

FIGNEWS-2024 - Propaganda

Guidelines v.1

Team: BIAS-BLUFF-BUSTERS
Subtask: Propaganda Annotation

Task

Annotate texts from the Israel war on Gaza and determine if such texts are propagandistic. This effort is part of the FIGNEWS2024 shared task, aiming at understanding and identifying propaganda in news articles and the different layers through which it could be expressed.

Cautionary note

Before diving into this annotation task, it's important to acknowledge that the texts you'll encounter may contain unsettling and distressing content. This could involve references to violent or tragic incidents, instances of physical and mental abuse, usage of inappropriate language, and deliberate dissemination of misinformation that may provoke distress.

Take breaks when necessary, don't hesitate to seek support if needed, and feel empowered to pause the annotation process if it becomes too uncomfortable. While your assistance in identifying propaganda is valuable, prioritizing your well-being is paramount.

Self-Reflection

Approaching this task requires you to acknowledge the presence of propaganda's influence, which can permeate our perceptions and beliefs. Reflect on how your personal biases might shape your interpretation of the propaganda. Consider the emotional impact it has on you and how it may attempt to manipulate your opinions.

Are there any personal connections or affiliations that could influence your perspective? Do you feel drawn towards or sympathetic to any particular side or group depicted in the propaganda? Reflect on your familiarity with the historical context of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the sources from which you've gathered information. Are there societal or cultural influences that may predispose you to favor one side over the other?

Furthermore, consider how you typically consume information about the conflict, including the language used and the credibility of the sources. Are there biases inherent in the sources you rely on for information?

Now, with these considerations in mind, would you label yourself as susceptible to propaganda? It's natural if you recognize some level of susceptibility. These guidelines aim to help you recognize and mitigate the influence of propaganda, both in the content you're analyzing and within yourself, fostering a more critical and objective approach.

Ready to commence? Let's begin unraveling the layers of propaganda.

What is propaganda?

Propaganda may occur in many different forms, but they share their persuasive function, the targeting of a specific audience, the representation of a group's specific agenda and it can contain faulty reasoning. Before diving into this annotation task, it's important to acknowledge that the texts you'll encounter may contain unsettling and distressing content. This could involve references to violent or tragic incidents, instances of physical and mental abuse, usage of inappropriate language, and deliberate dissemination of misinformation that may provoke distress.

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As annotator's are more likely to not judge a text as propagandistic if it aligns with their personal beliefs, we want to introduce 18 categories of linguistic cues (Da San Martino et.al, 2019) that can help to identify propaganda without the consultation of external sources.

We can divide those categories into 6 high-level groups similar as in Piskorski et al. (2023), according to the persuasive strategies that they employ.

Justification

The statement or argument usually contains two parts. The first is made up of a statement and the second of a supportive or justifying explanation that provides evidence or reasoning to back up the initial claim.

Type	Definition	Example
Appeal to authority	Saying something is true because an expert or authority agrees with it, without giving more evidence.	"Imam Hassan Chalghoumi strongly criticizes the atrocities committed by ISIS, Hamas, including the killing of children and women and rape, stressing that there is no cure in Islam. We must say that this is forbidden and is not permissible according to Islamic law!", "Israel Hamas War: Sunak's statement amid the war, all the big leaders of the world were shocked!"
Appeal to fear/prejudice	Trying to make people support something by scaring them towards an alternative or playing on their biases.	"If we don't stop Hamas, it will arrive in Europe", "Those who don't make plans to conquer Gaza will be caught off guard when they conquer us."
Flag-waving	Using strong national feelings to support or justify an action or idea.	"In the video, the medical staff celebrated him as he left the hospital, wrapped in the Israeli flag, to regain his strength and abilities after 44 days in the hospital during which he underwent treatment. Defending the homeland is unparalleled!"

