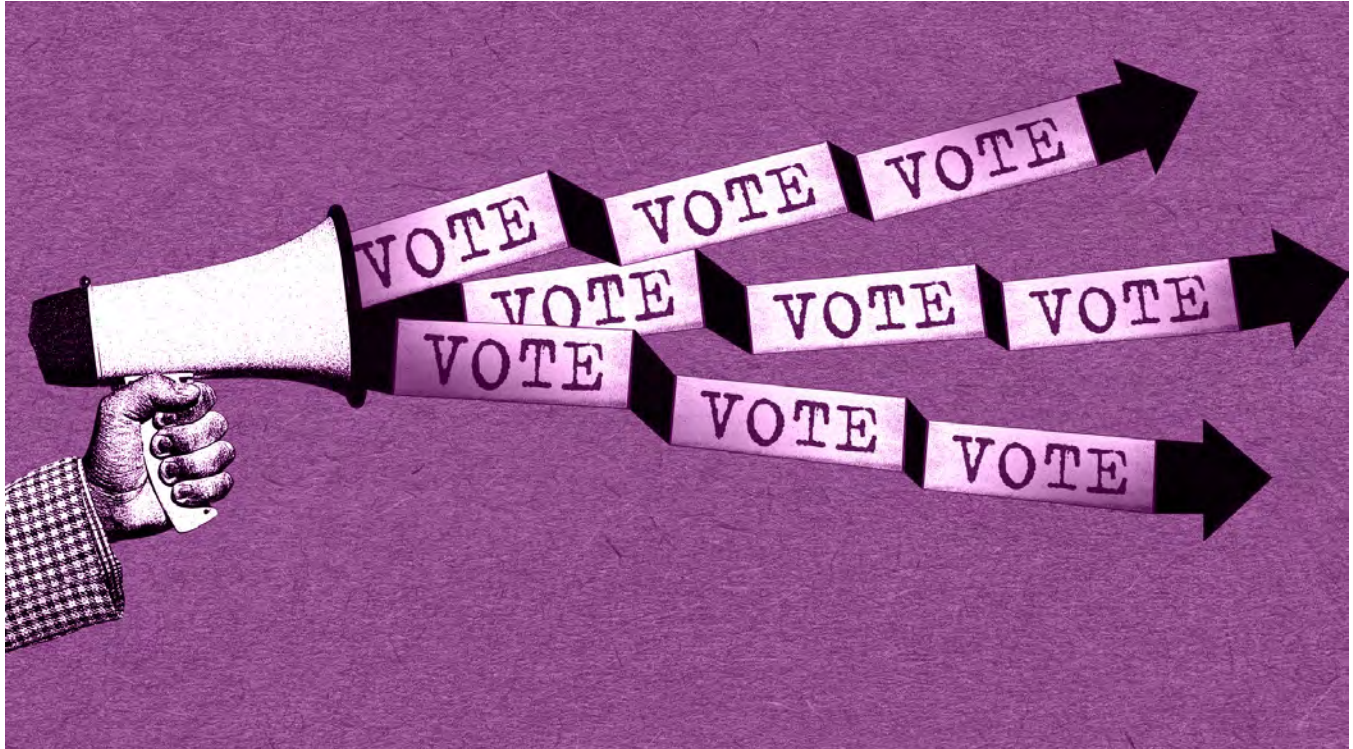


Lesson 4: Political Persuasion



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do political campaigns win voter support through advertising and communications?**
- 2 What are some common techniques used in political advertising to try to persuade voters?**
- 3 How can we analyze the effectiveness of a political ad?**

OVERVIEW

Political campaigns use a variety of persuasion techniques to influence public opinion and gain the support of voters.

In this lesson, students learn to recognize common persuasive techniques and analyze their use in political communication. Students identify these techniques by examining real-world political advertisements and analyze their effectiveness.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the role of persuasion in politics;
- describe common persuasive techniques;
- analyze real-world examples of political messaging and identify the persuasive techniques being used; and,
- evaluate the effectiveness of political messaging.

Starter

1. Begin with a quick brainstorm: Where do we see persuasive messaging in daily life? (e.g., social media, commercials, advertisements, op-eds, billboards, political speeches, protest signs, online petitions).
2. Have students think of a recent example of persuasive messaging they encountered.
 - What was the message?
 - Where did you see it?
 - What made it persuasive? (e.g., emotional appeal, facts, credibility)

Ask a few students to share their examples.

3. Discuss as a class: How do persuasive messages influence our opinions and behaviours?

Emphasize that persuasion isn't inherently harmful or deceptive. Like any form of communication, it can be used in both positive and negative ways, ethically and unethically.

Activities

1. Watch the “[CIVIX Explains: Persuasive Sources](#)” video to review the primary purposes of communication and the various groups that use persuasive messaging to influence people.
2. Discuss the role of persuasion in politics using Slide Deck 4.
 - Persuasive messaging in politics is meant to appeal primarily to our emotions in order to influence our opinions or actions, like supporting a particular issue or policy, or voting for a candidate.
 - Political communication focuses on the same objectives that we see in everyday advertising. These techniques try to invoke various emotions, including hope and optimism, fear and anxiety, outrage and anger, patriotism and pride, nostalgia, as well as compassion and empathy.
 - Persuasive messaging doesn't always have to be serious. Humour is a really useful way to get people's attention.

