

# POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

Power, Media, Emotion, Identity, and Technology

A systematic analytical report

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## Political Propaganda

Power, Media, Emotion, Identity, Technology

**A System for Reconstructing  
Public Reality**

From ancient persuasion to algorithmic  
influence operations



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## Executive Summary

Political propaganda is not merely a lie, an advertisement, or a loud campaign slogan. It is **organized communication by power** that uses facts, claims, rumors, half-truths, symbols, selective evidence, emotional triggers, and sometimes falsehoods to shape how a public understands reality and how it behaves inside that reality. Its purpose is not only to persuade people about one issue. Its deeper purpose is to structure perception: who is trusted, who is feared, who is blamed, which facts matter, which facts disappear, and which political actions feel necessary or inevitable.

The most important feature of propaganda is its systemic character. It links message creators, institutions, media channels, emotional cues, identity formation, repetition, social pressure, and political objectives. Propaganda can be used by states, parties, movements, military organizations, media networks, corporations, foreign intelligence services, interest groups, influencers, or decentralized online communities. It can be truthful in its individual facts yet manipulative in its framing; it can be false in its content yet powerful because it aligns with existing grievance or group identity.

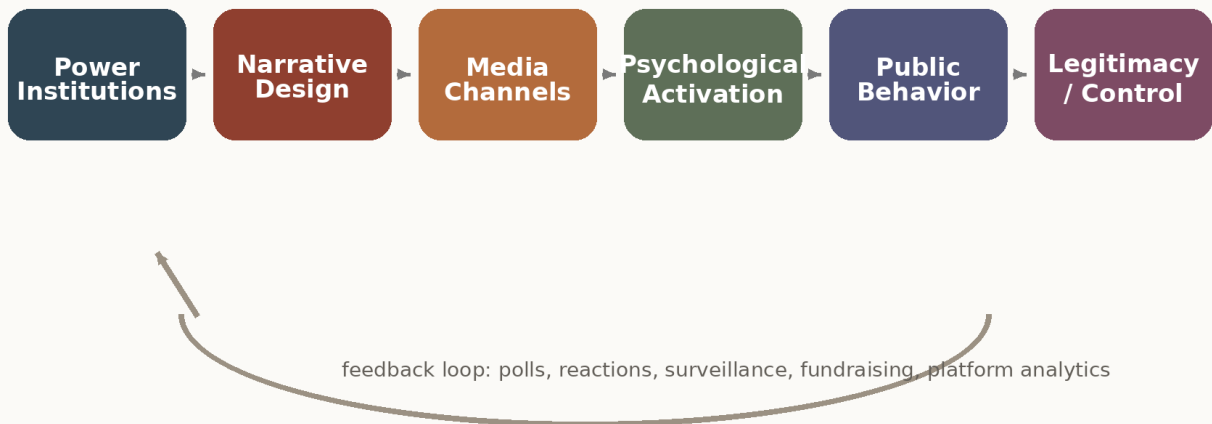
Modern digital propaganda is faster, cheaper, more targeted, and more difficult to attribute than earlier propaganda. Social media platforms, recommendation systems, private messaging apps, search engines, short-form video, memes, influencers, fake accounts, bots, trolls, generative AI, and deepfakes allow campaigns to test and amplify emotionally charged messages at scale. The result is not simply misinformation. It is a contested information environment in which political actors compete to define reality itself.

A democratic society cannot defend itself merely by banning falsehoods. It needs source verification, independent journalism, transparent political advertising, public-interest platform accountability, civic education, media literacy, open archives, resilient institutions, and citizens trained to ask: Who created this message? Who is the target? What emotion is being activated? What evidence is omitted? Who benefits if I believe it? These questions do not eliminate propaganda, but they slow it down.

**Source note.** The report synthesizes established communication theory, public documentation on propaganda and disinformation, and recent public sources on digital information operations. Key references include Britannica's definition of propaganda, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's material on Nazi propaganda, NATO and GAO definitions of disinformation and information threats, Pew Research Center data on social media news consumption, Freedom House reporting on internet control, Reporters Without Borders material on North Korea, RAND's Truth Decay work, and European Union AI transparency materials. Full source details appear in the selected sources section.

### Propaganda as a Political System

Power becomes perception through organized messaging, media channels, and psychological triggers.



*Figure 1. Propaganda works as a system: power designs narratives, media distribute them, psychology activates them, behavior legitimizes them.*

## 1. Concept and Boundaries

A working definition of political propaganda is: **a deliberate and organized effort to influence public opinion and behavior by shaping perception through strategically selected information, symbols, emotion, repetition, and social pressure.** This definition is broader than lying and narrower than all political communication. It includes factual material, but uses that material selectively. It may use falsehoods, but falsehood is not required. Propaganda is defined primarily by intent, organization, power relationship, and manipulation of public meaning.

Ordinary political argument asks people to consider reasons. Propaganda tries to organize the conditions under which some reasons feel natural and others feel illegitimate. It does not merely say, "support this policy." It may say, "only traitors oppose this policy," "the nation is under attack," "the enemy is corrupting your children," or "everyone knows the truth, but elites are hiding it." The message is designed to move belief into identity and identity into action.

The classic distinction is that propaganda has **deliberateness** and a heavier emphasis on manipulation than casual exchange. A political conversation can be biased without being propaganda. A campaign advertisement can be persuasive without being propaganda if it is transparent, bounded, and factually accountable. But when a political actor uses coordinated messaging, emotional intensification, selective facts, repetition, scapegoats, and media saturation to make one version of reality dominate the public sphere, the communication becomes propagandistic.

