

# Campaign Propaganda: Which Strategies Would You Use?

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**Overview:** How do you respond to political ads? Do attack ads cause you to reject the candidate being attacked – or the one doing the attacking? Are you persuaded by endorsements from groups that you respect? Are you aware how other ads try to influence you? Every election year, Americans complain bitterly about the many political ads they see over the long campaign season. This Mini-Q is designed to take you inside the world of campaign ads to learn about the strategies candidates and their managers use to win our votes.

## The Documents:

- Document A: Mondale and Ferraro, 1984
- Document B: Ronald Reagan, 1984
- Document C: Eisenhower vs. Stevenson, 1952
- Document D: George H.W. Bush, 1988 and 1992
- Document E: Obama vs. Romney, 2012
- Document F: Nixon vs. Humphrey, 1968

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

## Hook Exercise: Would You Vote for This Man?

Buttons bearing a candidate's message have been in the campaigning politician's toolkit since the mid-1800s. How much can a button tell you about a candidate? Let's have a look.

**Directions:** Examine each of the buttons closely. Look at both the pictures and the words. Notice the expressions on each candidate's face. Think about what the symbols mean. Use your observations to complete the table. In the middle column, write two factual observations about each button. In the right-hand column, make an inference about what message the candidate is trying to send, based on a fact you listed in the second column. For example, Reagan is with his wife. The inference is that he is a family man with family values.

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Theodore Roosevelt, 1904



Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1944

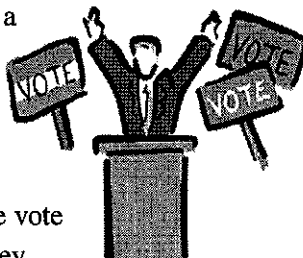


Ronald Reagan, 1980

Candidate	Facts/Observations	Inferences
Theodore Roosevelt	1.	1.
	2.	2.
Franklin D. Roosevelt	1.	1.
	2.	2.
Ronald Reagan	1.	1.
	2.	2.

## Campaign Propaganda: Which Strategies Would You Use?

In just a few years, you will be voting. Some of you may be voting already. You will probably be wearing campaign buttons or putting campaign bumper stickers for your favorite candidate on your car. You may be working on a **political campaign**. To be both a smart voter and a smart campaigner, you must understand the purposes of campaigns and the tricks of the campaigner's trade.



In an election, the people vote to decide which candidate they want. Society's goal for political campaigns is that they provide the information voters need to make a good decision. The candidates' goal, on the other hand, is to convince voters to put an X next to their names on the ballot. And how does a candidate attract those "X"s? A big part of the answer is **campaign propaganda**.

Propaganda is all around us. Think about all the ads you see in a single day – whether on television, in video games, on billboards, or at the movies. Advertising is a form of propaganda because it is designed to shape your beliefs and your actions. "Whoppo Burgers Build Muscles and Attract Girls!" Hear that ad enough and some guys will buy Whoppos.

Campaign propaganda is another form of advertising, except in this case the product being sold is the candidate. You may be most aware of it on television or on the Internet. But there are lots of other campaign propaganda delivery systems—websites, tweets, automated phone calls (aka robocalls which tend to happen when you are eating dinner), campaign buttons, bumper stickers, flyers sent through the mail, posters/billboards, radio, movies, books, comic strips, video games.

With all of these campaign ad delivery systems available, how does a campaign manager plan to reach the voters? Over the years, campaign propagandists have developed certain "**tricks of the**

**trade.**" Here are six "tricks" often used in political campaigns:

- *Testimonials/Endorsements.* When a prominent person announces her support for a candidate, that is an example of this technique at work. **Endorsements** may be from business leaders, other politicians, or even celebrities. **Testimonials** can also come from everyday people—for example, a military veteran might talk about how a politician backed laws good for veterans. Endorsements that are unexpected may be most effective. For example, when former Secretary of State Colin Powell, a Republican, endorsed Senator Obama in 2008, it was big news.

