

# MIDTERM ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL ADVERTISING



Tuesday, November 8, 2022



# LEARNING GOALS

1

To understand the purpose of political advertising in a democracy.

2

To examine the unique ways in which political advertising in the U.S. is **funded**.

3

To understand how political advertising is **regulated** (and how that differs from commercial advertising).

4

To analyze contemporary political advertising and identify the source.

5

To be familiar with fact-checking and ad transparency websites.

6

To understand (and practice) the process of political ad creation.



# The Election

- State and local elections happen **every** year.
- Congressional elections happen every **2** years.



## THIS YEAR:

- Congressional elections determine who represents **your state** in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.
- They also decide which political party will hold a majority in each chamber of Congress for the next 2 years.

# The Election

- Find out **where you can vote**:  
<https://ova.elections.il.gov/PollingPlaceLookup.aspx>
- Find out **who is running for office** in your area:  
<https://www.elections.il.gov/ElectionOperations/DistrictLocator/DistrictOfficialSearchByAddress.aspx?TR=nmMgh2A2WnA%3d&T=637982411339233616>

Source: <https://www.usa.gov/midterm-state-and-local-elections>



ACTIVITY



**“Whenever the people are well  
informed they can be trusted with their  
own government.”**

**THOMAS JEFFERSON (1789)**

# Where do you get *your* political information?

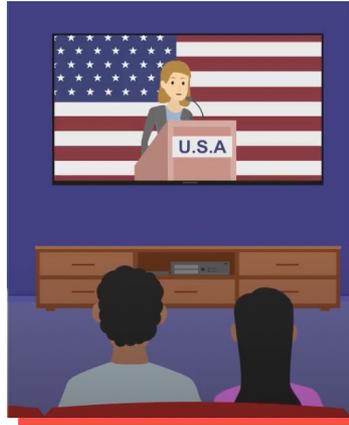


SHARE

# How do we learn about political candidates?



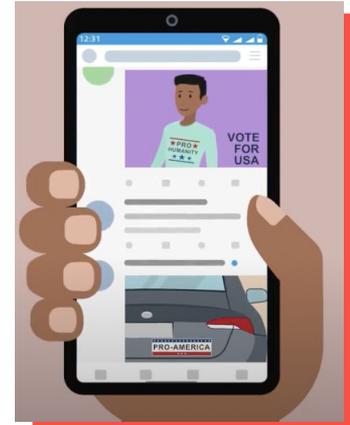
**Advertising**



**News and  
Debates**



**Other people**



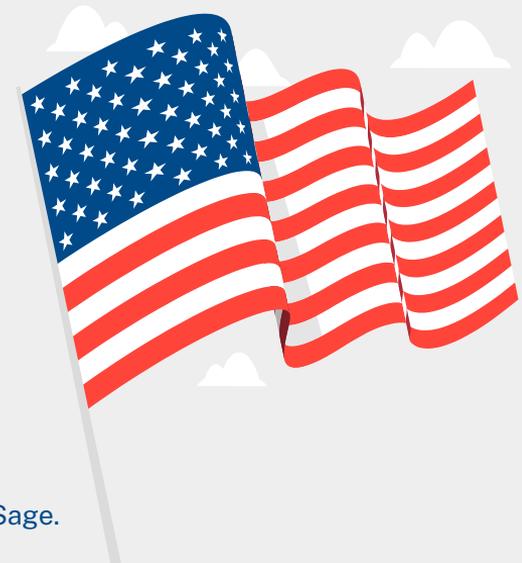
**Social Media**



# Political Advertising

Different from other political messages:

1. “control of the message by source”
2. use of mass communication channels for distribution” (PAID).



Source: Kaid, Lynda Lee. (1999). “Political Advertising: A Summary of Research Findings.” In *The Handbook of Political Marketing*, edited by Bruce I. Newman, 423–438. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