Category	Core Meaning	How It Differs From Propaganda
Ordinary opinion exchange	Citizens or commentators exchange views, arguments, values, and interpretations.	Usually decentralized and dialogic; propaganda is organized, strategic, and usually tied to a political objective.
Political public relations	Reputation management and message discipline for a leader, party, government, or organization.	PR may become propaganda when image-making suppresses context, manufactures consent, or systematically manipulates emotion.
Public diplomacy	A state communicates with foreign publics to improve legitimacy, reputation, or policy support.	Public diplomacy can be transparent cultural communication; propaganda is more manipulative, selective, and often covert.
Political advertising	Paid persuasive messaging for a candidate, party, issue, or referendum.	Advertising is a channel or format; propaganda is a broader system that may include advertising but also media, education, rumor, and social pressure.
Campaign messaging	Strategic language used to frame a candidate, opponent, issue, or election choice.	Campaign messages become propagandistic when they rely on demonization, deception, systematic fear, or reality reconstruction.
Disinformation	False or misleading information deliberately created or spread to deceive.	Disinformation is often a tool of propaganda, but propaganda may use true or partially true information as well.
Misinformation	False or inaccurate information spread regardless of intent.	Misinformation can be accidental; propaganda is intentional and organized.
Conspiracy theory	A narrative alleging hidden coordination by powerful actors, often with weak evidence.	Conspiracy theories can become propaganda when organized actors use them to mobilize fear, hatred, or distrust.
Psychological warfare	Operations aimed at enemy morale, perception, and decision-making during conflict.	Psychological warfare is usually military or security-oriented; propaganda can target domestic publics, allies, enemies, or neutral audiences.
Information warfare	Strategic contest over information systems, narratives, cyber operations, and public cognition.	Information warfare is the broader battlefield; propaganda is one weapon inside it.

The central analytical test is not simply whether a statement is true or false. The better questions are: Who organized the communication? What audience was selected? What emotion was activated? Which facts were emphasized? Which facts were hidden? What behavior was desired? What institutional or political interest benefits from the message? A truthful fact can become propagandistic when stripped of context, repeated with emotional cues, and attached to a misleading causal story.

## 2. Historical Development

Political propaganda is older than mass media. Rulers have always needed obedience, legitimacy, fear, awe, loyalty, and enemy images. What changes across history is the communication technology, the organizational capacity of the state, and the scale of the audience.

In **ancient Rome**, propaganda operated through coins, triumphal arches, public rituals, imperial titles, military victory narratives, monuments, and public spectacles. The ruler was not merely an administrator; he was made visible as a symbol of order, conquest, and divine favor. Power was inscribed into public space.

During the **Reformation**, print technology transformed religious and political conflict. Pamphlets, sermons, woodcuts, translations, and polemical writing allowed religious arguments to circulate beyond clerical elites. Competing authorities fought over salvation, corruption, legitimacy, and identity. Printing made propaganda portable.

The **French Revolution** created a modern language of mass political symbolism: liberty, the people, virtue, treason, enemies of the revolution, civic festivals, newspapers, songs, and revolutionary iconography. Political propaganda moved from courtly legitimacy to popular mobilization.

**World War I** marked a major institutional turning point. Governments mobilized posters, censorship, atrocity stories, patriotic duty, recruitment campaigns, war-bond drives, and official information bureaus. The war demonstrated that industrial societies could mobilize not only armies and factories but emotions, sacrifice, hatred, and consent.

In **Nazi Germany**, propaganda became a central institution of dictatorship. It used modern media, rallies, film, radio, education, posters, spectacle, scapegoating, racial mythology, enemy construction, and censorship to normalize persecution and war. The propaganda ministry did not merely advertise policies; it organized public reality around the leader, the nation, the racial enemy, and the promise of renewal.

In the **Soviet Union**, propaganda was tied to party ideology, class struggle, socialist realism, education, press control, historical rewriting, cults of leadership, and the claim that the party represented the scientific direction of history. It fused state power with official truth.

The **Cold War** internationalized propaganda through broadcasting, cultural diplomacy, intelligence-linked publishing, ideological campaigns, defectors, films, radio, and front organizations. Both democratic and communist systems sought to win global publics, not simply territory.

American wartime propaganda included patriotic posters, film, radio, war information offices, bond campaigns, enemy images, and appeals to sacrifice. British wartime propaganda similarly emphasized morale, national endurance, anti-Nazi unity, and credibility. Democratic wartime propaganda often coexisted with a free press, but the pressure of war narrowed acceptable narratives and heightened emotional mobilization.

Authoritarian information-control systems in **China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran** represent a different model. These systems combine state media, censorship, intimidation, education control, internet filtering, selective access to global information, narrative discipline, and punishment of dissent. The goal is not only persuasion but the management of what can be publicly known.

Modern democratic election campaigns use polling, message testing, paid advertising, cable news, talk radio, podcasts, influencers, consultants, data analytics, microtargeting, direct mail, text messaging, search advertising, and social platforms. These methods are not automatically propaganda. They become propagandistic when they are organized around deception, dehumanization, manufactured panic, or systematic manipulation of public reality.