Bandwagon	Convincing people to do something just because many others are doing it.	Ex.: “Hundreds of thousands of people marched this weekend across the world to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people. In London, between 500,000 and a million people were counted by the organizers and several tens of thousands more gathered in Paris and Brussels. Since the start of Israel's war against Gaza, numerous demonstrations in support of the Palestinians have taken place.”
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Simplification

An argument is excessively simplified. Usually, the cause, the consequences or the existence of alternatives are disregarded.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Causal oversimplification	Blaming one cause for something when there are actually many causes. This includes scapegoating, i.e. blaming a single person or group of people.	Ex.: “The conflict could end quickly if Hamas stops its attacks and lays down its weapons #Social_Sky”
Black-and-white fallacy, dictatorship	Suggesting there are only two possible choices when there are actually more. In extremes explicitly telling the audience what to do.	“When Hamas behaves like ISIS and walks around with the ISIS flag, then they are ISIS!”; “There is no alternative to war.”

Distraction

The statement removes focus from the issue at hand in order to distract the reader.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
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Straw man	Replacing an opponent's argument with another, which is then disputed instead of the original. Often caricatures the opposing view.	(not found)
Red herring	Distracting from the main issue with irrelevant information. The distracting information may be associated with the original issue, but it is not highly relevant to the issue.	Ex.: "in the face of this savage persecution which falls every day, incessantly, without restraint, without conscience on Gaza.... This song, still tragically relevant today, was composed by my friend Tewfik Benghabrit "
Whataboutism	Responding to criticism by accusing the critic of hypocrisy instead of addressing the original criticism.	"..The newspaper that normalized Sanwar". Tell me, Yanoni, did Yedioth Ahronoth correspond with Sanwar? Did Yahya write that famous note "Take a calculated risk" to Nahum Barnea, or to Bibi Netanyahu? Was it Noni Moses who sent Sanwar 30 million dollars in suitcases, every month, for years? ..“

Call

The text does not present an argument but encourages to act or think in a certain way.

Type	Definition	Example
Slogans/Hashtags	Using a short, memorable phrase to create an emotional response; may include labeling and stereotyping. We include hashtags here, as they can introduce a propagandistic touch to a message.	"Who is with whom in Israel-Hamas war? #HamasTerrorists #HamasAttacks #IsraelAtWar #IsraelHamasWar #ZeeLive #ZeeNews #FacebookLive"
Thought-terminating cliché	Using phrases that stop deeper thinking or discussion. Often short statements that offer seemingly simple	"...There is no clearer proof than this of the fact that Hamas controls all the humanitarian aid that the world pours into Gaza. You

	solutions to complex problems.	don't have to be a genius to understand the simple equation - humanitarian aid = aid to the terrorist organization Hamas!..."
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Attack on Reputation

The text does not address the topic itself, but targets the participating party (can be a person, group of individuals, organization, object or activity) directly in order to undermine them or their credibility.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Name calling or labeling	Giving someone or something a label or name that makes them seem bad or good to make others dislike or like them.	"... you are disgusting terrorists, cowards, and liars..."
Doubt	Making people question whether something or someone is credible.	"DNA: Why did Israel become the biggest arms dealer? For America, does war mean an opportunity to sell arms?"
Reductio ad Hitlerum / Guilt by Association	Associating an idea or action with a group hated by the audience to make it seem unacceptable; can be any person or concept with negative association.	Ex.: "Angelina Jolie chose to side with Gaza and actually with Hamas against Israel...", "Are you going to dissolve the Muslim Brotherhood and those who claim it? Will you reverse immigration, which fuels support for Hamas at home?..."

Manipulative Wording

The text contains words or phrases that are connotated, confusing, exaggerated in order to impact the reader on an emotional level, rather than presenting an argument.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
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Loaded language	Using words that make people feel strong emotions to persuade or influence them.	“dancing in hotels on the skulls of women and children”, “.... We will continue to strike the terrorists who carried out the inhumane massacre of October 7...”, “The never-ending sadism! ...”
Repetition	Saying the same thing many times to make people more likely to believe it.	“Lebanon attacks Israel again Lebanon attacks Israeli military camp #IsrealWar #HamasTerrorism #Isreal #Gaza #America”
Exaggeration or minimization	Making something out to be better or worse than it really is, or making it seem less important.	“This is the new proof of world war!”
Obfuscation, intentional vagueness, confusion	Using unclear language so that people can interpret it in different ways.	Ex.: “Gaza: Humanitarian disaster for displaced people Aid is blocked for Palestinians forced to leave the northern Gaza Strip. A near-total blockade of the basic necessities for survival...” → It is vague and unclear who is responsible for the blockade and why it is there.