3. Using Slide Deck 4, review some specific persuasive techniques used by looking at examples from advertising. We have provided multiple examples for each technique. Please review them ahead of time before showing them to your class (or provide some of your own examples).

For each example, ask students to consider the following prompts.

- How does the ad make you feel?
- What makes the ad persuasive?
- Is it effective? Did the ad use the technique effectively? Why or why not?

For some examples, you may want to show students the ad and discuss their reactions before revealing the technique. The techniques covered include:

- Using slogans or catchphrases
- Inciting fear
- Instilling a sense of hope or of a better future
- 'Us vs. Them' framing
- Presenting ideas as obvious and beyond debate
- Appeals to nostalgia

4. Distribute or provide access to Activity 4.1. Explain to students that they will analyze how these persuasive techniques can be used in politics by looking at current or historical examples from a range of political parties (historical example bank provided at studentvote.ca/canada). For each example, students will briefly describe the ad, identify the techniques at play, identify the emotions the ad is trying to target, and evaluate the effectiveness of the ad.

TEACHER NOTES:

- If you provide current election examples, make sure that multiple political parties are represented.
- Emphasize that some examples might use multiple techniques at once and encourage students to write down all the techniques they can identify.

Consolidation

As a whole class or in small groups, discuss the following questions:

- After analyzing the various ads, what makes a political message effective in your opinion?
- What persuasive technique do you find most effective and why?
- What is the difference between persuasion and lying? Do you think using persuasive techniques can ever be unethical? Why or why not?
- After thinking critically about a persuasive message, how can you decide for yourself whether or not to agree with it? What information would you need to make a well-informed choice?

Extended Learning

Have students work in groups to create their own persuasive political messaging related to the current federal election. Ask students to accompany their work with a short reflection about the techniques they used and why they think they are effective. Afterward, organize a physical or digital gallery walk where students can see each other's work. As they review each other's work, ask students to make note of the different persuasive techniques used.

Adaptations and Supports

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-teach key vocabulary (e.g., persuasion, bias, opinion, platform, rhetoric).• Use visuals or real-world examples of persuasive ads with subtitles or translations if possible.• Provide sentence starters for analyzing persuasive messages (e.g., "This message is trying to convince me to..." or "The ad uses ___ to make me feel ___").
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include political messages that reflect a range of cultural perspectives and community concerns.• Encourage students to reflect on how persuasive messaging may resonate differently based on cultural values, lived experiences, or identity.• Invite comparisons between Canadian political messages and those from students' countries of origin, where applicable.
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide audio versions of persuasive texts or videos with captions.• Allow students to work with a partner or small group when analyzing messages.• Permit alternative ways to demonstrate understanding (e.g., recording a short audio explanation).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Persuasion plays a key role in democracy and the development of our political system. If you want to improve society, you must persuade others to support your issues, strategies, proposals, and legislation.

This is especially true during elections when political parties or candidates try to campaign for your vote to be elected.

Political ads are specifically designed to appeal to our **emotions** and attempt to connect with the audience on a personal level by triggering various emotions, such as hope, fear, anxiety, outrage, patriotism, and compassion. While many political ads take on a serious tone, persuasive messaging can also effectively use humour to appeal to people who might not typically engage with politics.

By and large, political advertising uses many of the same persuasive techniques as commercial advertising. Some of the most common persuasion techniques used during an election include the following:

- **Using slogans or catchphrases:** Slogans and catchphrases can reduce complex issues or ideas into easily digestible, oversimplified messages that make ideas or arguments more persuasive. These catchphrases help reinforce key ideas in voters' minds, making the candidate or policy easier to remember.
- **Inciting fear:** This technique emphasizes, or sometimes exaggerates, threats and dangers to make it seem like something terrible will happen if we don't change our behaviour. This technique often presents a worst-case scenario of what could happen if a specific candidate or policy is chosen. Ads focusing on threats to national security, economic collapse, or personal safety are often examples of fear-based persuasion.
- **Instilling a sense of hope or optimism:** This technique emphasizes a vision of a better future. These ads inspire optimism and a sense of possibility, encouraging voters to believe in a brighter tomorrow if a particular candidate or party is elected.
- **'Us vs. Them' framing:** This technique divides supporters of a particular candidate or party and an opposing group. Political ads attempt to build solidarity among supporters and demonize the opposition, dividing people into opposing groups to create feelings of loyalty to an "in-group" and feelings of opposition to an "out-group."
- **Presenting ideas as obvious and beyond debate:** This technique frames policies as self-evident, universally acceptable, or beyond debate to discourage critical thinking or opposition.
- **Appeals to nostalgia:** This technique romanticizes the past as a "better" time to persuade voters that returning to these conditions is the solution to current problems. This appeal often taps into idealized images of a simpler, more prosperous time. It can resonate with individuals who feel disconnected from the present or feel that the present is chaotic and in need of change.