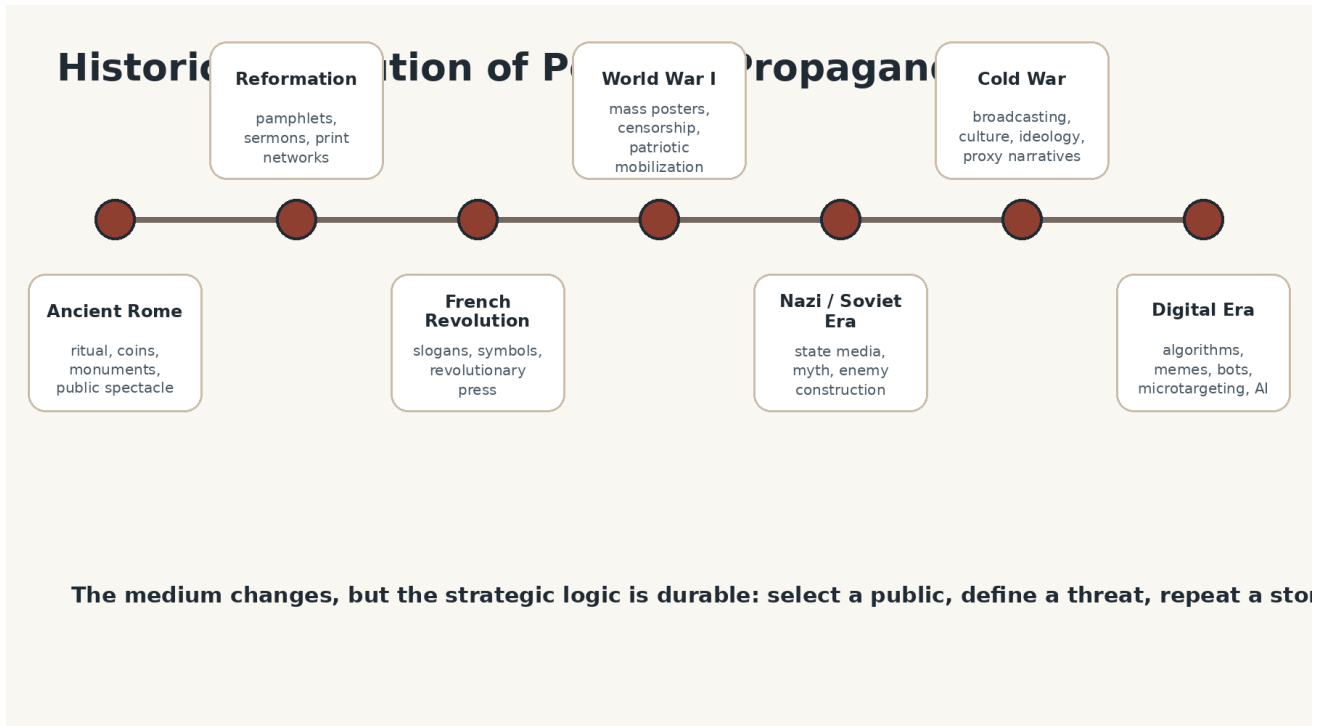


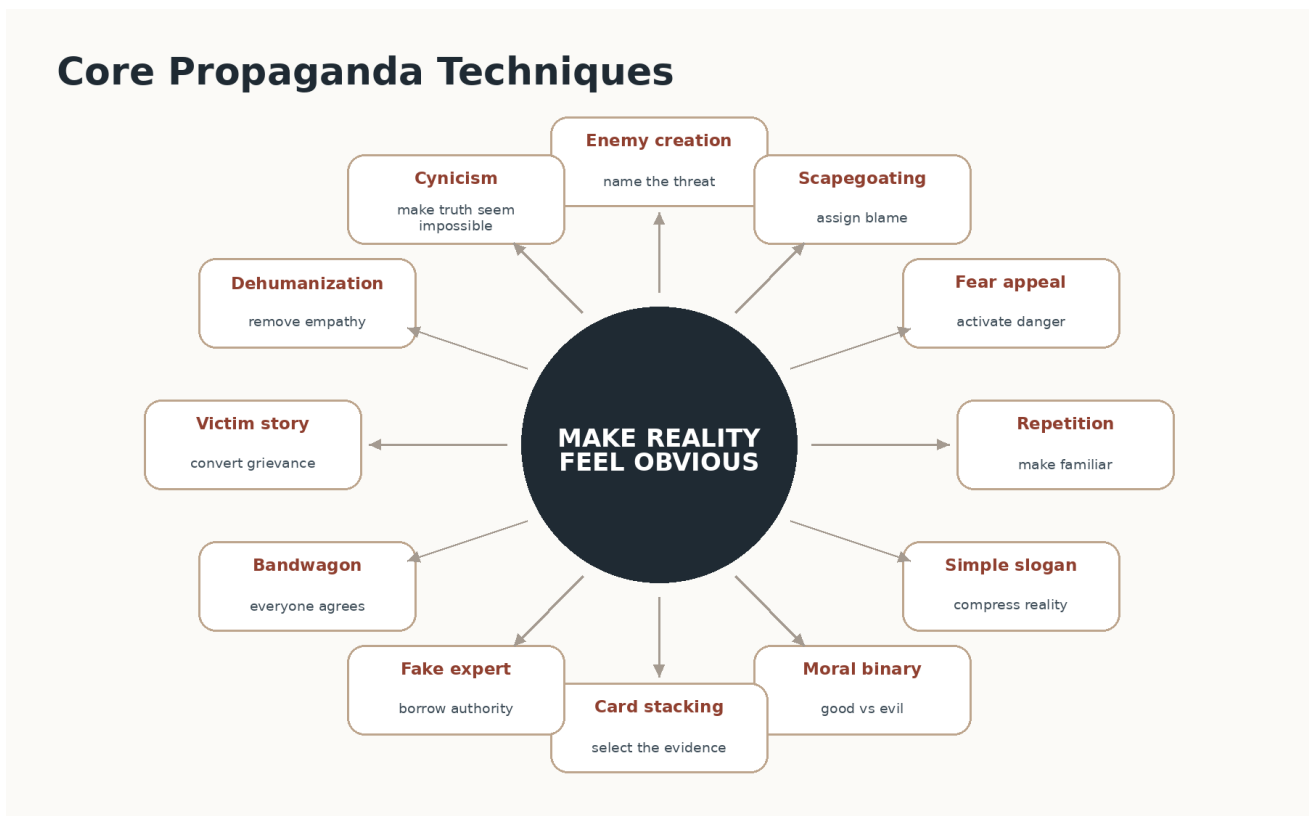
Figure 2. Propaganda evolves with communications technology, from monuments and print to broadcast systems and algorithms.