# What is the purpose of political advertising?

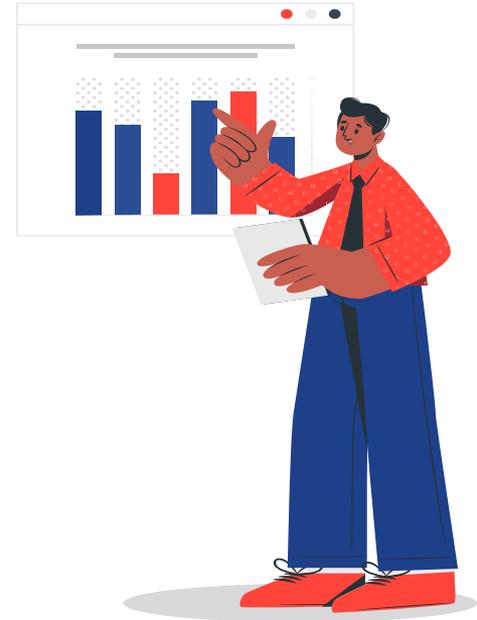
-  Rally votes.
-  Generate enthusiasm for candidate or issue.
-  (Re)define candidate image.
-  Provide information.



# What information can we learn from political advertising?



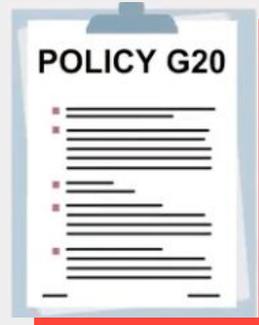
SHARE



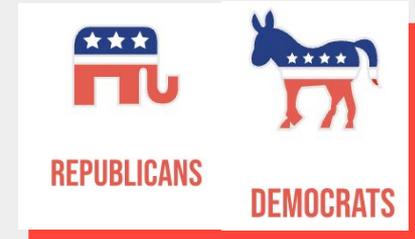
# Political advertising can be about...



Candidates



Policies



Political parties





# Advertising typically offers information about candidates':



Name



Political party



Office sought



Image or personality



Stance on issues



Values

# Political advertising can be...



Positive



Negative



Neutral



# All advertising...



- Targets you for messages based on your interests (and online behavior).
- Is created to inform, persuade, and sometimes entertain you.

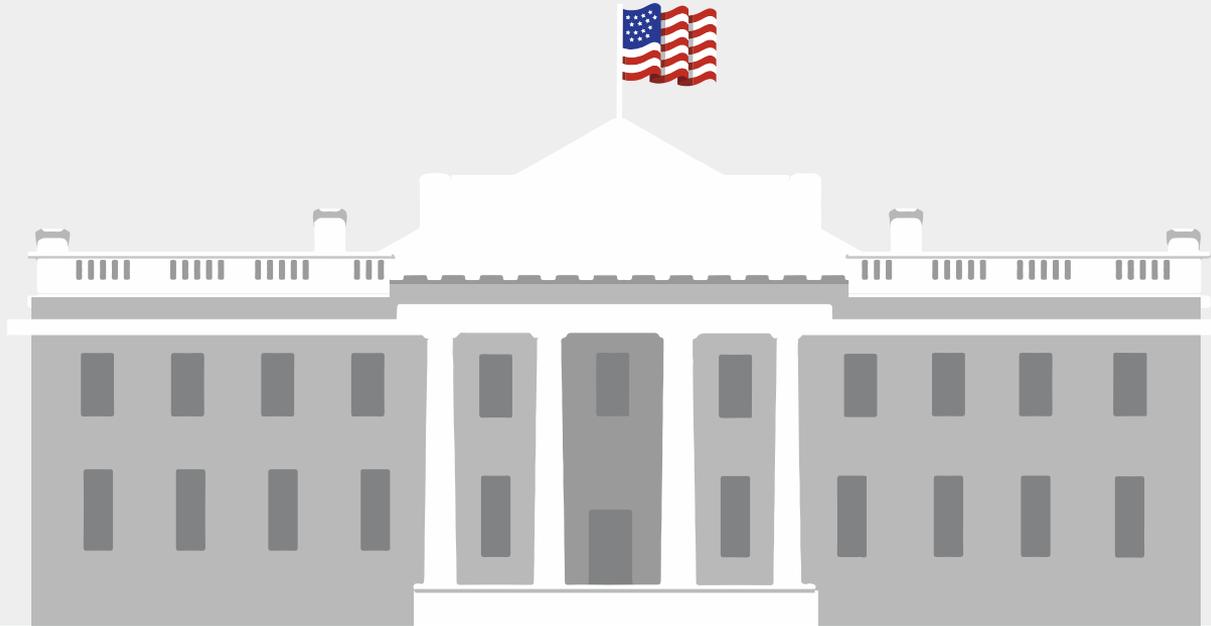


# Examine a political ad

1. Go to Google's Ad Transparency website:  
<https://adstransparency.google.com/political?political=&region=2840>
2. Select a political ad.
3. What is the ad about?
4. What information is offered?
  - Is the information negative, positive, or neutral?
5. What did you learn from the ad?
6. Who do you think created the ad?
7. Who do you think was the target audience?



