Lesson 6
Campaign Communications

GUIDING QUESTIONS

❶ **How do political parties share their message?**

❷ **How can I evaluate political party messages?**

OVERVIEW

During the election campaign, political parties use many ways to present their leader and communicate their party's vision to the public. Being an informed voter means critically examining these messages and advertisements.

In this lesson, students dissect and analyze various political party communications or advertisements. Afterwards, students evaluate the strengths and limitations of each party's campaign strategy.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the purpose of political communications in elections;
- analyze a variety of media texts and evaluate their significance or effectiveness; and
- work collaboratively with peers to analyze and organize information.

Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- Set up a classroom Twitter or Facebook account to track social media posts from the political parties.
- Be sure to show options from each party in the same medium to ensure comparisons can be made on the same level and are not biased towards format.
- When choosing video advertisements, be sure to show ads of similar tone. Try not to compare a positive ad from one party with an attack ad from another. Consider comparing positive and negative toned ads from the same party.
- Supplies/Needs: Slide Deck 6, chart paper and examples of political party advertisements or social media messages from the current election campaign (consider using screenshots of social media posts)
- All digital files, videos and slide decks can be found at: studentvote.ca/canada (*Classroom Resources*).

Readiness

Ask students to document any campaign communications or political advertisements they see in the community or online in lead up to the lesson. Students can take pictures on their phone or capture screen shots.

Starter

1. Through a whole-class discussion, invite students to share all the ways they think political parties and candidates try to communicate with voters and share their message (e.g., advertising, lawn signs, mailings/pamphlets, their website, social media, public events, door-to-door canvassing, news coverage, candidate debates).

2. Ask students if they have noticed any of these efforts for the current election and invite them to share their photos from the *Readiness* activity.

3. Discuss as a class: Which methods are most effective in reaching voters and why? Has the pandemic influenced communication strategies for the election?

Activities

1. Using Slide Deck 6, review the three types of media: paid, earned and owned. Explain to students that political parties use all of these forms of media to share their message with voters.

   - **Paid media:** Advertising that has been purchased, including online ads, billboards, broadcast or print ads, and promotional mailings.

   - **Owned media:** Communications shared by individuals or groups through their own platforms, such as websites, blogs or social media channels.
   - **Earned media:** Media coverage produced by news organizations or reported by others through social shares, mentions or word of mouth.

2. Share examples of political party advertisements or social media messages from the current election campaign. You could use images from each party or party leader's Instagram account or video advertisements found on their website or YouTube channel. Encourage students to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content.

   As a class, investigate the advertisements/messages using the following guiding questions.

   a) Describe the content: What does it show? What is your immediate impression? How does it make you feel?

   b) Identify the claim (or main message): What claim is being made? Is it a factual statement that can be proven? Is it an opinion statement that is up to one's interpretation?

   c) Examine the framing: How does the language, images, colour, fonts or tone influence the message? Is the message misleading?

   d) Analyze the purpose: What is the purpose of the message? Is it an attack ad? Who is the target audience? How might different audiences interpret it?

3. As a class, co-create criteria to evaluate political party advertising or communication. For example:

   - Is the message clear and concise?
   - Is the message factual?
   - Are the images/visuals relevant to the message(s)?
   - Do the message(s) target the intended audience?
   - Is the language of the message appropriate to the tone and content?

4. Divide students into groups and have them evaluate the communications of one of the political parties or candidates running in your school's riding. Select options from each party in the same medium(s) to ensure comparisons can be made on the same level and are not biased towards format. Place each piece of media (or printed screenshot of the video) in the middle of a larger piece of paper or chart paper. Ask students to annotate their thoughts around the edge.

5. Post each group's work around the classroom or down a hallway. Have students participate in a 'Gallery Walk' to look at their peers' work. For a further extension, give students sticky notes so they can add their own thoughts or ideas.

Consolidation

Have a closing discussion about campaign communications, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- Evaluate the communications of each political party or candidate and rank them based on the co-created criteria for effectiveness.
- Which party's messaging is most appealing to you and why?
- If you were the leader of a party or candidate, what would be your communications strategy? What formats would you use? Who would you try to reach? What would be your main messages?

Extended Learning

Divide students into groups and ask them to track the communications of one particular political party or candidate across various communication activities. Students should gather and compare the party or candidate's communications from multiple platforms and in different formats (e.g., video, print material, social media posts).

Provide an overall checklist of what should be collected during the tracking period. For example:

- 3 video advertisements
- 12 social media posts from 3 different social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok)
- 1 party pamphlet
- 1 speech
- 2 media releases

Suggested questions:

- What are the party's key messages? Are they consistent across all platforms or communications?
- Are they focused on highlighting their own ideas or do they focus on criticizing their opponents?
- Which demographic groups does the party appear to be targeting with their communications? Do you think they use different platforms to target different audiences? Explain your reasons.
- Which platform do you think is most effective and why?

Afterwards, give students an opportunity to share their work with each other through a classroom presentation, 'Gallery Walk' or an alternative method.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Elections are contests of leadership, ideas and persuasion, where interested groups and individuals campaign for our support and, ultimately, our vote.

It is the job of **political parties** and **candidates** to communicate their vision and ideas with voters in order to gain their support. A political platform is a series of declared values and proposed actions the party will take if elected.

Candidates and parties use a communications strategy that incorporates all three types of media (paid, earned, owned), as well as outreach activities and events to spread their message.

Paid media: Publicity that has been purchased to bring a message to an audience. Examples include print, broadcast or social media advertising, or a direct mail campaign.

Owned media: Communications managed by an individual, group or organization through its own platforms, such as websites, blogs or social media channels.

Earned media: Media coverage or mentions reported by third parties such as news organizations, or shared through external social media channels or through word of mouth.

Campaign outreach also includes lawn signs, public events, door-to-door canvassing and town halls or debates.

As a voter, it is your job to gather, interpret and analyze campaign information, formulate conclusions and judgments, and make your voting decision.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Section	Guiding Questions for Teachers
Starter	Can students identify different ways political parties or candidates share their messages using concrete examples? Can students predict what makes communication effective? Can they reflect on how the pandemic has changed the tactics used by parties and candidates?
Activities	Can students distinguish between different types of media? Can they identify the purpose of sample political communications? Can students identify criteria for effective political messaging? Do students understand how to annotate? Can students analyze key text features and visual elements (e.g., word choice, bold, colours, fonts)? Can students identify target audiences and/or how different audiences might respond to different messages?
Consolidation	Can students apply criteria for determining effectiveness? Are students able to explain why they ranked the communication strategies or campaigns in a particular way?

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	**Modifications** • Group students so that everyone participates within their comfort level. • Use simple vocabulary when describing political terms. • Replay videos frequently or provide advanced access. **Enrichment** • Ask students to create their own additions to each party's campaign – remembering to be in line with the party platform and campaign goals.
Language Learners	• Ensure subtitles are on during any videos and replay them numerous times. • Give clear criteria and post key terms and definitions for student reference.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	• It may be appropriate to show political ads from a country outside of North America as examples. Be sure that you understand the language and context. • Be selective in your choices of political ads so that students do not feel uncomfortable (e.g., anti-immigration platform ads).
Accessibility & Accommodations	• Use technology options if needed. Websites such as note.ly or padlet.com may be helpful.