### 3. Core Techniques

Propaganda techniques are not random tricks. They are recurring patterns that simplify complexity, attach emotion to identity, and make a desired political conclusion feel self-evident. The same technique can appear in authoritarian state media, democratic campaign advertising, wartime communications, social media memes, or conspiracy channels.

- **Enemy creation:** defines a person, group, state, ideology, institution, migrant, minority, journalist, judge, elite, or foreign actor as the source of danger.
- **Scapegoating:** assigns broad social failure to a target group, turning structural problems into a moral accusation against an enemy.
- **Fear appeals:** activate threat perception around war, crime, disease, immigration, economic collapse, moral decline, or national humiliation.
- **Repetition:** makes a claim feel familiar; familiarity can be mistaken for truth, consensus, or common sense.
- **Simple slogans:** compress complex realities into memorable formulas that can be repeated without evidence.
- **Emotional imagery:** uses children, flags, soldiers, ruined cities, crying families, crowds, weapons, sacred spaces, or dramatic music to bypass slow reasoning.
- **Patriotic mobilization:** fuses policy support with loyalty to the nation and makes dissent feel like betrayal.
- **Moral binaries:** divides the world into pure good and absolute evil, leaving little space for complexity or compromise.
- **Conspiracy narratives:** explain disorder through hidden plots, secret elites, traitors, foreign manipulators, or corrupt institutions.
- **Selective facts and card stacking:** present only facts that support the narrative while excluding contradictory context.
- **Context removal:** uses isolated clips, screenshots, old videos, misleading images, or partial statistics to create a false impression.
- **Statistical distortion:** changes baselines, hides denominators, cherry-picks dates, confuses correlation with causation, or uses fake precision.

- **Fake experts and borrowed authority:** uses credentials, think tanks, pseudo-academic reports, uniforms, or media titles to give weak claims artificial legitimacy.
- **Bandwagon effect:** suggests that all normal, patriotic, intelligent, or moral people already agree.
- **Name-calling:** substitutes stigma for argument and trains audiences to reject a target before hearing evidence.
- **Testimonial:** uses celebrities, religious leaders, soldiers, victims, influencers, or ordinary citizens to transfer trust to the message.
- **Plain folks image:** presents elites as ordinary people who share the audience's habits, language, grievances, and lifestyle.
- **Heroic narratives:** turns a leader, party, army, or movement into the rescuer of a threatened people.
- **Victim narratives:** converts political power into an image of persecution, creating loyalty through grievance.
- **Crisis exaggeration:** inflates danger to justify extraordinary measures, emergency powers, censorship, war, or repression.
- **Dehumanization:** portrays opponents as insects, disease, criminals, invaders, parasites, animals, demons, or existential contaminants.
- **Censorship and agenda control:** removes competing information, narrows public discussion, or floods the environment with distractions.
- **False equivalence:** equates unequal evidence, unequal harms, or unequal institutional conduct to create paralysis.
- **Cultivation of cynicism:** makes citizens believe everyone lies, all facts are political, and truth is impossible; this benefits actors who thrive in confusion.



*Figure 3. Propaganda techniques make a political interpretation feel obvious before the audience has fully examined evidence.*

A mature propaganda analysis avoids a common mistake: treating techniques as automatically belonging to one ideology. Any ideology, party, state, movement, or media ecosystem can use these techniques. The relevant

questions are empirical: What technique is used? Against whom? With what evidence? Through which channel? With what intended political result?

## 4. Modern Digital Propaganda

Digital media changed propaganda by altering speed, scale, targeting, and attribution. A twentieth-century propaganda campaign required newspapers, radio, film, posters, schools, rallies, or state-controlled broadcasters. A twenty-first-century campaign can move through a meme, a short video, a private group chat, a fake local-news site, a recommender system, an influencer network, a bot swarm, or a synthetic image.

**Social media algorithms** reward engagement. Because outrage, fear, humiliation, identity threat, and moral shock often generate high engagement, the platform environment can unintentionally favor propagandistic content even when no central censor controls it. Recommendation systems on video platforms can move users from ordinary political curiosity toward more extreme or conspiratorial content if those pathways keep attention. The crucial change is that distribution is no longer only editorial; it is computational.

**X/Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Telegram, WhatsApp, Reddit, and search engines** each produce different propaganda opportunities. Open networks favor public virality, hashtags, influencer amplification, screenshots, and algorithmic visibility. Messaging apps favor closed-group trust, rumor circulation, community authority, and difficult external verification. Search engines shape what appears authoritative. Video platforms combine personality, repetition, emotion, and recommendation loops. Telegram and similar channels can serve as semi-public command centers for activists, extremists, state-aligned media, or war narratives.

**Memes and short-form videos** compress politics into symbolic fragments. A meme can carry an enemy image, a stereotype, a joke, an accusation, a conspiracy, and a call to identity in one visual unit. Short video adds voice, music, pacing, facial expression, and emotional narrative. These formats are difficult to refute because they are often ambiguous: the creator can claim satire, humor, or "just asking questions" while still implanting a political association.