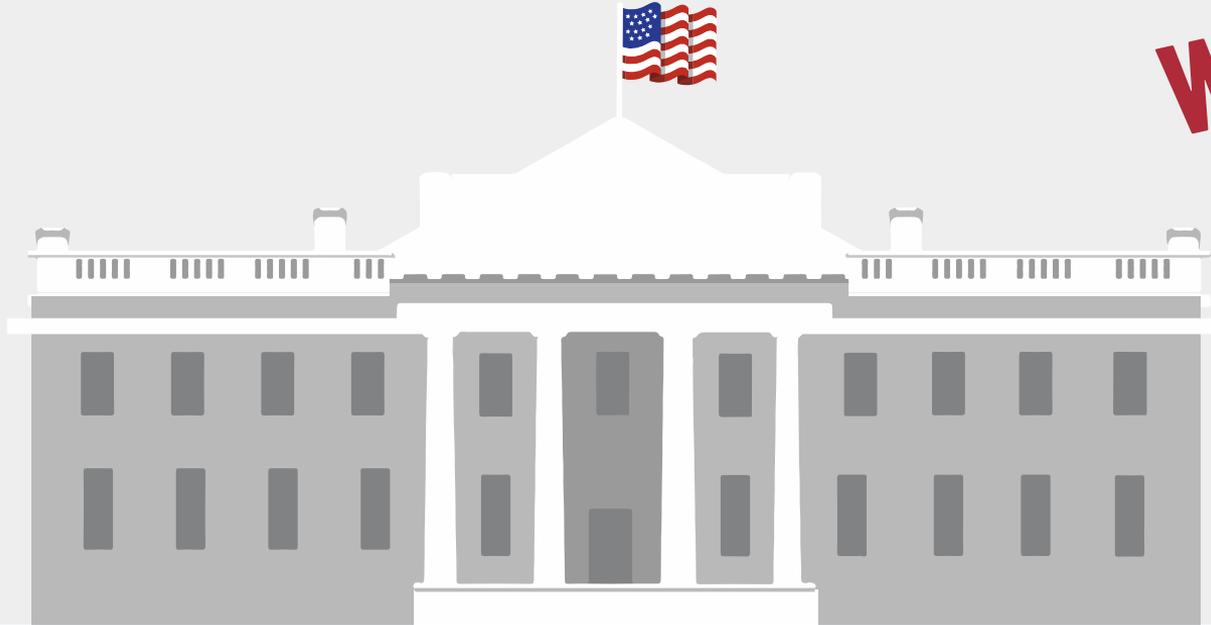
# How much money was spent on political advertising in the 2020 Presidential election cycle?



**GUESS**

# \$8,000,000,000

**WHOA!**

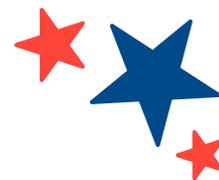


## Presidential election ad budgets by medium

As percent of total spending.

Medium	Total Democrats	Total Republicans	Joe Biden	Donald Trump	Total
Local broadcast	48.5%	50.4%	40.7%	39.0%	49.3%
Digital	20.0	30.6	25.6	38.8	24.5
Local cable	15.1	7.6	14.5	3.6	11.9
National cable	5.6	5.7	6.4	10.1	5.6
National broadcast	3.5	2.4	5.4	4.3	3.0
Radio	3.1	1.1	3.6	1.3	2.2
Broadcast Hispanic	3.6	1.6	3.3	2.6	2.8
Satellite	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

