writing and outcomes, we did it in two ways:

1. **Simple comparisons** (what patterns show up in the raw data), and
2. **Adjusted comparisons** that account for things like incumbency, candidate strength, and district partisanship.

Our Analysis

We started with the basics: we compared biographies to see whether clear patterns showed up in the raw data. For example, do candidates with longer bios tend to win more often? Do easier-to-read bios perform better? Do certain writing styles show up more frequently among winners than losers?

From there, we moved to a stricter test. Rather than relying only on simple comparisons, we used statistical models that allow us to ask a more realistic question: does the relationship still hold once you account for major factors that drive election outcomes, like incumbency, party, and the political baseline of a district?

We also paid close attention to the idea that biography effects might not be "more is better" or "simpler is better." In campaigns, many signals work like thresholds: a page can be too thin to be credible, or so long that it feels unedited. The same is true for readability: writing can be so simplified that it starts to read like generic boilerplate rather than substance.

So instead of assuming the relationship between biography writing and performance is a straight line, we specifically tested whether the data showed sweet spots and danger zones. Once those patterns became clear, we translated them into practical ranges that campaigns can use as guidance when writing and editing biography pages.
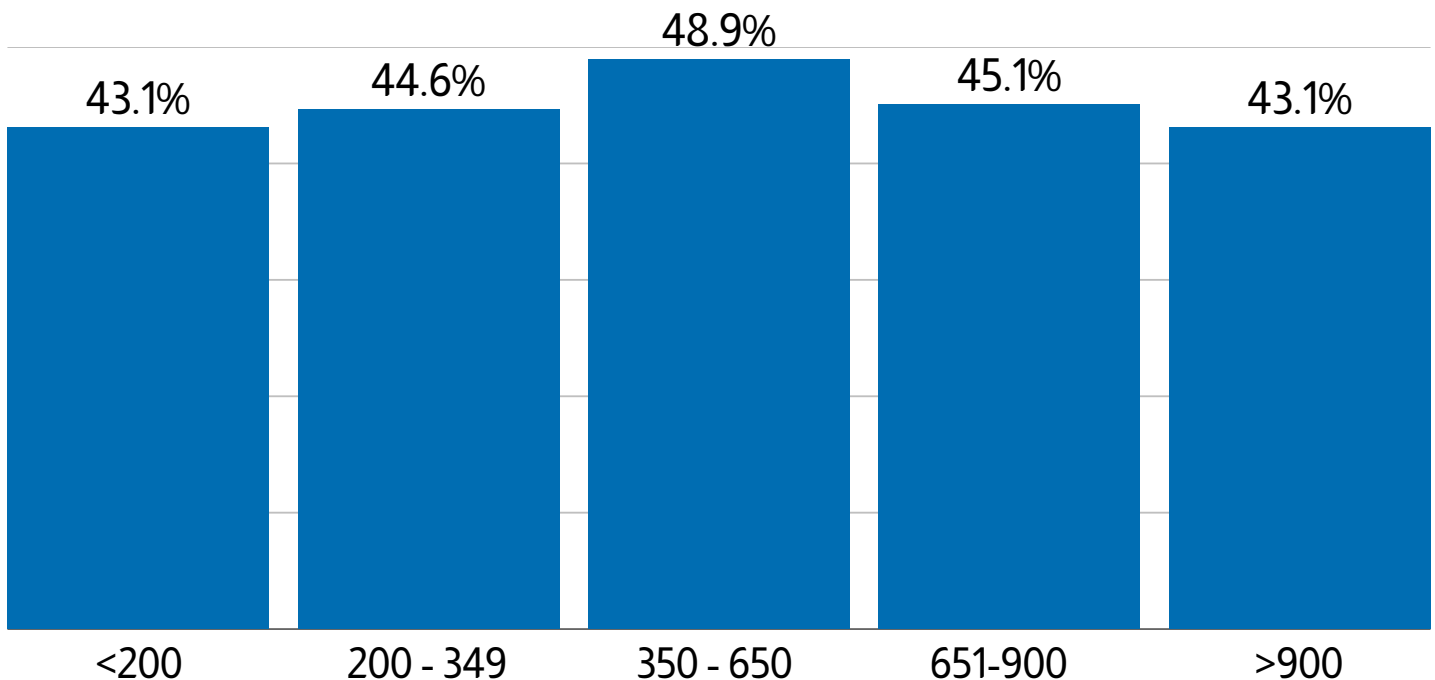
Results

Biography length shows a clear "sweet spot"

One of the most consistent patterns in the data is that biography pages do not work on a simple "more is better" scale. Instead, they behave more like a credibility threshold. Candidates with biographies that are clearly underbuilt tend to perform worse, and candidates with biographies that are sprawling and unedited also tend to perform worse. The strongest results sit in the middle.