**Influencers** personalize propaganda. The audience does not feel it is receiving an official directive; it feels it is hearing from a familiar personality. This is especially powerful when the influencer appears outside traditional politics: lifestyle, finance, religion, wellness, military commentary, comedy, gaming, or culture-war entertainment.

**Bots, trolls, fake accounts, and comment brigades** manipulate social proof. Their purpose is often not to persuade with evidence but to create the impression that an opinion is dominant, that an opponent is hated, that a journalist is discredited, or that public consensus has shifted. Coordinated inauthentic behavior can make a fringe narrative appear mainstream.

**Microtargeting and data analytics** allow political actors to segment publics by geography, age, race, religion, income, issue interest, media behavior, consumer data, and emotional vulnerability. The same campaign can send different emotional versions of the same political story to different groups. One audience receives fear; another receives pride; another receives resentment; another receives cynicism.

**AI-generated images, synthetic audio, and deepfakes** lower the cost of manufacturing plausibility. Even when fake media are debunked, they can produce a "liar's dividend": real evidence can be dismissed as fake, while fake evidence can circulate long enough to shape first impressions. The danger is not only false media. It is the erosion of shared confidence in any media.

## The Digital Propaganda Stack

Modern campaigns combine content, identity simulation, distribution systems, and performance analytics.

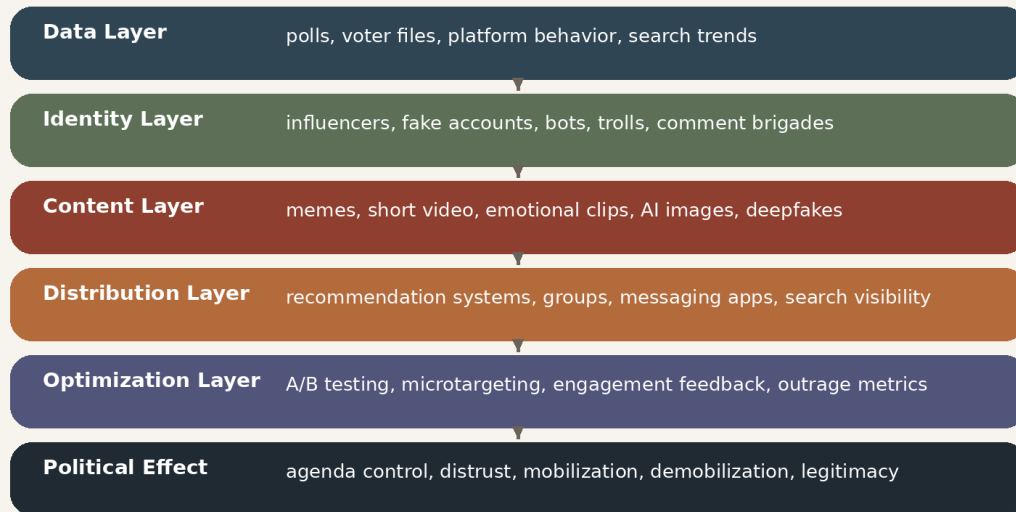


Figure 4. Modern propaganda is a stack: data, identities, content, distribution, optimization, and political effects.

## 5. Psychological Foundations

Propaganda works because human beings are not neutral information processors. People reason through identity, emotion, memory, status, fear, loyalty, and social belonging. Propaganda exploits normal psychological tendencies and places them under political pressure.

- **Confirmation bias:** people more readily accept information that supports prior beliefs and discount information that threatens them.
- **Group identity and tribalism:** political messages become stronger when they tell audiences who "we" are and who "they" are.
- **Fear response:** threat messages narrow attention and increase willingness to accept harsh measures.
- **Anger mobilization:** anger converts grievance into action; it can drive voting, protest, harassment, donation, and sharing.
- **Cognitive dissonance:** when facts threaten identity, people often reinterpret facts rather than abandon the identity.
- **Authority bias:** uniforms, titles, credentials, celebrity, religious status, or institutional labels can make claims feel credible.
- **Mere-exposure effect:** repeated exposure makes a message feel familiar, and familiarity can be mistaken for truth.
- **Social proof:** people infer credibility from apparent popularity, likes, shares, comments, crowds, endorsements, or poll claims.
- **Conspiratorial thinking:** complex events are explained by hidden plots, which can produce a sense of special knowledge and moral superiority.
- **Hostility toward the opposing camp:** messages are judged less by evidence than by whether they help one side and injure the other.
- **Grievance politics:** propaganda turns humiliation, economic stress, cultural anxiety, or institutional distrust into identity-based mobilization.
- **Moral panic:** a group or behavior is portrayed as an existential threat to children, nation, religion, safety, or civilization.

The strongest propaganda does not introduce a completely new belief. It attaches itself to an existing fear, memory, prejudice, hope, humiliation, or identity. That is why propaganda becomes powerful around economic insecurity, war, immigration, crime, race, religion, gender, class, corruption, distrust of elites, and national identity. These issues are not only policy questions. They are identity questions. They answer: Who belongs? Who is protected? Who is blamed? Who is losing status? Who is cheating? Who is betraying the group?

Economic insecurity is especially fertile because it creates anger without always identifying a clear cause. Propaganda supplies a cause. War is fertile because it activates loyalty and fear. Immigration is fertile because it links economic stress, cultural anxiety, language, border, crime, and national identity. Crime narratives are fertile because individual incidents can be converted into a general sense of disorder. Race, religion, gender, and class are fertile because they are tied to memory, morality, status, and belonging. Corruption narratives are fertile because they explain distrust of institutions and make extraordinary actions seem necessary.