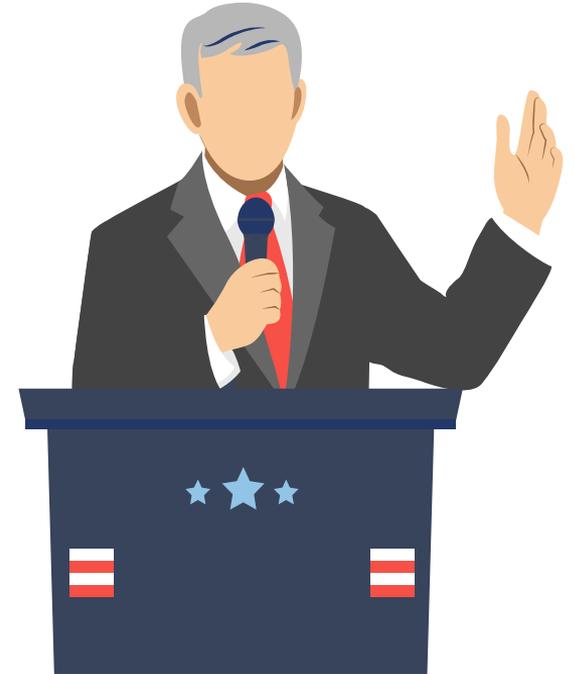
Source: Media spending from Kantar/CMAG from April 1, 2020, through Election Day.



**So political advertising  
must work, *right?***

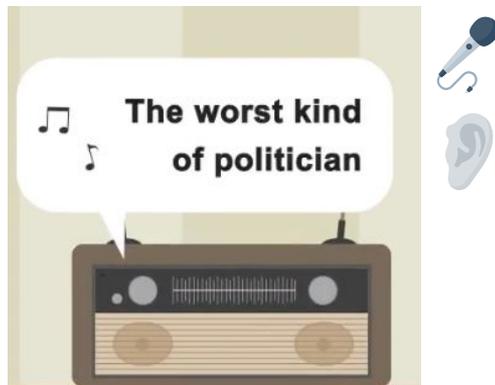


**How can you find out  
the source of the ad?**



# Sometimes the candidate tells you the source...

- **Political ads on TV and radio are required to disclose the source of the ad.**
  - **“Stand by Your Ad” Act:** Under Section 311 of the BCRA, Section 318 the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (2 U.S.C. 441d) was amended to include the "Stand By Your Ad" provision. [McCain-Feingold Bill]
  - Only applies to TV and radio ads.



“I'm candidate X and I approve this message.”

# Sometimes it's hard to tell...

## Who paid for this ad?

## Who is the source of the message?



SHARE

LET'S REGULATE BIG TECH  
AND SAVE AMERICA



Support American jobs in the tech sector  
Stop giving other countries a tech advantage

VOTE FOR  
**JOHN DOE**  
NOV. 8

Paid for by the Americans for Regulation of Technology PAC. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee. [www.art-pac.com](http://www.art-pac.com)

**Look at the small  
yellow letters at  
the bottom...**

**This is a political action  
committee (PAC)...but  
we do not know WHO is  
IN the PAC!**



**LET'S REGULATE BIG TECH  
AND SAVE AMERICA**

Support American jobs in the tech sector  
Stop giving other countries a tech advantage

**VOTE FOR  
JOHN DOE**

NOV. 8

Paid for by the Americans for Regulation of Technology PAC. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee. [www.art-pac.com](http://www.art-pac.com)



# What is a PAC?

- *PAC* stands for **political action committee**.
- A political action committee is organized for the purpose of raising and spending money to elect and defeat candidates.
- Most PACs represent business, labor, or ideological interests.



**Who is spending this  
kind of money?**



# Let's follow the money...

1. Go to Google's Ad Transparency website:  
<https://adstransparency.google.com/political?political&region=US>
2. How much money has been spent on political ads?
3. How many ads?
4. Who are the largest spenders?





# How is political advertising funded in the U.S.?

Individuals, political action committees, unions, and even corporations can fund candidates and advertising.



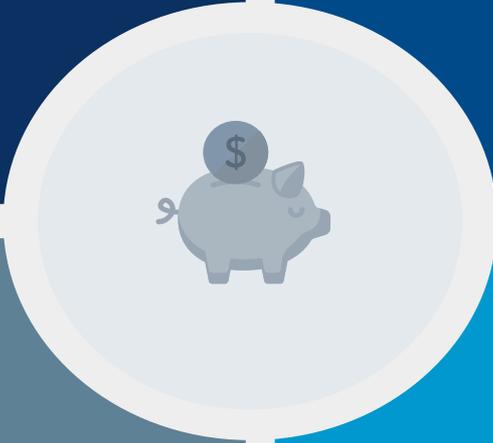
The rise of digital media also means it's easier for *anyone* to create and fund advertising.



