

# Modern Propaganda, Elections, and the Future

Propaganda: information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, institution, nation, etc. (dictionary.com).

Using propaganda as a tactic to persuade an audience to agree with a message is a common practice in politics. With the 2015/2016 presidential election cycle currently in progress, it is essential that people of voting age in the United States are able to separate fact from fiction in relation to what the candidates are claiming. In this essay, I will be using a combination of objective and subjective perspectives to analyze the effectiveness of modern propaganda on voters' tendencies to view candidates favorably or unfavorably.

In the age of the internet, modern propaganda is much more dangerous than in previous decades because it includes input from uninformed civilians. Just as a politician can release an official video or poster with exaggerated facts or outright lies, any person can make an image that supports their point of view, and state it as fact. For example:



Figure 1. This Is What A Successful Presidency Looks Like image. Adapted from Reddit, 2016.

Retrieved from

[https://www.reddit.com/r/PropagandaPosters/comments/40h38n/this\\_is\\_what\\_a\\_successful\\_presidency\\_looks\\_like/](https://www.reddit.com/r/PropagandaPosters/comments/40h38n/this_is_what_a_successful_presidency_looks_like/)

This image was posted on Reddit.com, by someone who is clearly a fan of Barack Obama. However, there are two problems with this image. First, Reddit is not a reliable source. It is a forum that allows people to post anything that they want on the website. Second, there is no way of knowing if the person who posted the image fact checked the statistics. A politically uninformed voter or a person who is already a fan of Obama may look at the image and assume that the numbers accurately reflect his performance as president of the United States. The appearance of boring numbers and sophisticated words helps the viewer perceive the information as credible even though it might not be. This is how an average person accidentally or purposefully increases the amount of propaganda that reaches the general public.

Another important aspect of effective propaganda is memorability. Two particular pieces of memorable propaganda come to mind, the Obama “Hope” campaign and the famous Uncle Sam “I Want YOU for the U.S. Army” poster.



*Figure 2.* Obama Hope Poster. Adapted from Huffington Post, 2008. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-arnon/how-the-obama-hope-poster\\_b\\_133874.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-arnon/how-the-obama-hope-poster_b_133874.html)



*Figure 3.* I Want YOU for U.S. Army Poster. Adapted from American Treasures of the Library of Congress, 2010. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm015.html>

From a personal perspective, I believe that the 2008 Obama “Hope” poster was effective propaganda. As a young sophomore in high school, I did not make any effort to follow any sort of U.S. or world politics. However, during the 2008 election when Barack Obama was first elected president, the one element of his campaign that I remember catching my attention was the flashy red, white, and blue portrait of Obama with large letters spelling HOPE at the bottom of the poster. Even today, that poster is what first comes to mind when I think about either of Obama’s presidential campaigns. The idea of hope was inspiring because it came at a time when many people had lost their jobs due to the Recession that was brought on by the corruption inside of the big banks. Therefore, the promise of hope strongly influenced the actions of millions of people who voted for President Obama.

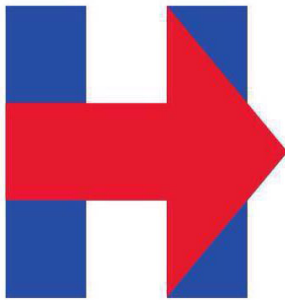
The Uncle Sam “I want YOU for the U.S. Army” poster was used as pro-war propaganda to convince young men to join the army in both World War I and World War II (American Treasures of the Library of Congress, 2010). This image has a lasting effect on people who have seen it. Its memorability has been proven by the fact that it was effective enough to be used for two wars. The poster features the character, Uncle Sam, who represents the greatness of the United States. The aggressive nature of Uncle Sam’s request to join the army instills the idea that even YOU, the average citizen, can do it too. Overall, the poster implies that joining the army in a time of war is the most patriotic way to help your country.

Applying these same elements (memorability, slogans, and images) to the current race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, we can analyze how effective the propaganda they are using in their campaigns will be in the outcome of the general election.

Hillary Clinton’s slogan is “I’m With Her.” This highlights the fact that if she were to be elected, she would be the first female president of the United States. In any other election, the

prospect of having a female president would be the main focus. However, between the excitement of Donald Trump and the rise of Bernie Sanders, the hype for Hillary was left in the dust. Though her slogan is short and easy to remember, the impact of the slogan is considerably less effective than it should be.

Fortunately, Hillary Clinton's original campaign logo is more dynamic because it does not depend on her gender being the selling point. The logo started off with a simple "H" with an arrow through the middle, as if it is pointing towards Hillary Clinton and implying that she is the correct direction to go. The two sides of the "H" are blue and the arrow is red. Then it evolved into a blue themed logo that also includes her slogan, "I'm with her" and her campaign website.



*Figure 4.* Hillary Clinton Campaign Logo. Adapted from Designer Daily, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.designer-daily.com/the-great-hillary-clinton-campaign-logo-controversy-52451>



*Figure 5.* I'm with Her Car Magnet. Adapted from the Hillary Clinton website, 2016. Retrieved from <https://shop.hillaryclinton.com/products/im-with-her-car-magnet>

The extra information on the evolved logo clarifies her message. It was brought back with the intention of bringing unity to the democratic party, which backfired because Bernie Sanders supporters did not interpret it that way. Most likely the average Bernie supporters will

eventually default back to Hillary Clinton as their vote for the general election, even if it is only because they are not Trump fans. The two logos that she used may not have been very effective during the primaries, but it could potentially be more effective in the general election simply because more people *will* be with her.

Yet, the republican nominee, Donald Trump, took a different approach to how he created visual propaganda for his campaign. Instead of a poster, he made hats. The red baseball cap sports his campaign slogan “Make America Great Again.” Even from a far distance, the symbol is instantly recognizable. A Trump supporter can be spotted a mile away. The hat idea is brilliant because people willingly carry and spread his message on a daily basis, unlike a sign that cannot be easily transported during a working person’s average day.



*Figure 6.* Make America Great Again hat.  
Adapted from the Donald Trump campaign website,  
2015.  
Retrieved from <https://shop.donaldjtrump.com/product-p/dtc-odtrh-rd.htm>

Do you own this hat? Have you seen someone with this hat? If you have, then you are most likely a Donald Trump supporter or met someone that supports him.

A strategy that may be even more effective is using videos to tell a story through moving images. During the Democratic National Convention Hillary Clinton released a series of video ads for a campaign she called, “In His Own Words.”<sup>1</sup> The videos showed images of a particular group of people next to quotes of actual things Donald Trump said about them. It was powerful because a face was given to the people who are personally affected by the actions of Donald Trump.

The videos that Donald Trump released during the Republican National Convention<sup>2</sup> repeatedly painted Hillary as a monster and a liar. The videos fed off of the crowd’s anger and fear by reassuring them that the negative parts of the country that they already believed in were true. This was effective because using human emotion to make a point makes the viewer believe that they are deeply connected to the campaign, thus, making their loyalty to the candidate stronger.

Finally, people my age, millennials, will be voting in the presidential election for the first or second time. Many of us are coming to the realization that the outcome will directly affect us more than it did in the past. We are also a generation of taking the initiative to actively be part of the political process, either by volunteering or protesting. Some of us are fighting for a political revolution that will continue long after the election. Even though we might not like either of the candidates in the race, we must take advantage of our constitutional right to vote because we have the power to change the future of our country.

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<sup>1</sup> Link to Hillary Clinton’s DNC videos <https://www.youtube.com/user/DemConvention/search?query=in+his+own+words>

<sup>2</sup> Link to Donald Trump’s RNC videos <https://www.gop.com/videos/>

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