- *Stacking the Deck.* Stacking the deck means including positive facts and leaving out negative ones. For example, a candidate might say that she voted for a tax cut without mentioning tax increases she also voted for.

- *Plain Folks.* This method is designed to appeal to ordinary people by making the candidate seem to be just like them. In 2008, Senator Obama often talked about his Kansas grandparents. He and Senator McCain both attended events like county fairs. Both went to bars and drank beer. In 2012 Governor Romney frequently wore jeans, and President Obama rolled up his sleeves.

- *Negative or Attack Ads.* This technique involves saying bad things about the opponent. Ads calling a candidate a "flip-flopper" or pointing out problems in the candidate's personal life are common attack ads. Often, attack ads are designed to make voters fearful about the future if the other candidate wins. Many people say they dislike these so-called attack ads and don't want candidates to use them. Yet attack ads do seem to work.

- *Glittering Generalities.* This trick involves using certain "catch phrases" that appeal to people's emotions but are so vague they have little meaning. Campaign **slogans** often fall into this category. For example, in 2008, then-Senator Obama used the



slogan “Change We Can Believe In,” while Senator McCain’s slogan was “Country First.” These slogans sound good, but is their meaning clear?

• *Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing.* These techniques are the opposite of each other. In guilt by association, a candidate tries to make the opponent seem bad because he was associated with an unpopular person, event, or idea. In coat-tailing, a candidate tries to make himself look good by claiming a relationship to a popular person, event, or idea. Think about a vice president running to become president. If the president he served with were popular, he would probably use coat-tailing. If the president he served with was unpopular, his opponent might use guilt by association.

How does a campaign manager decide which propaganda strategies to use? We suggest that you use three measuring sticks:

1. Is it *informative* to voters? A campaign strategy is informative if it provides voters with a better understanding of the candidate and his or her positions on the issues.
2. Is it *effective* in winning votes? A campaign strategy is effective if it wins votes and helps the candidate get elected.
3. Is it *ethical*? A campaign strategy is ethical if it is truthful and respectful of opponents.

The challenge is to conduct a campaign that is both effective and ethical.

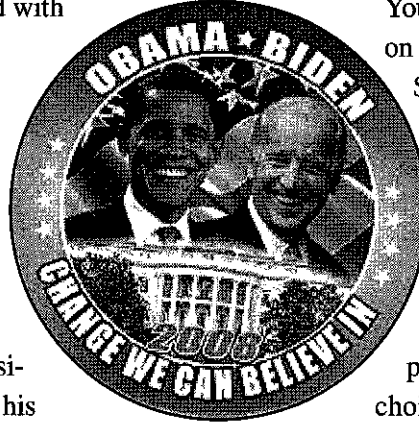
Here is your task: You are in charge of a political campaign in your state. Your candidate is three percentage points behind the other major candidate. The election is only two weeks away.

You have \$1 million dollars to spend on three ads – \$600,000 for one ad, \$300,000 for a second ad, and \$100,000 for the third. The candidate you are working for has requested that each ad use a different strategy as described above.

Write a letter to your candidate which describes your advertising plan. With each of your three strategy choices do three things:

- State the amount of money you will be spending on the ad;
- Use documents from the Mini-Q that provide historical examples of the strategy;
- Explain why you believe that strategy is informative, effective, and ethical.

Good luck!



## Background Essay Questions

1. What is society's goal for political campaigns? What is a candidate's goal? Can both of these goals be achieved?
2. What is the similarity between advertising and campaign propaganda?
3. How does the "stacking the deck" strategy help a candidate?
4. How might "glittering generalities" help a candidate?
5. Why might a candidate use the "plain folks" approach? Would this approach be effective in winning your vote?
6. How are "guilt by association" and "coat-tailing" related? Explain your answer.
7. What are three reasonable measuring sticks or criteria when choosing campaign propaganda strategies? Briefly explain each.
8. Define these terms:
  - political campaign
  - propaganda
  - tricks of the trade
  - slogans
  - endorsements
  - testimonials