Super political action committees (super PACs), if registered as a non-profit group, can raise **unlimited** funds. Individual donors of PACs are usually not identified.



Short story: *more money* in politics means many *more political ads*.



Source: 2010 Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission Supreme Court Case.

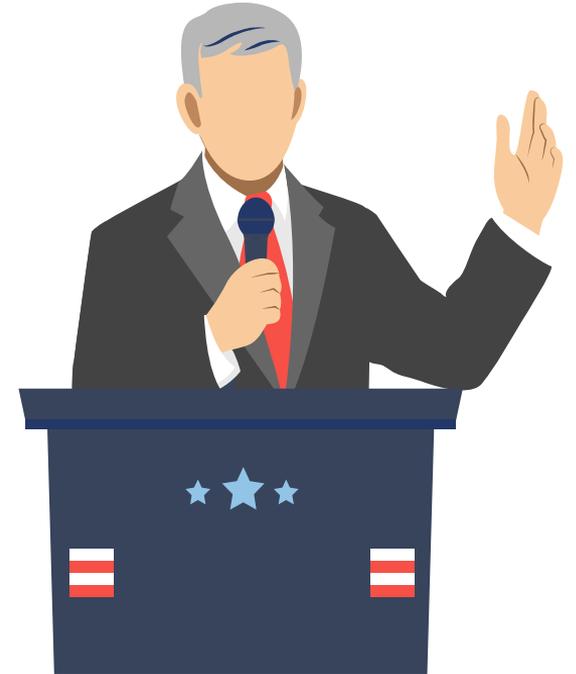
# Let's follow the money...

1. Go to Opensecrets.org: <https://www.opensecrets.org/online-ads>
2. Click on one of the top 5 advertisers.
3. Scroll down to see where they spend money on Facebook.
4. Are you surprised? Why or why not?



ACTIVITY

# How are political ads regulated?



**Have you ever  
suspected that an  
ad wasn't telling  
the whole truth?**

**Can political ads lie?**





# STIR it up!



# How is political advertising regulated in the U.S.?

- “Public Communication” is regulated by the Federal Elections Commission.
- Political advertising is given greater protection than commercial advertising (First Amendment, importance of political speech).
- “Truth-in-advertising” laws for commercial products do not apply to political ads (Federal Trade Commission).
- That means, political ads **may not be telling the whole truth...**



# ***Most political advertising does not outright lie, but it's important to note that ads can be misleading by:***

- Taking quotes out of context.
- Borrowing, altering, or editing audio, images, or video footage.
- Misleading information about policy stances (e.g., votes on a Bill that contained a lot of issues).
- Leaving out important information.

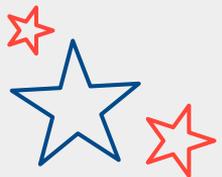
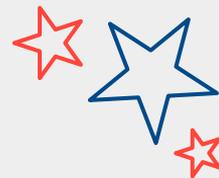
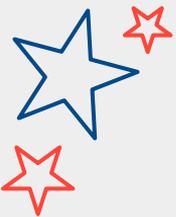


# Let's take a closer look...

1. Go to the Ad Watch website: <https://www.politifact.com/ad-watch/>
2. Select a political ad that is 'mostly false' and click on the headline
3. Find a link to the actual ad and review it.
4. Read the "If your time is short" summary of the ad review.
5. Be prepared to discuss the ad.
  - What is the ad about?
  - What parts of the ad are false claims?
    - *Hint: taking quotes out of context, borrowing/altering/editing content, misleading information, leaving out important information.*



# REVIEW TIME



**The truth-in-advertising regulations enforced by the Federal Trade Commission for commercial advertising do not apply to political advertising.**

TRUE

FALSE

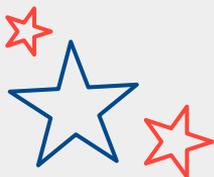


**The truth-in-advertising regulations enforced by the Federal Trade Commission for commercial advertising do not apply to political advertising.**

 **TRUE**

 **FALSE**

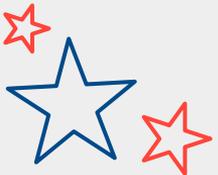
**This is true.** Political ads are given greater protection under the First Amendment than commercial ads.