## 6. Issues Where Propaganda Works Powerfully

Propaganda concentrates where reality is complex, emotionally charged, and difficult for ordinary citizens to verify directly. It thrives in domains where people must rely on intermediaries: experts, journalists, government agencies, intelligence sources, military briefings, health institutions, statistical agencies, courts, or platforms.

Issue Area	Why It Is Vulnerable	Common Propaganda Move
Economic insecurity	People feel loss before they can identify structural causes.	Blame a scapegoat: immigrants, elites, foreign competitors, minorities, bankers, bureaucrats, or traitors.
War and national security	Information is secret, emotional, and fast-moving.	Define dissent as disloyalty; exaggerate victory or enemy evil; hide costs.
Immigration	Links border, labor, crime, culture, race, language, and national identity.	Use isolated incidents as representative proof of an invasion or collapse.
Crime	A vivid case can overpower statistical context.	Convert anecdote into national emergency; imply one group is inherently dangerous.
Race, religion, gender, class	Bound to identity, status, memory, and morality.	Frame equality claims as persecution of the dominant group or destruction of tradition.
Corruption and elites	Distrust often has real causes, but may be generalized.	Treat all institutions as illegitimate except the propagandist's movement.
Public health	Requires expertise, statistics, and trust in institutions.	Turn uncertainty into proof of conspiracy; turn corrections into evidence of cover-up.
National identity	Defines belonging and betrayal.	Make political loyalty synonymous with authentic membership in the nation.

## 7. Democracy vs Authoritarianism

Propaganda exists in both democratic and authoritarian societies, but its institutional structure is different.

In **authoritarian systems**, propaganda can be centralized, mandatory, and fused with coercion. The state may control television, newspapers, publishing, schools, historical narratives, courts, police, internet access, and civil society. Censorship prevents competing facts from circulating. The education system teaches official memory. Police power punishes alternative narratives. Internet shutdowns, throttling, filtering, licensing, surveillance, and arrests create an information environment where public disagreement is dangerous.

In **democratic systems**, propaganda is more decentralized. It often flows through parties, campaigns, consultants, cable news, partisan media, talk radio, podcasts, influencers, think tanks, super PACs, data firms, interest groups, donors, activist networks, public relations firms, and algorithmic platforms. There is usually no single propaganda ministry. Instead, political actors compete inside a fragmented attention market. The danger is not only censorship but saturation, cynicism, polarization, and the collapse of shared facts.

Dimension	Authoritarian Model	Democratic Model
Control of media	State ownership, licensing, censorship, intimidation, direct editorial orders.	Private and public media compete; partisan ecosystems can still create closed information worlds.
Control of opposition	Legal repression, police power, arrests, bans, surveillance.	Opposition is legal, but can be discredited through propaganda, harassment, or agenda control.
Internet control	Filtering, shutdowns, throttling, domestic	Open internet, but algorithmic amplification,

	intranets, platform blocking.	foreign influence, and platform opacity create vulnerabilities.
Historical narrative	Official memory enforced through schools, museums, law, and censorship.	Competing narratives exist, but media fragmentation can erode shared history.
Message discipline	Centralized slogans and state narratives.	Decentralized repetition through aligned media, influencers, parties, donors, and online communities.
Main risk	Public truth is subordinated to state power.	Public truth fragments into hostile realities and strategic distrust.

## 8. Representative Cases

The following cases are not ranked and are not presented as moral equivalents. They are analytical examples showing how propaganda systems differ by regime type, technology, audience, and strategic objective.

### United States

Messages are created by parties, campaigns, super PACs, advocacy groups, media personalities, consultants, donors, and social movements. Target publics include voters, activists, donors, persuadable swing constituencies, and demobilizable opponents. Emotions include fear, resentment, patriotic pride, outrage, hope, distrust, and cultural belonging. Media include television ads, cable news, social platforms, podcasts, direct mail, text messages, search ads, and influencer content. Intended effects include turnout, fundraising, agenda setting, opponent delegitimization, coalition maintenance, or issue reframing.

### Russia

State media, security-linked networks, official spokespeople, proxy outlets, online influence operations, and aligned influencers promote narratives of Western hypocrisy, Russian victimhood, anti-NATO grievance, traditional values, and strategic inevitability. Audiences include domestic citizens, Russian-speaking communities abroad, European and American publics, and populations in contested regions. Media include television, Telegram, foreign-language websites, state broadcasters, social platforms, and covert online operations.

### China

The Chinese Communist Party combines state media, censorship, platform regulation, education, patriotic narratives, diplomatic messaging, and online mobilization. Target audiences include domestic citizens, diaspora communities, foreign publics, businesses, universities, and states debating China policy. Common emotions include national pride, historical grievance, stability anxiety, suspicion of separatism, and distrust of foreign criticism. The intended effect is regime legitimacy, social control, policy acceptance, and international narrative influence.

### Nazi Germany

The Nazi state used the propaganda ministry, radio, film, rallies, newspapers, education, posters, symbols, and censorship to glorify the leader, create a national rebirth myth, scapegoat Jews and other targeted groups, normalize militarization, and prepare the public for persecution and war. Target audiences included ordinary Germans, youth, soldiers, occupied populations, and foreign observers. Emotional levers included humiliation, racial fear, pride, resentment, hatred, destiny, and unity.

### Soviet Union

The Soviet system used party control, official ideology, schools, newspapers, posters, socialist realism, historical rewriting, and leadership cults. Audiences included workers, peasants, youth, soldiers, party members, foreign communist movements, and anti-colonial publics. Emotional levers included class pride, revolutionary destiny, anti-capitalist anger, sacrifice, suspicion of enemies, and faith in historical progress.

