Identifying Risks in Political Messaging

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1. *Find one democratic and one republican video advertisement related to the upcoming election. Could be presidential (endorsed by the candidates) could be a PAC ad, could be state, could be local. Please include a link to the ad.*

   Democratic: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjTjb63DgY8
   Republican: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=speJ-hLqZ-M

2. *Identify all risks which are being communicated in the ad. Do they mention/imply a scenario? Do they mention/imply consequences? Do they mention/imply likelihoods?*

   Democratic:
   Kamala Harris's ad focuses on the middle class's economic challenges. The ad presents a scenario where, under Trump, corporations have received tax cuts but are imposing unfair price hikes on middle-class families. The consequences of this scenario are clearly emphasized, showing that middle-class families are struggling financially due to the significant rise in living costs, including groceries and housing. Additionally, the likelihood of these risks is implied rather than directly stated. By highlighting that Trump sides with corporations exploiting the middle class, the ad suggests that continuing to support Trump will likely worsen the economic hardships faced by the middle class.

   Republican:
   Donald Trump's ad highlights the risks associated with Kamala Harris's handling of border security. The ad explicitly presents the risk scenario and its consequences. It first mentions how Harris's failure in border management has allowed over 10 million illegal immigrants to enter the United States. The Republicans then emphasize the severe consequence that 250,000 Americans have died due to crimes committed by these illegal immigrants. Additionally, the possibility that these risks may persist or escalate is not directly stated but is implied, much like in Harris's

ad. The phrase "Failed, Weak, Dangerously liberal" suggests that Harris's policies pose a risk to the nation and increase the likelihood of these risks intensifying.

3. *For each risk scenario mentioned in both ads, do a brief bit of background literature and try to present your best assessment of the actual likelihood and actual consequences of the risk mentioned. Compare and contrast between democratic and republican messaging.*

    Democratic:
    Kamala Harris's ad emphasizes the economic struggles of middle-class families, focusing on the scenario in which corporations benefited from tax cuts under the Trump administration while imposing unfair price hikes on essential goods like groceries and housing. Several sources support this scenario. First, the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act provided substantial tax breaks to corporations. However, many companies increase profits through stock buybacks rather than passing the benefits on to consumers or workers (Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 2018). Furthermore, a 2022 study by the Roosevelt Institute found that corporate markups reached historically high levels, particularly in essential sectors like food and housing, exacerbating the financial strain on middle-class families. During the Trump administration, the income gap between middle-class and upper-income households widened significantly, with middle-class wages growing much slower than those of wealthier households, further exacerbating economic inequality (Pew Research Center, 2020).

    Given this background, there is a high likelihood that the scenario will worsen if Trump's policies continue. Since the 2017 tax cuts, corporate practices have focused on raising markups and prioritizing shareholder profits, which has already placed a significant financial burden on middle-class families. These actions are especially prominent in sectors like housing and food. If Trump's pro-corporate policies, favoring tax cuts and deregulation, persist, these trends will likely continue or intensify. As wages remain stagnant and the cost of living rises, middle-class families will likely face more severe economic difficulties, further aggravating their already precarious financial situation, as the literature supports.
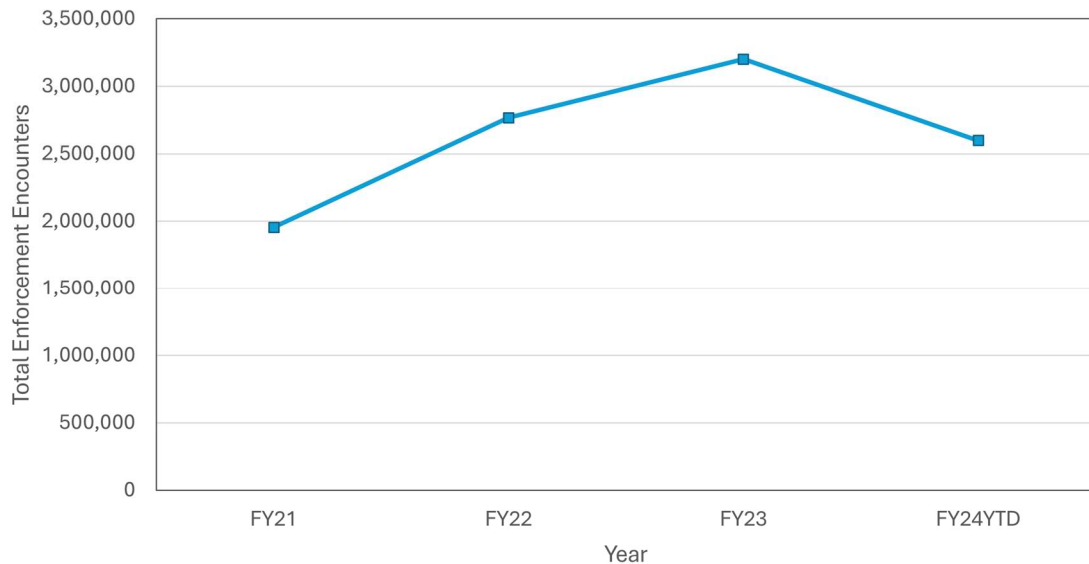
Republican:

Figure 1 Total Enforcement Encounters

According to the risk scenario in Donald Trump's advertisement, more than 10 million illegal immigrants have entered the U.S. due to Harris administration's alleged failure in managing the border, and it claims that 250,000 Americans have died because of crimes committed by these immigrants. First, U.S. Customs and Border Protection data provide insight into the number and trends of illegal immigrants. As shown in Graph 1, from FY21 to FY24YTD, the number of illegal immigrants has surpassed 10 million, with numbers rising each year. However, studies challenge the assertion that an increase in illegal immigration directly leads to a rise in crime. For example, a report by the National Institute of Justice reveals that immigrants, whether legal or illegal, are not more likely to commit crimes in the U.S. and might be less likely to do so. Another study focused on Texas, which has a large illegal immigrant population, found that U.S.-born citizens are over twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 2.5 times more likely for drug offenses, and more than four times more likely for property crimes compared to illegal immigrants.

In summary, while the rise in illegal immigration mentioned in Trump's advertisement is factual, research consistently shows that illegal immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born citizens. Furthermore, there is no reliable evidence to support the claim that 250,000 Americans have died due to crimes by illegal immigrants. Therefore, even though illegal immigration has been on the rise, the evidence suggests that its impact on crime and public safety has been overstated, and the actual risk posed to society remains minimal.

Compare and Contrast:

Both advertisements highlight potential risks associated with the opposing party's policies. The Democratic message focuses on the economic risks posed by the Trump administration's pro-corporate policies, such as tax cuts and deregulation. It argues that while these policies significantly benefit wealthy corporations, they increase the financial burden on middle-class families. In contrast, the Republican message emphasizes immigration issues, suggesting that the Harris administration's failure in border management has led to a surge in illegal immigration, resulting in higher crime rates and more American deaths.

However, the two messages differ regarding the clarity and reliability of the evidence supporting their claims. The Democratic message underscores the economic risks by citing credible research and statistics, thus increasing its reliability. Studies from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy and the Roosevelt Institute support the argument that Trump's policies negatively impacted the middle class.

On the other hand, while the Republican message accurately acknowledges the increase in immigration, its claims that illegal immigrants have increased crime rates and caused more deaths are seen as exaggerated or lacking substantial evidence. Research shows that illegal immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born citizens, and fears about immigrant-related crime are often overstated.

In conclusion, the Democratic message clearly explains economic risks based on credible data and research. In contrast, the Republican message raises exaggerated concerns about immigrant crime, relying on weaker or less substantial evidence.

4. *Do you believe they are using a targeted risk communication strategy? What elements of their communication style are related to the risk communication approaches we discussed in class (knowledge deficit, trust & credibility, science literacy etc...)*

Democratic:

The ad featuring Kamala Harris focuses on addressing the economic struggles of the middle class as its primary communication strategy. It primarily uses the Knowledge Deficit Model by presenting information about corporate tax cuts under the Trump administration in a simplified manner. This approach aims to fill the knowledge gap among viewers who may need help understanding the link between corporate tax policies and their everyday financial hardships, helping them grasp how these policies contribute to rising costs.