**There are legal limits to the amount of money corporations can spend on political ads.**

**TRUE**

**FALSE**



# There are legal limits on the amount of money corporations can spend on political ads.

 **TRUE**

 **FALSE**

Actually, corporations can spend as much money on political ads as they like, according to the 2010 “Citizens United” Supreme Court case.



# MAKE A POLITICAL AD



ACTIVITY

# Political Advertising Process

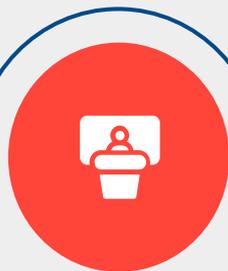
## Step 1

Pick a candidate, issue, or political party.



## Step 3

Pick your target audience: who should receive your message and why?



## Step 5

Brainstorm ideas, think about your goals and strategy, and create at least 1 political ad.



## Step 2

Do some research and select at least 3 pieces of information for the ad.



## Step 4

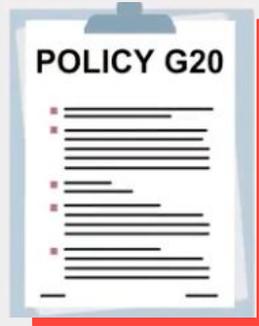
Select your media channels for the message and audience.



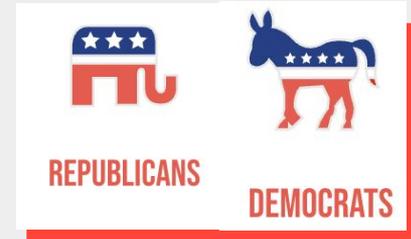
# Step 1: Pick the candidate, issue, or political party.



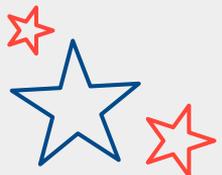
Candidates



Policies



Political parties



## Step 2: Research the candidate, issue, or political party.

**Information 1**

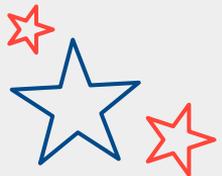
SOURCE

**Information 2**

SOURCE

**Information 3**

SOURCE



# Example of information: Core issues and values

## EDUCATION

Add evidence  
or examples  
here

## FAMILY

Add evidence  
or examples  
here

## EQUAL RIGHTS

Add evidence  
or examples  
here



## ENVIRONMENT

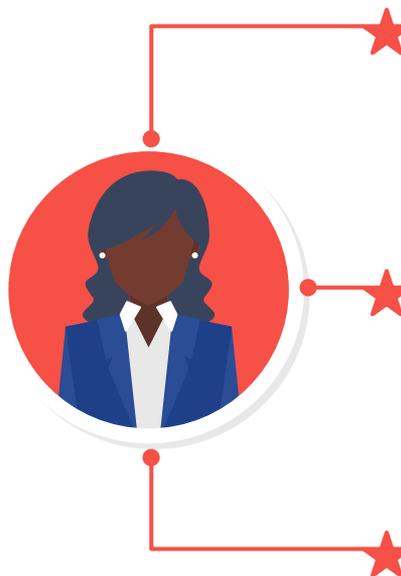
Add evidence  
or examples  
here

## BUSINESS

Add evidence  
or examples  
here

## MILITARY

Add evidence  
or examples  
here

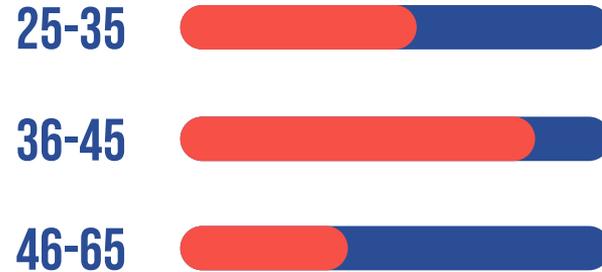


# Step 3: Pick your Target Audience (Example)

## GENDER



## AGE



## INTERESTS



What other characteristics may be relevant to the target audience?

# Option: Create a Voter Profile (EXAMPLE)

## BASIC INFO

Age range 35 - 45

Gender: Female

Studies: Degree in Medicine

## PROFILE

- Motivations
- Behavior
- Personality
- Interests



## PROFESSIONAL INFO

Job: Doctor

Income range: \$250-\$300k/year

Location: Indianapolis

## HOBBIES

- Travel
- Art
- Nature
- Reading

# Step 4: Select your media for the target audience.

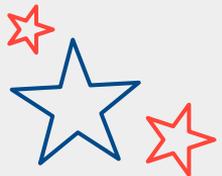
## Some channels to consider...