### North Korea

The state monopolizes public information and constructs a totalizing narrative around leadership, national siege, military strength, ideological purity, and external enemies. Target audiences are domestic citizens, soldiers, elites,

youth, and foreign observers. Media include state television, radio, newspapers, schools, rituals, monuments, and controlled cultural production. Intended effects include loyalty, fear, isolation, and regime survival.

### **British wartime propaganda**

British wartime propaganda emphasized morale, endurance, unity, credibility, sacrifice, and resistance to Nazi aggression. Target audiences included domestic civilians, soldiers, allies, occupied Europe, and neutral publics. Media included radio, posters, newsreels, speeches, censorship, and international broadcasting. The intended effect was to sustain public morale and weaken enemy confidence while maintaining credibility.

### **Modern election campaigns**

Campaigns use polling, message testing, segmentation, ads, opposition research, rapid response, influencers, and platform analytics. Target publics are not just voters in general but microgroups: persuadables, base voters, donors, low-propensity voters, demographic subgroups, and issue communities. The intended effects include turnout, persuasion, demobilization, agenda control, and reputational framing.

### **Ukraine war information warfare**

Russia, Ukraine, NATO states, independent journalists, open-source intelligence communities, influencers, military bloggers, and foreign governments compete over battlefield narratives. Audiences include domestic publics, soldiers, allies, adversaries, neutral states, donors, and international institutions. Emotional levers include courage, atrocity, fatigue, resilience, fear of escalation, national survival, humiliation, and distrust. Media include official briefings, Telegram, X/Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, satellite imagery, drone footage, memes, and leaked documents.

### **Middle East conflicts**

States, armed groups, diasporas, activists, international media, religious authorities, humanitarian organizations, and foreign governments compete over legitimacy, victimhood, security, occupation, terrorism, sovereignty, and humanitarian suffering. Target publics include domestic populations, regional audiences, Western publics, diplomats, donors, and international courts. Visual evidence, casualty claims, historical framing, moral binaries, and selective context are central.

### **Taiwan issue**

Propaganda around Taiwan often concerns sovereignty, democracy, national rejuvenation, deterrence, separatism, invasion risk, and U.S.-China competition. Message creators include governments, militaries, state media, parties, online networks, and foreign policy communities. Target audiences include Taiwanese voters, mainland Chinese citizens, U.S. and allied publics, investors, and regional states. Intended effects include deterrence, intimidation, reassurance, domestic legitimacy, and diplomatic positioning.

### **U.S. presidential elections**

Presidential campaigns are high-intensity propaganda environments because they combine identity, leadership, fear, hope, policy, media spectacle, opposition research, negative advertising, donor networks, debate clips, social platforms, and turnout machinery. Domestic and foreign actors may both seek to influence perceptions. The intended effects include candidate legitimacy, opponent disqualification, mobilization, fundraising, and agenda dominance.

### **Brexit**

Brexit communication involved sovereignty, immigration, economic control, national identity, distrust of Brussels, expert credibility, and competing risk narratives. Message creators included campaigns, parties, newspapers, advocacy groups, donors, social media actors, and public figures. Target audiences included working-class communities, conservatives, Euroskeptics, undecided voters, younger voters, and regional publics. Intended effects included mobilizing identity, simplifying institutional complexity, and framing the referendum as control versus dependence.