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## Timeline

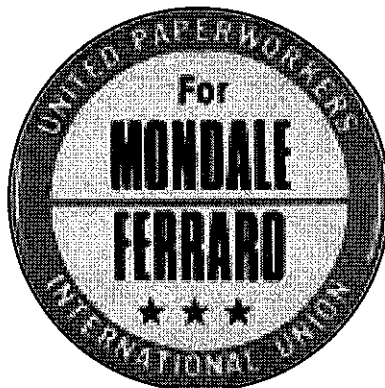
- 1789-1792** – George Washington is twice elected president without campaigning.
- 1800** – Candidates Thomas Jefferson and President John Adams are attacked through flyers and newspapers.
- 1860** – Photographs first used on medals, buttons, posters, and banners.
- 1920** – Republican National Committee publishes a campaign textbook on propaganda techniques.
- 1928** – Radio is used as a campaign tool for the first time.
- 1952** – Candidates Eisenhower and Stevenson use television ads for the first time.
- 1960** – Kennedy and Nixon appear in the first televised presidential debate.
- 2008** – Social media like texting and Facebook become a significant factor in a presidential campaign.

## Document A

Source: Private Collection, 2012.

**Note:** Walter Mondale, the former vice president, was the Democratic nominee for president in 1984. His running mate was Representative Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman nominated to run as a vice presidential candidate by a major party.

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## Document Analysis

1. Which propaganda strategy was used on these buttons?

- Stacking the Deck     
  Glittering Generalities     
  Plain Folks  
 Testimonials/Endorsements     
  Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing     
  Negative or Attack Ads

2. In your own words, define the primary strategy used in this document. Hint: See Background Essay.

3. What is the evidence that the Mondale-Ferraro campaign was using this strategy in 1984?

4. Informative: Do you think this strategy is informative? Why or why not?

5. Effective: Would you expect this to be an effective strategy? Why or why not?

6. Ethical: Is this an ethical strategy? Explain.

## Document B

Source: "The Living Room Candidate," Museum of the Moving Image, 1984.

### *Prouder, Stronger, Better* (Reagan TV ad)

NARRATOR: It's morning again in America. Today more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history. With interest rates at just half the record high of 1980, nearly 2,000 families will today buy new homes, more than at any time in the past four years. This afternoon 6,500 young men and women will be married and with inflation at half of what it was four years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future. It's morning again in America and, under the leadership of President Reagan, our country is prouder and stronger and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were just four short years ago?



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### Document Analysis

1. Which propaganda strategy was used in this commercial?

Stacking the Deck

Glittering Generalities

Plain Folks

Testimonials/Endorsements

Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing

Negative or Attack Ads

2. In your own words, define the primary strategy used in this document. Hint: See Background Essay.

3. What is the evidence that the Reagan-Bush campaign was using this strategy in 1984?

4. Informative: Do you think this strategy is informative? Why or why not?

5. Effective: Would you expect this to be an effective strategy? Why or why not?

6. Ethical: Is this an ethical strategy? Explain.

## Document C

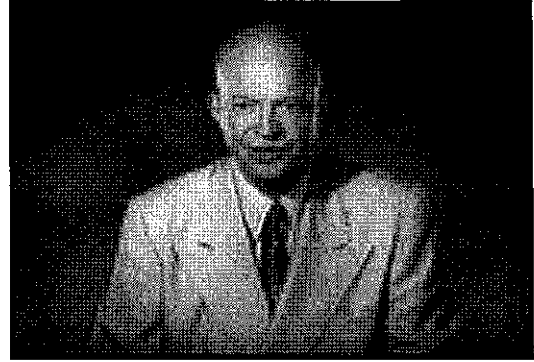
**Source:** "The Living Room Candidate," Museum of the Moving Image, 1952.