Additionally, the ad utilizes the Trust and Credibility Model, portraying Harris as a champion for the average American, standing up against corporate greed, in contrast to Trump, who is portrayed as favoring corporations. By framing Harris in this way, the ad establishes her as a trustworthy advocate for the public. Trust is a critical factor in risk communication, as audiences are more likely to accept and act on messages from leaders they view as credible. Through this strategy, the ad strengthens the audience's confidence in Harris as the right leader to tackle these urgent economic issues.

Republican:

The Republican ad primarily uses the Trust and Credibility Model to position Donald Trump as the most dependable leader for managing national security risks, particularly regarding border control. By highlighting Trump's past immigration policies and contrasting them with Kamala Harris's perceived failures, the ad seeks to build trust in Trump's ability to safeguard the nation from external threats. Given that national security issues tend to evoke strong emotions, the ad focuses on strengthening trust in Trump's leadership to encourage support for his policies.

While the ad incorporates the Knowledge Deficit Model, it does so to a lesser extent. The primary strategy is not to educate but to appeal to emotions. The ad deliberately amplifies fears and concerns surrounding immigration, aiming to evoke strong emotional responses that drive the audience to support Trump.

For ISE 589 Students

1. *Identify emotional elements (similar to those used as controls in the paper) which are present in the democratic and republican ads you analyzed in Q1. For each element, identify whether it is positive or negative.*

   Democratic:
   Negative
   - *Messages*: costs are too high; corporations are gouging families; Trump is focused on giving them tax cuts.

   Positive
   - *Messages*: Harris is focused on you building up the middle class; She'll make groceries more affordable by cracking down on price gouging and she'll cut

housing costs by taking on corporate speculators; middle class families build America.

- *Images*: Kamala Harris sharing a moment of closeness with a smiling mother and child; a smiling mother and baby.

Republican:

Negative

- *Messages*: she's failed us; over 10 million illegally here; a million Americans dead from fetal brutal migrant crimes and Isis; Kamala Harris failed weak dangerously liberal.
- *Images*: Kamala Harris smiling and dancing; illegal immigrants crossing the border; negative news.

2. *Analyze which risks are painted with a positive or negative emotional light. How does the positive or negative emotional language compare with the actual and implied/stated likelihoods identified in Q1. Are there consistent trends between political parties?*

When comparing Kamala Harris's Democratic ad and Donald Trump's Republican ad, both use negative emotional elements, but they differ significantly in their approach and overall message. The Democratic ad highlights the economic risks the middle-class faces, painting a picture of financial hardship under Trump's policies. The negative messaging about rising costs, corporate greed, and Trump's focus on tax cuts for large companies aligns with these risks. However, the ad ultimately shifts to a positive tone by presenting Kamala Harris as the leader who can resolve these economic struggles. By emphasizing her plans to tackle corporate price gouging and reduce living costs, the ad uses enthusiasm signals to offer a hopeful solution for the future.

In contrast, Trump's Republican ad maintains a consistent focus on fear and anxiety throughout. The ad emphasizes the failure of border control and immigration issues, portraying these problems as significant threats to national security. It suggests Harris's policies only exacerbate these dangers, framing the situation as a significant risk to American society. By amplifying these fears, the ad aims to make voters view the current situation as dire, arguing that only Trump's strong leadership can address these issues effectively. This approach aligns with the Republican Party's traditional focus on national security and immigration, where fear is used to underscore the need for decisive action and leadership.

Analyzing the trends between the two parties reveals distinct differences in how they communicate risks. The Democratic ad acknowledges the seriousness of the problems but ultimately offers a message of hope, focusing on the positive future that Harris can bring. On the other hand, the Republican ad continuously emphasizes fear and anxiety, pressuring voters to support strong leadership to combat the perceived threats. While the Democratic ad concludes with optimism centered on economic recovery, the Republican ad remains focused on the dangers of the current situation, particularly about security and immigration. These differences reflect each party's traditional policy priorities and political strategies, with Democrats leaning toward solutions and optimism and Republicans highlighting the need for strong action in the face of ongoing threats.

References

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