

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 me 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.

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 programs.



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.

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.



Brought to you by the Political Advertising Literacy (PAL) Research Group at the University of Tennessee and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The PAL research group investigates how much U.S. voters know about political advertising, called political advertising literacy (PAL), and aims to improve their knowledge to effectively cope with misleading political advertising.

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