**Note:** General Dwight Eisenhower, a hero of World War II, was the Republican candidate for President in 1952. His Democratic opponent was Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois. A news photographer had taken a photo of Stevenson showing a hole worn in the sole [bottom] of his shoe. The hole soon found its way into the campaign.

### *Eisenhower Answers America (Eisenhower ad)*

Woman: You know what things cost today. High prices are just driving me crazy.

General Dwight Eisenhower: Yes, my Mamie [his wife] gets after me about the high cost of living. It's another reason why I say it's time for a change. Time to get back to an honest dollar and an honest dollar's worth.



### *I Love the Guv (Stevenson ad)*

Song Lyrics: I'd rather have a man with a hole in his shoe than a hole in everything he says.

I'd rather have a man who knows what to do when he gets to be the prez.

I love the guv, the governor of Illinois

He is the guv that brings the dove of peace and joy.



## Document Analysis

1. Which propaganda strategy did both Eisenhower and Stevenson use in their ads?

- Stacking the Deck     
  Glittering Generalities     
  Plain Folks  
 Testimonials/Endorsements     
  Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing     
  Negative or Attack Ads

2. In your own words, define the primary strategy used in this document. Hint: See Background Essay.

3. What is the evidence that the Eisenhower and Stevenson campaigns were using this strategy?

4. Informative: Do you think this strategy is informative? Why or why not?

5. Effective: Would you expect this to be an effective strategy? Why or why not?

6. Ethical: Is this an ethical strategy? Explain.



## Document D

**Source:** "The Living Room Candidate," Museum of the Moving Image, 1988 and 1992.

**Note:** This is a photo of Governor Michael Dukakis, who ran against Vice President George H.W. Bush in 1988, and lost.

### *Tank Ride (Bush ad, 1988)*

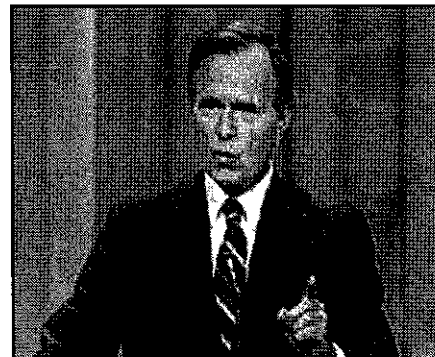
**NARRATOR:** Michael Dukakis has opposed virtually every defense system we developed. He opposed new aircraft carriers. He opposed anti-satellite weapons. He opposed four missile systems, including the Pershing-II Missile deployment. Dukakis opposed the Stealth Bomber and a ground emergency warning system against nuclear attack. He even criticized our rescue mission to Grenada and our strike on Libya. And now he wants to be our Commander-in-Chief. America can't afford that risk.



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### *The George Bush Promise (Clinton ad, 1992)*

**NARRATOR:** The George Bush promise: "Read my lips – no new taxes." Then he gave us the second-biggest tax increase in American history. Bush increased the gas tax by 56 percent. Can we afford four more years? Bill Clinton, a different kind of Democrat. As governor, Arkansas has the second-lowest tax burden in the country. Balanced 12 budgets. You don't have to read his lips. Read his record. Clinton/Gore. For the people. For a change.



**Note:** The photo above is of President George H.W. Bush who ran against Governor Bill Clinton in 1992 and lost.

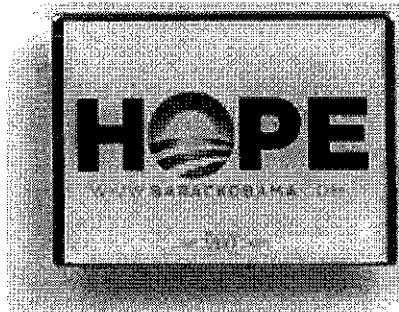
## Document Analysis

- Which propaganda strategy did both Bush and Clinton use in their ads?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Stacking the Deck	<input type="checkbox"/> Glittering Generalities	<input type="checkbox"/> Plain Folks
<input type="checkbox"/> Testimonials/Endorsements	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing	<input type="checkbox"/> Negative or Attack Ads
- In your own words, define the primary strategy used in this document. Hint: See Background Essay.
- What is the evidence that the Bush and Clinton campaigns were using this strategy?
- Informative:** Do you think this strategy is informative? Why or why not?
- Effective:** Would you expect this to be an effective strategy? Why or why not?
- Ethical:** Is this an ethical strategy? Explain.

