

Using Distrust of the Opposing Side to Build Credibility

Team: Election Security

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Introduction

As a consultant in the election security team, one of the three avenues that we are using to secure the elections from misled social media outlets is by raising awareness of the ties that Mastriano has with Donald Trump. This is in effort to dissuade people from voting for Mastriano who is publicly and famously known for preaching about voter fraud. In essence, this creates for him a “win-win” situation, where if he wins the elections, it’s because the voters also believed in this misconstrued notion, but if he loses the election, he can blame it on voter fraud. In a 1975 Stanford study conducted by researchers Ross, Lepper, and Hubbard, they found that “once formed, impressions are remarkably persistent”. Given this observation, this advertisement does not aim to dissuade people from their impressions of Mastriano, but rather use Donald Trump as a “common enemy” to influence their decisions to not vote for Mastriano.

Methods

Research from the Ipsos and PBS Newshour groups shows that in the United States, upwards of **80% of citizens are skeptical about the security and validity of the election process**. Due to this uncertainty, it is vital for us to find a way to pinpoint and convince US citizens to believe in the election process.

In order to do this, the team chose to target the age groups of **18-29 years old, and 30-49 years old in Pennsylvania**. Our intent was to capitalize on these groups’ frequent use of social media, as a method of distribution for our message.


We chose to attack this from three different angles: 1) using concrete logistical evidence, 2) using a message discounting the credibility of the opposing side, and 3) a scare message. This presentation expounds upon the 2nd, whereby we discredit the authority of Doug Mastriano who is a strong advocate for election fraud and has strong ties to Donald Trump. The goal is to use the ties that Mastriano has with Trump to convince the audience that Mastriano is a biased source of information who would propagate the agendas of Trump.

Results

Through the use of social media and online pictures of Donald Trump and Doug Mastriano, the advertisement to the right spreads the message “Trump Endorses Mastriano... Secure the Elections from Trump” to 1) announce the affiliation between Trump and Mastriano and 2) use Trump as a driving force behind not voting for Mastriano due to their connection.

This message primarily would speak to Democrats who have a negative view of Donald Trump but also works to publicize the clear affiliation Mastriano has with Trump to show that he is a biased source and his claims are not fully trustworthy.

By using social media to publicize this information, particularly Facebook, Instagram, and Tiktok since, according to Statista, these social media applications garnered the greatest attention and active monthly usage across all age groups, particularly amongst those we are targeting, making them effective sources to advertise.



Discussion

Limitations of Study:

Since the advertisement itself has not been published on social media platforms, we are unable to find the direct statistics correlated with how much this advertisement influenced people’s decisions on their votes. However, due to elements of persuasion that researchers in several papers have noted (such as mob mentality and fear appeals), there is strong evidence that discrediting the opposing side may be an effective strategy for convincing audiences.