

Assignment 2: Observing the Intersection of Politics and Social Media

In this assignment, I have located four different political ads on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube that were intended to inform voters for the 2018 midterm elections. In an effort to stay armed with facts during the election I conducted the following analysis:

1) North Dakota Hunting Ad, Published Early November 2018



Taken Down from Facebook but you can find the ad here on the NYtimes website:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/04/us/politics/election-misinformation-facebook.html>

Link to Facebook Delete Page:

https://www.facebook.com/ads/archive/?active_status=all&ad_type=political_and_issue_ads&country=US&q=hunters%20north%20dakota

This ad was intended to suppress voters in North Dakota by insinuating that the state would revoke hunting licenses from all those who voted. It was published by a group called Hunters Alerts and claims to be funded by the North Dakota Democratic – Nonpartisan Lead (NPL) Party. The ad targets the concerns conservative voters especially, implying stricter gun control thereby discouraging them from participating in the election.

However, the presumed threat seems to be an empty claim given that the link provided on the ad brings readers to an [amateur web page](#) with the same text displayed in the original Facebook ad. Additionally, the webpage address is feigned to look like the official url of the North Dakota Democratic-NPL Party website: <https://demnpl.com/by-voting-in-north-dakota-you-could-forfeit-your-hunting-licenses/>. Upon searching the official website, you find messages completely contradictory to the advertisement as well. In fact, there is an [entire page](#) on the official website dedicated to encouraging voter participation. On the page visitors will find information about their polling station, how to register and how to submit ballots. Whoever disseminated the ad may have believed that it would appear authentic given that the North Dakota Democratic – NPL Party daily shares many articles bashing conservative nominees and their ideals. The main target is a man named Kevin Cramer, a Republican candidate for the North Dakota Senate seat. He was conveniently running against an NPL Party member, Heidi Heitkamp. After conducting a lateral search on the official website there were no official sources questioning the credibility and reputation of the organization. The North Dakota Democratic-NPL Party was the product of a merger between the North Dakota Nonpartisan League and the Democratic Party in North Dakota. Each of those respective organizations dating back to the 1910s. Yet the organization who published the ad, Hunter Alerts, has no presence other than from the deleted Facebook page.

After the publication of the ad it was generally dismissed. [The New York times](#) dubbed the ad misleading and [conservative outlets](#) who picked up on the ad before it was taken down, doubted its credibility. Similarly, the licensing manager for the North Dakota Game and Fishing Department had no knowledge about the ad denied its claims. Within days of the ad being published it was also deleted from [Facebook](#) however it was initially verified by Facebook and stored in the ad archive before being deleted. Consequently, this support from Facebook could have caused some viewers to initially trust the message to an extent.

The ad comes about in the midst of a close race between Heidi Heitkamp and the aforementioned Kevin Cramer where Heitkamp was struggling to hold on to her senate seat. Heitkamp's campaign was accused of similar misleading advertising tactics where she [printed the names](#) of sexual assault and domestic violence survivors in a public newspaper without their consent and even incorrectly identifying some individuals as well. Presumably, this could be seen as a tactic to rally liberal support for Heitkamp's campaign while the Hunter Alerts ad was used to suppress the conservative vote for her opponent. Whether or not Heitkamp's campaign published the ad is still uncertain but the information it contains has definitely been debunked.

2) Donald Trump Ad Immigration Ad, Published October 31, 2018:

<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1057728445386539008>



Donald J. Trump ✓

@realDonaldTrump

Follow

It is outrageous what the Democrats are doing to our Country. Vote Republican now!
Vote.GOP



1:18 PM - 31 Oct 2018

42,058 Retweets 97,947 Likes



58K 42K 98K

This advertisement was posted by President Donald Trump on his personal twitter feed. It was developed and [financed](#) by his administration similar to the ads he's published during his presidential campaign. The ad villainizes immigration showcasing inflammatory remarks from Luis Bracamontes, an illegal immigrant convicted for murdering two California police offers. Interspersed are also cherry-picked remarks from participants in the caravan admitting to violent felonies they committed. Overall, the entire ad is heavily biased towards the far-right anti-immigration sentiments with the aim of painting all immigrants as gruesome and lawless criminals. The intent of this advertisement is clear: encourage the American electorate to vote

GOP and condemn Democrats for endangering the country. Trump's motives are reinforced by the concluding message, that "President Donald J. Trump and Republicans are Making America Safe Again."

As for the validity of the claims in the advertisement, they have been dubbed deceptive and misleading by [The New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#) and [CNN](#) who refused to run it on its platform. NBC and Facebook also banned the ad from running because of community standard violations. The caravan is nowhere near the U.S border yet, contrary to the footage of people storming what appears to be the U.S. border. The caravan was last reported to be in Mexico near Tijuana. Furthermore, many of the participants in the caravan are [not criminals](#) and are simply normal individuals fleeing violence, economic hardship and seeking asylum. Moreover, Democrats did not organize or financially support the caravan as the ad claims. They do support [legislation for more border security](#) and to want address the root cause of the migrant crisis but not by directly supporting the caravan. All of the footage in the ad, though real, is out a context and littered with rhetoric. Consequently, this ad would not provide sound facts for voters to make informed decisions.