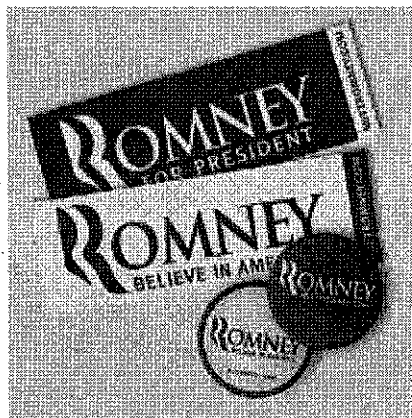
**Document E**

Source: Obama-Biden campaign, barackobama.com, 2012.



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Source: Romney campaign, mittromney.com, 2012.



**Document Analysis**

1. Which propaganda strategy is being used in both Obama's and Romney's items?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Stacking the Deck	<input type="checkbox"/> Glittering Generalities	<input type="checkbox"/> Plain Folks
<input type="checkbox"/> Testimonials/Endorsements	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing	<input type="checkbox"/> Negative or Attack Ads
2. In your own words, define the primary strategy used in this document. Hint: See Background Essay.
3. What is the evidence that the Obama and Romney campaigns were using this strategy?
4. Informative: Do you think this strategy is informative? Why or why not?
5. Effective: Would you expect this to be an effective strategy? Why or why not?
6. Ethical: Is this an ethical strategy? Explain.

## Document F

**Source:** "The Living Room Candidate," Museum of the Moving Image, 1968.

**Note:** Richard Nixon (Republican candidate) ran against Hubert Humphrey (Democrat) in the 1968 Presidential election.

### *The First Civil Right* (Nixon ad)

**Note:** *The First Civil Right* showed pictures from recent incidents of violence in the US. The ad had no narration. It presented a collage of photographs of Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey and these two photographs of the violence in the streets during the Democratic convention, and the Vietnam War.



### *Voting Booth* (Humphrey ad)

**NARRATOR:** What have the Democrats ever done for you? Well, let's think about it. Your kids are getting a better education today because Democrats have given schools needed federal aid. And when school is out, your kids won't have to wander the streets. Democrats have paved the way for them to get good summer jobs. You've got more money today for

those little luxuries because Democrats worked hard to push through a higher minimum wage. You don't have to worry about supporting your mother today and she needn't worry about being a burden on you thanks to Social Security and Medicare. Quite an accomplishment? You know it! What have the Democrats ever done for you and yours? Think about it.

### Document Analysis

1. What strategies do these ads use?

- Stacking the Deck     
  Glittering Generalities     
  Plain Folks  
 Testimonials/Endorsements     
  Guilt by Association/Coat-tailing     
  Negative or Attack Ads

2. In your own words, define the primary strategy used in this document. Hint: See Background Essay.

3. Informative: Do you think this strategy is informative? Why or why not?

4. Effective: Would you expect this to be an effective strategy? Why or why not?

5. Ethical: Is this an ethical strategy? Explain.

# From Thesis to Essay Writing

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## Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

### Working Title

### Paragraph #1

Grabber

Background

Restating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and road map

### Paragraph #2

Baby Thesis for bucket one

Evidence: Supporting detail from document with document citation

Argument: Connecting evidence to the thesis, why strategy is #1.

### Paragraph #3

Baby Thesis for bucket number two

Evidence

Argument

### Paragraph #4

Baby Thesis for bucket three

Evidence

Argument

### Paragraph #5

Conclusion: "Although" statement followed by convincing restatement of main idea

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