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Television
- Radio/Podcasts
- Mailers/Post cards
- Billboards
- Posters

## Social media ideas...



Note: Twitter does NOT allow political ads.



# EXAMPLE: Advertising Plan

## MEDIA CHANNELS

## GOALS

## KEY MESSAGES

Social Media

50%

Radio

10%

Outdoor  
(Billboards)

40%

# Step 5: Determine your goal and strategy, brainstorm creative ideas, and make your ad.



**Goal:** What you want to achieve with your message.



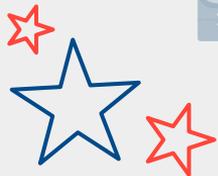
**Strategy :** HOW you will achieve your goal.



**Creative Ideas:** How can you bring your strategy to life?  
(brainstorm at least 10 different ideas)



Pick your best ideas and create the ad (can be a rough or draft), and then put all the ideas into a plan.



# Example: Our goals and strategy



## TRUST

Show images of competence  
Provide facts with sources



## DIALOGUE

Show bipartisan support and relationships images



## FAIR ELECTION

Focus on democracy and importance to the USA

# Example: Creative strategy ideas



## JINGLE

Make up a song



## INDUCE EMOTION OR EVOKE VALUES

(e.g., pride, fear, hope)



## USE FACTS

Will include exact  
numbers from  
research

# SHOW US YOUR POLITICAL AD



SHARE

# Summary of political advertising

1

There is no law that requires that political ads be truthful



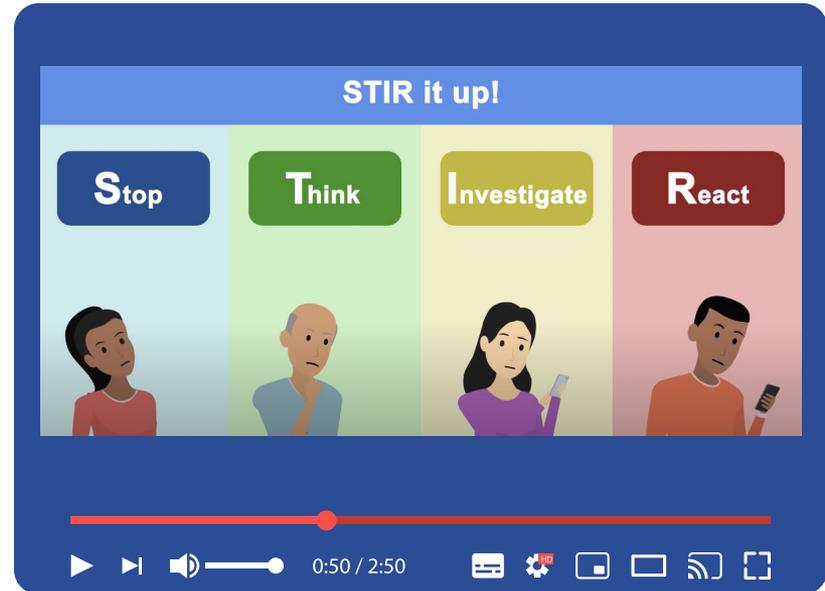
2

Political ads are not fact-checked before they are shown



3

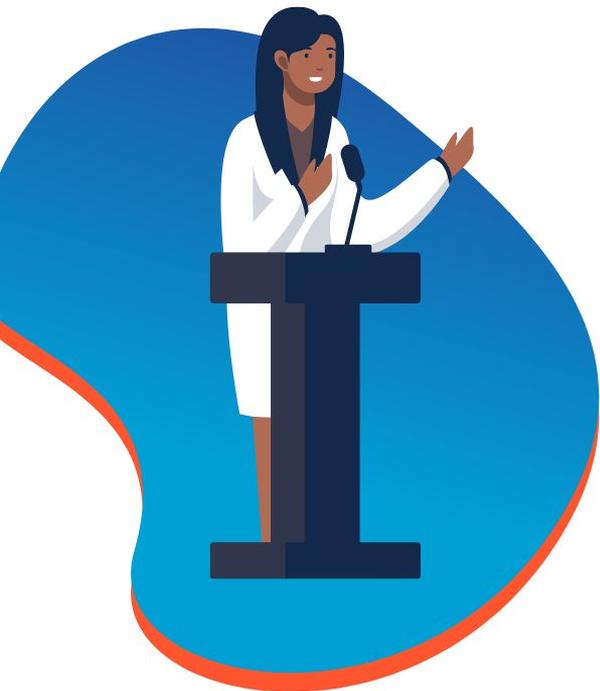
Anyone can post political information on social media