In practice, the highest-performing biographies cluster in the range of roughly **350 to 650 words**, with a practical target closer to **400 to 600 words**. When biographies fall below about **200 words**, outcomes are consistently weaker. The same is true, particularly in primaries, when biographies exceed roughly **900 words**.

Biography Length And Electoral Performance

Primary Election Margin

<200	200 - 349	350 - 650	651-900	>900
43.1%	44.6%	48.9%	45.1%	43.1%

What makes this finding important is that it persists even after accounting for factors that strongly shape electoral outcomes, such as incumbency, candidate quality, district political baseline, party, and election year. That does not prove the biography causes performance, but it does suggest that biography length is capturing something real about campaign readiness and message discipline.
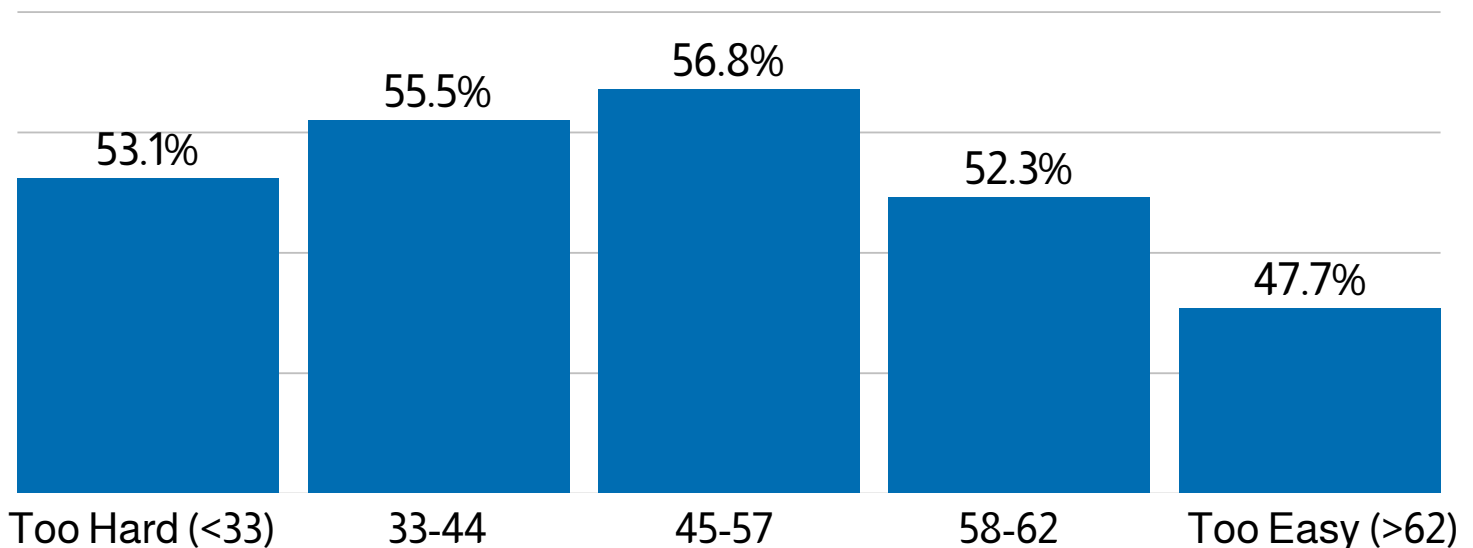
A reasonable interpretation is that extremely short biographies look unfinished or under-resourced, and extremely long biographies look unedited. Both impressions are costly in a medium where attention is limited and credibility cues matter.

Readability also has a middle range, and "too easy" is a warning sign

Readability shows a similar nonlinear pattern. A common assumption in politics is that simpler is always better. The data suggest that is incomplete. The best-performing biographies tend to read like professional plainspoken writing, not like slogans.

When readability becomes extremely "easy" as measured by Flesch Reading Ease, general election outcomes in particular are weaker. One plausible explanation is that very easy-to-read biographies often reflect highly generic phrasing, short repetitive sentences, and boilerplate language that may feel more like marketing copy than a serious biographical narrative. In the context of a general election, where broader audiences may be evaluating seriousness and credibility, that distinction appears to matter.