Consequently, Trump's advertisement has been written off as a fear mongering tactic and conspiracy theory. All of the major [political commentators](#) condemned the advertisement as racist and inaccurate. Despite major news outlets' harsh critique and systematic debunking of the ad's claims there are still Trump supporters who find veracity in the message, "Once again, we believe that Donald Trump is under attack, and that the Democrats are orchestrating it."¹Evidently, this comment mirrors the frightening support base for Trump and the empty incendiary message he touts. Conversely, the comment section underneath the video demonstrates a healthy balance between left-wing and right-wing dissenters. Many cited the Washington Post articles which falsified the claims in the video while others affirmed the empty claims in the video equally blaming Democrats for "dangerous illegals."

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/20/us/politics/trump-migrant-caravan-midterm.html>

3) **Rich Madaleno Maryland Senate Ad**, Published June 8, 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24rb53EPdSM>



This advertisement was published by the Madaleno Campaign, Marylanders for Madaleno, as noted by the message line at the bottom of the video. The treasurer of his campaign, Linda Eisenstadt, is also listed in the “paid for” line further connecting the funds to the Madaleno’s team.

In order to encourage progressive voters to support his campaign Rich Madaleno discusses his stance on a range of hot button topics including supporting Planned Parenthood, banning armed weapons and supporting public schools. All of his positions were definitely left-leaning and even has a provocative intent. Madaleno has centered his campaign around an anti-trump sentiment, ending his video kissing his husband in an effort to annoy Trump and his supporters. Initially when you first search Madaleno using Marylanders for Madaleno-Jenkins it does take you to a [disabled link](#). However, given the end of election season, it is logical that site would be taken down once the campaign has completed. In order to verify that the site truly existed in the first place and that Madaleno actually ran a campaign I located two [Washington Post](#) articles that profiled Maryland’s gubernatorial primary candidates. Both Washington Post articles corroborate Madaleno’s support for the legislation he cites in the video including funding [Planned Parenthood](#) and [banning assault weapons](#).

Support for the advertisement varied greatly. On Youtube the first dozen comments were almost all negative right-wing bashes. Most people targeted Madaleno’s sexuality and his blatant anti-conservative campaign strategy. These comments were not substantive criticism but more incendiary remarks. Comments from the Washington Post articles revealed Maryland

constituents constructively critiquing the specifics of Madaleno's campaign. Marylanders want more to be done around traffic congestion and health care - some of the issues he did not touch on in the video. The reporters from the Washington Post also had their own opinions about Madaleno's success in the polls but none of the commentary was derived from the ad. Most of the conversation around this video spoke to how his constituents would receive him in light of the current political climate.

- 4) **RGA Georgia TV Ad**, Published August 10, 2018
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI32ZBImwUw>



The above ad I found to be financed by the [Republican Governors Association](#) (RGA) which is a DC-based 527 organization whose primary objective is to elect and support Republican governors. By publishing this ad, RGA aims to discredit Stacey Abrams' gubernatorial campaign by targeting her support for higher taxes and juxtaposing it against her alleged personal tax evasion. Given the mission of RGA, their motive for defaming Stacey Abrams is to bolster the position of her Republican opponent by discouraging republican support for her campaign.

Though the claim made in the ad is technically [true](#) it omits important context about Abrams' circumstance. She does owe around 50,000 in taxes because she has been paying of her school debt and supporting two households in her family. Additionally, upon closer look at her IRS documents she is on a repayment plan to settle her debts with the government which she explain in depth in her [op-ed](#) in Fortune magazine. As Abrams has been proven to not be

engaged in blatant tax evasion it does not truly matter how much she [personally donated](#) to her own campaign. She is not spending money she owes the government. The \$50,000 figure stated in the ad is [verified and true](#)- Abrams has in fact loaned that much to her campaign. The contribution to her campaign does not mean automatically mean she has been delinquent with her regular payment amounts to the IRS.

Snopes further explains that Abrams opponent is also [in debt](#) for failing to repay a loan to a private company. A fact that the RGA advertisement conveniently overlooked, proving its loyalty to the Republican Candidate. With this said, the messages in the advertisement were misleading and not accurate information with which voters should have based their decisions. In spite of these misleading claims, Stacey Abrams received overwhelming support for her campaign with over 13,000 donations totaling around \$6 million. Her constituents say that they can better connect with her as a candidate since she endures the same financial struggles as the common person. "Learning about Abrams' debt, Holley said, assured her that the Democrat is the only candidate who has 'been through the kinds of things my family and friends have gone through,'" ² However, some of Abrams' constituents are wary about her funding practices in general and not necessarily those specific to her personal contributions. There has been scrutiny over out-of-state funding for her campaign has- "Out-of-state interests are not in line with Georgia interests. And people in the state should drive the election," ³ said Don Lowery, a 53-year old database administrator from Marietta. Overall, in spite of the speculation about the integrity of all of Abram's sources of funding, the specific claims of the ad were too misconstrued to be inform voters' decisions.

² <https://politics.myajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/democrat-irs-debt-faces-scrutiny-georgia-governor-race/GCuJYI51XrC4juQubAiZLJ/>

³ <https://politics.myajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/raising-cash-outside-georgia-both-strength-vulnerability-for-abrams/ZaiD0pr4HFOzGqIYpv7MhK/>