Perspective

The text contains details making the reader feel closer to one side. Reporting events told by one side is not inherently Propaganda, because texts are often lacking enough context to make this a strong signal that there was an intent to only present that side.

Type	Definition	Example
Humanization	Bringing one side closer to the reader by introducing personal details, personal stories, details not relevant to	- a kidnapped child’s dream of becoming a teacher

	the events, but highly relatable. Assume to be manipulative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a soldier's last message to their mum - soldiers' favorite food or songs - a family that had just decorated the room for the soon-to-be born child before their house got destroyed - the student's of a destroyed university remaining exams <p>"Melissa Joudah was sleeping in her family's four-story home when an Israeli bombardment hit her at 4 a.m. during the second week of Israeli attacks on Gaza..."</p>
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Propaganda vs. Clickbait

We do not consider clickbait as propaganda, as we concluded that its intent is fundamentally different from propaganda. Clickbait is content created primarily to draw attention and compel visitors to click on a link to a specific web page. It frequently employs sensationalist headlines or intriguing teasers not to persuade readers about any particular agenda, but rather to maximize traffic and viewer engagement. The following points illustrate the difference between clickbait and propaganda:

- **Engagement Over Information:** Clickbait's principal aim is to increase clicks and traffic, rather than to inform or persuade the audience about specific topics.
- **Sensationalist Language:** Clickbait uses exaggerated or sensational language to quickly capture attention.
- **Broad Audience Appeal:** It targets a general audience rather than a specific group, and is designed to attract as many viewers as possible regardless of their ideological backgrounds.
- **Lack of Agenda:** Unlike propaganda, clickbait does not seek to promote a specific political or ideological agenda.

The following examples demonstrate cases where we can identify persuasive strategies, but the intent is not necessarily to influence the reader's perspective but to generate clicks on their articles:

Example of Clickbait	Persuasion Strategy
#BREAKING Big news from Israel... Hamas fired 150 missiles at Tel Aviv	Loaded Language
Last night in Gaza.. destruction and devastation #TV9Bharatvarsh	Loaded Language
People entered Israeli Parliament amid Israel-Hamas war, what happened?	Vague and obfuscated, rhetorical question
Israel's all out attack on Hamas, fierce attack continues, watch big news LIVE	Loaded language

While it is well possible that the full reports or articles behind the clickbait headlines contain propaganda, the headlines aim to grab the reader's attention to continue reading and engaging with their content.

Propaganda vs Bias

Bias refers to the partiality or prejudice present in a piece of media. It can manifest in various forms, such as political, cultural, or ideological leanings. Bias can occur unintentionally due to the inherent perspectives and beliefs of the creators, or it can be deliberately introduced to sway the audience towards a particular viewpoint.

On the other hand, propaganda is the deliberate dissemination of information, ideas, or rumors to influence public opinion or manipulate behavior, often in support of a particular agenda or ideology. Propaganda can be found in various forms, including news articles, advertisements, speeches, and social media posts.

While bias does not always imply propaganda, propaganda almost always contains some form of bias. Propagandistic texts typically amplify and reinforce biased perspectives to serve a specific agenda or goal. This bias can be either explicit, with overt attempts to manipulate the audience's perceptions, or implicit, subtly shaping the narrative to favor a particular viewpoint.

Moreover, while bias can be unintentional, propaganda is inherently intentional. Propagandists strategically craft their messages to sway public opinion, employing persuasive techniques such as the ones mentioned above.

Labels

There are 2 high-level labels that focus on annotating an entire example as propaganda or not. Additionally, there are 2 labels for examples that do not fall into those categories for reasons specified below.