General Election Performance By Biography Readability

Too Hard (<33)	33-44	45-57	58-62	Too Easy (>62)
53.1%	55.5%	56.8%	52.3%	47.7%

The practical takeaway is not that campaigns should write in a complicated style. It is that campaigns should aim for writing that feels substantively informative and professionally composed, rather than overly simplified or template-driven.

Point of view appears to reflect candidate type, but first-person singular is a caution flag

Biographies vary in how they present the candidate's voice. Some are written in third person, as a traditional biography. Others use "we" language, and others use "I" language. In the raw data, third-person biographies look substantially stronger. However, that relationship is closely tied to the fact that incumbents and higher-quality candidates are more likely to have polished third-person bios.

After accounting for incumbency, candidate quality, and other structural factors, point of view is not a strong standalone predictor of winning. That said, one pattern remains: **biographies written heavily in first-person singular voice are associated with modest but consistent vote share penalties.**

This does not mean that authenticity is harmful. It suggests that campaigns should be careful about biographies that read like personal essays or repetitive resume statements framed as "I did this, I did that." In this dataset, the strongest-performing biographies tend to sound like a professional narrative about the candidate, even when they include personal elements.

Sentiment explains little

We also tested whether "positive" versus "negative" tone is associated with performance. In practice, most campaign biographies are already written in a positive register, which leaves little meaningful variation. As a result, sentiment is not a useful lever for campaigns to optimize.

This is an important finding for practitioners because it redirects attention away from trying to engineer emotional tone through generic sentiment metrics and toward the elements that appear to matter more: completeness, clarity, discipline, and specificity.

Distinctiveness offers modest upside, within disciplined constraints

Beyond length and readability, one of the more interesting results is that biographies that sound less templated tend to perform modestly better, especially when distinctiveness is measured relative to the candidate's party and year. In practical terms, this means that biographies that avoid generic boilerplate and include concrete, specific, verifiable detail show a small but meaningful association with stronger outcomes.

The key constraint is that distinctiveness is beneficial within the boundaries of discipline. A biography does not become stronger by becoming longer. The gains appear when campaigns remain in the length and readability sweet spots but write with specificity. In other words, campaigns are not rewarded for adding volume. They are rewarded for sounding like a real person with a real story in a real community.

Lexical diversity is not a stable target

Measures of "lexical diversity" can sound appealing as a proxy for quality writing, but in practice they are strongly tied to document length and formatting. In this dataset, lexical diversity does not emerge as a reliable, interpretable lever for campaign recommendations. It may still be useful internally as a diagnostic, but it does not translate cleanly into practitioner guidance in the way length, readability bands, and template avoidance do.

What This Means For Campaigns

The strongest-performing biographies are neither minimal placeholders nor unedited resumes. They are complete, edited narratives that communicate credibility quickly. Campaigns should treat the biography as an asset that reduces friction for high-value audiences. That includes donors deciding whether to give, endorsers deciding whether to engage, journalists doing basic vetting, and voters trying to answer the first question any campaign must address: "Who is this person, and why should I take them seriously?"

The most defensible recommendations from the analysis are therefore structural rather than ideological. Campaigns can improve by targeting a biography length that communicates seriousness without losing discipline, and by writing in a style that is accessible without collapsing into generic boilerplate. The data also suggest that campaigns benefit from avoiding heavy first-person singular framing and from incorporating specific local and

personal details that distinguish the candidate without expanding the biography into a long-form autobiography.

Limitations and appropriate interpretation

This analysis identifies consistent associations, not causal effects. Strong campaigns are more likely to have strong websites, and strong websites are more likely to have strong biographies. While we account for several major structural factors, biography quality may still be downstream of campaign capacity.

Readability metrics can be distorted by formatting, especially where web pages contain bullet lists or irregular punctuation. That does not invalidate the direction of the findings, but it does caution against treating any single readability score as definitive.

Finally, candidates can appear in multiple cycles, which means the dataset is not a set of completely independent observations. This matters most for statistical inference. It matters less for the practical conclusion that biographies show consistent penalty zones at the extremes.

Conclusion

The central lesson is that biography pages operate as credibility infrastructure. The strongest signals are not subtle rhetorical flourishes. They are visible indicators of completeness and discipline.

Candidates whose biographies land in a middle range of length and readability, and who avoid generic boilerplate while maintaining a professional narrative voice, tend to show stronger performance across multiple electoral measures. Candidates whose biographies look unfinished, overly simplistic, or unedited tend to underperform.

For campaigns seeking evidence-backed digital recommendations, the biography page is therefore a straightforward place to improve. It is low cost, high visibility, and closely aligned with the reputational judgments that shape donor behavior, press coverage, and voter impressions.