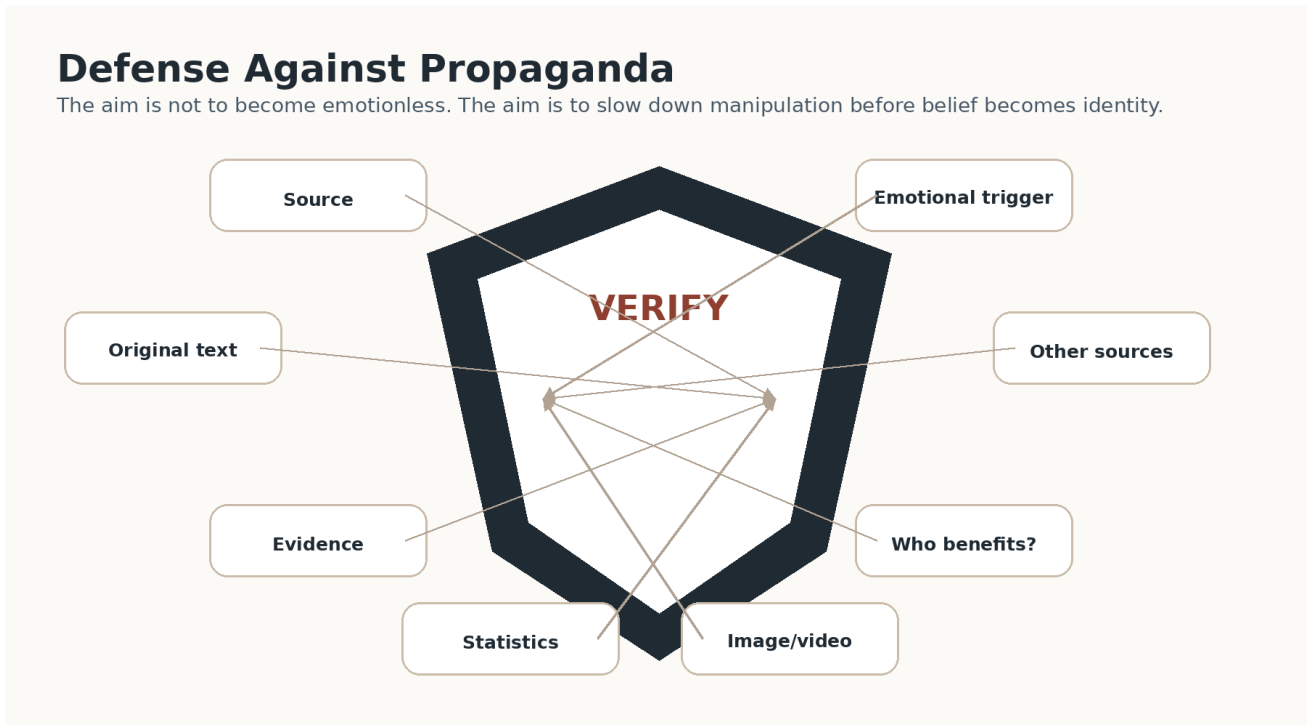
### **COVID-19 misinformation**

COVID-19 information disorder involved public health agencies, governments, anti-vaccine networks, influencers, foreign actors, alternative media, wellness communities, and platform communities. Audiences included

frightened citizens, parents, ideological groups, religious communities, and people distrustful of institutions. Emotional levers included fear, uncertainty, freedom, betrayal, bodily autonomy, distrust of elites, grief, and anger. Intended or actual effects included confusion, resistance to public-health measures, institutional distrust, and politicized identity formation.

## 9. Identification and Defense

The practical defense against propaganda is not cynicism. Cynicism is often an outcome propaganda seeks: if citizens believe everyone lies, they stop distinguishing evidence from manipulation. The stronger defense is disciplined skepticism: slow down, verify, compare, contextualize, and ask who benefits.



*Figure 5. A propaganda defense protocol slows emotional reaction and restores evidence, context, and motive analysis.*

1. **Check the source.** Identify the creator, funder, platform, outlet, author, sponsor, and distribution network.
2. **Verify the original text.** Do not rely on screenshots, cut clips, quote cards, or summaries when the original speech, filing, bill, interview, or report is available.
3. **Detect emotional manipulation.** Notice when a message is designed to make you feel panic, humiliation, rage, contempt, or tribal pride before presenting evidence.
4. **Verify statistics.** Ask about denominators, time periods, baselines, cherry-picking, correlation, causation, and missing comparisons.
5. **Check images and videos.** Search for earlier appearances, geolocation clues, edits, synthetic artifacts, misleading captions, and whether the image is from another time or place.
6. **Question repeated slogans.** Repetition can create familiarity without proof. Ask whether the phrase explains reality or replaces analysis.
7. **Beware extreme binaries.** Messages that divide the world into pure good and pure evil often suppress tradeoffs, uncertainty, and evidence.
8. **Analyze who benefits.** Every propaganda message has a beneficiary: a state, party, leader, movement, donor, platform, outlet, or foreign actor.

9. **Identify target and purpose.** Ask whether the message seeks to persuade, mobilize, demobilize, radicalize, confuse, distract, intimidate, or discredit.
10. **Compare multiple trustworthy sources.** Use reputable outlets, official documents, academic research, court records, public data, and independent fact-checking.
11. **Protect institutions of verification.** Independent journalism, professional fact-checking, academic freedom, public archives, transparent data, and open courts are anti-propaganda infrastructure.
12. **Demand platform accountability.** Transparency around political ads, synthetic media labeling, bot networks, recommendation systems, and coordinated manipulation reduces hidden influence.
13. **Teach civic media literacy.** Citizens need practical habits for identifying manipulation, not merely abstract warnings that propaganda exists.

Warning Sign	Diagnostic Question	Likely Risk
The message demands immediate outrage.	What evidence would I examine if I waited ten minutes?	Emotional bypass of reasoning.
One group is blamed for everything.	Are structural causes being replaced by a scapegoat?	Enemy construction and dehumanization.
The evidence is a screenshot or short clip.	Can I find the original source and full context?	Context removal or fabrication.
Numbers are dramatic but unexplained.	What is the denominator, baseline, and comparison group?	Statistical distortion.
All institutions are dismissed as corrupt.	Which institutions are exempt from this distrust, and why?	Cultivation of cynicism.
A leader is presented as the sole savior.	What checks, laws, or institutions are being weakened?	Authoritarian personalization of politics.
A message appears everywhere at once.	Is this organic public interest or coordinated amplification?	Astroturfing, bots, paid influence, or campaign synchronization.
Opponents are mocked as less than human.	What violence or repression would this language make easier?	Moral exclusion and coercive politics.

## 10. Conclusion: Propaganda as Reality Reconstruction

Political propaganda should not be understood simply as lying to the masses. That definition is too shallow. Propaganda is a political system in which power, media, emotion, identity, and technology combine to reconstruct public reality. It determines not only what people think, but what they think politics is about; not only who they support, but whom they fear; not only what facts they accept, but which institutions they trust to define facts.

The deepest danger of propaganda is not that citizens believe one false claim. False claims can be corrected. The deeper danger is that citizens become trapped inside a political reality where correction itself is interpreted as enemy action, expertise is read as conspiracy, pluralism is treated as weakness, cruelty is treated as justice, and loyalty becomes more important than truth.

The study of propaganda is therefore not a side topic in political communication. It is central to understanding democracy, authoritarianism, war, elections, digital platforms, public opinion, and the future of civic life. In every age, propaganda adapts to the dominant medium: monument, sermon, pamphlet, newspaper, poster, radio, film, television, cable news, social media, short video, algorithm, bot, and synthetic image. The medium changes; the struggle over reality remains.

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