Propaganda

This label applies to statements or texts that intentionally use emotional language, exaggerations, or misleading claims to influence the audience's opinion or behavior towards a specific agenda. A text should be labeled as "Propaganda" if it employs one or more persuasive strategies such as manipulative wording, calls to action, simplifications of complex issues, or attacks on reputation as listed above. The presence of even a single technique can qualify a text as propaganda, especially if it significantly impacts the emotional or cognitive response of the audience. However, annotators should consider the overall context (if given) and aim of the text to determine if the persuasive strategy is used prominently enough to influence perceptions actively.

"And you ask, where are the leaders of # Hamas? They enjoy seeing the blood of innocents being shed, they receive money and steal what the poor have to offer, they watch the fire of hell that they opened on # Gaza while they are fleeing in the land of # bliss or hiding underground in holes. Injustice is nothing but a curse whose end is destruction and your destruction is certain # Hamas_Sin"

Not Propaganda

This label is used for straightforward, factual reporting or statements that provide information without attempting to influence the audience through emotional or biased language. Texts suitable for this label should present balanced views and focus on delivering information rather than persuading. It's important to note that texts with sensational or attention-grabbing headlines—often referred to as clickbait—that still provide factual content without persuasive intent also fall under this category. Clickbait itself does not automatically imply propaganda if the persuasive strategies are geared towards generating clicks, rather than promoting an ideological agenda.

Thousands of # Gaza residents who were displaced to the south of the Strip are heading north to inspect their property and families with the entry into force of the temporary # truce between # Israel and # Hamas

Unclear

The "Unclear" label is meant for texts where it's difficult to determine if the intent is to persuade or merely inform because the elements of persuasion are subtle or mixed with factual reporting. Additionally, texts that contain untranslated chunks should be labeled as unclear, as annotators cannot fully understand such examples.



"The orders for the civilians were to kill the men and capture the women, the old and the children." The chilling interrogations of # Hamas terrorists detained by #Israeli police. #JT20H
Agnès Vahramian Info France 2

Not Applicable

This label is for texts that are completely outside the scope of propaganda, focusing instead on cultural, scientific, or other neutral topics that don't involve persuasive communication concerning the conflicting situation.

Nicknamed the "Newton of Gaza", this Palestinian child found a trick to light up the tents of his makeshift camp.

How To Annotate?

You are going to see a column with media texts about the conflict between Israel and Hamas. The goal is to assess one of the before-mentioned labels from a drop-down menu. You may look up information about people mentioned in the texts or even do some fact-checking, but it is not expected.

Read the Full Text: Always read the entire text, including Hashtags to assess as much as you can about the reader's intention and the context.

Assess the Impact: Consider whether the persuasive strategy used is central to the text's message and significantly shapes the reader's understanding or response.

Context Matters: Evaluate the context in which the text is presented. A persuasive technique might be less impactful in a longer, more balanced discussion compared to a brief, targeted message.

Consistency: When uncertain, compare the text with previously annotated examples of propaganda and not propaganda to ensure consistent application of criteria.

Assess the Intention: Is the intention to seek the reader's attention or is the intention to influence the reader's opinion?

Before you assign a label, think about how you would justify and explain your decision.

If you feel uncertain, you may use the [Q&A sheet](#) to ask questions and discuss edge cases with others.

References

Giovanni Da San Martino, Seunghak Yu, Alberto Barrón-Cedeño, Rostislav Petrov, and Preslav Nakov. 2019. [Fine-Grained Analysis of Propaganda in News Article](#). In *Proceedings of the 2019 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing and the 9th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing (EMNLP-IJCNLP)*, pages 5636–5646, Hong Kong, China. Association for Computational Linguistics.

Piskorski, J., Stefanovitch, N., Bausier, V. A., Faggiani, N., Linge, J., Kharazi, S., ... & Nakov, P. (2023). *News categorization, framing and persuasion techniques: Annotation guidelines*. Technical report, European Commission Joint Research Centre, Ispra (Italy).

Appendix

See [Bias Guidelines](#) for dev process, use of LLM for pre-tagging, recommendations and data quality considerations.