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3tsjajaZ-E>

# POLITICAL ADVERTISING LITERACY TIPS

While many candidates try to use political advertising ethically, there are many ways a political ad creator might attempt to mislead you.



**An ad may take a candidate’s words out of context and give a misleading interpretation of what the candidate actually said.**

In a speech a candidate states that “her opponent claims that ‘voting for me means a vote for higher taxes,’ yet my record indicates the opposite.” The opponent uses video or audio of her saying “Voting for mean means a vote for higher taxes” but fails to mention the context of the statement, thus, making it look like the candidate supports higher taxes.

# POLITICAL ADVERTISING LITERACY TIPS

## **An ad may take a true fact out of context.**

A senator voted against a bill that had a provision to increase funding for school lunches. The senator indeed voted against the bill because he felt that the bill had things in it that would actually harm children. An opponent uses that fact to claim that the senator voted against nutrition for children and that he is anti-child, yet fails to mention that the senator has voted 50 times for bills that increased funding for school lunch program.



# POLITICAL ADVERTISING LITERACY TIPS

## **Watch out for images.**

They can be taken out of context or manipulated, too. A candidate running for re-election may state that his opponent will allow riots in the streets. To support this statement, the ad uses images or footage of riots. But the riot images used are of riots that actually happened as a result of the policies of the candidate running for re-election during the time that candidate was actually in office. Images may also be manipulated to make a candidate look incompetent, older, more ethnic or other alterations to trigger fear or bigotry within some potential voters.



# POLITICAL ADVERTISING LITERACY TIPS

## **Watch out, too, for how ad claims are supported.**

An ad may claim that the opposing candidate's environmental plan will cost too much money and be ineffective. To support this claim, the ad quickly cites an article in a publication or a study done by an organization to make you think the claim has been independently verified. But take a close look at those sources and you might find out that publication or that study was sponsored by the political party of the person making the negative claim.





# FINAL WORDS

1

Political advertising **CAN** provide valuable information.

2

**BUT** you should be critical about what you see and look across a variety of sources to get your information.

3

Be an informed voter and VOTE.



# Election Day: Tuesday, November 8, 2022



**ARE YOU  
REGISTERED  
TO VOTE?**

<https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote>



**FIND OUT WHEN  
AND WHERE  
ELECTIONS ARE IN  
YOUR AREA**

<https://www.usvotefoundation.org/>



# Resources

<https://adstransparency.google.com/political?political=&region=US>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/12/20/regulating-fact-from-fiction-disinformation-in-political-advertisin>

<https://www.factcheck.org/about/our-mission/>

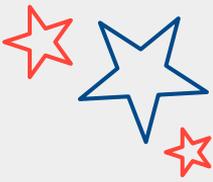
<https://www.fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees/advertising-and-disclaimers/>

<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org>

<https://www.opensecrets.org/online-ads>

<https://www.politifact.com/ad-watch/>



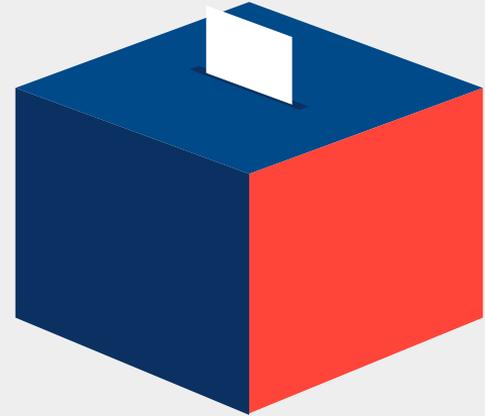


# Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

Contact: Prof. Michelle Nelson ([nelsonmr@illinois.edu](mailto:nelsonmr@illinois.edu))

Created by Michelle Nelson and Kirby Cook  
(and the rest of the PAL team: Chang Dae Ham, Eric  
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