

PACs, Super PACs, and Unions in the Media

Activities ask you to examine the political messaging of Political Action Committees (PACs and SuperPACs) and labor unions and how these organizations' use of the media influences voters and shapes democracy.

Special Interest Groups, Political Action Committees (PACs), and Labor Unions are constantly engaging in political advocacy through advertising. They devote enormous amounts of time and resources to persuading voters and citizens to support their positions on issues and candidates.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

In the past, these organizations relied mainly on newspapers, direct mail, and television advertising to influence voters and citizens.

However, when running for President in 2008, Barack Obama's campaign changed the political advertising landscape by using social media posts and online ads to reach voters. Since then, the amount of money spent on online ads has gone from the millions to the billions and continues to grow with every election cycle on Facebook and Google and other online platforms. Many of these ads are carefully designed to microtarget specific groups with specific messages.

Paradoxically, as the American Bar Association has pointed out, "lying in political ads is also perfectly legal" because what is said is considered political speech and that is protected under the First Amendment ([Political Advertising on](#)

[Social Media](#), June 26, 2020). As a consequence, misinformation and disinformation keeps reappearing during and after elections, including in 2021 with the "Big Lie" that the 2020 Election was stolen from the former President.

Activity 1: Evaluate Political Action Committee (PAC) Advertisements

- Curate a digital collection of political ads from PACs during the 2020 election. Here are some examples you might include:
 - [America First Action Super PAC](#)
 - [Preserve America PAC](#)
- Use the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Advertisements](#) to critically evaluate the ads.
- Closely look at the information provided in the ads - Did you find any potential inaccuracies and misinformation in their appeals to voters? (see [Super PAC ad attacks Comey before testimony](#)). Were some PACs less truthful than others? Why do you think that might be?
- Based on your analysis, **create a social media campaign** to bring awareness about how PACs seek to influence voters and shape democracy through ads.
 - The social media campaign should include at least 2 videos (e.g., YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok), 5 example posts, and 3 images (e.g., memes, graphics, infographics) designed by you.
 - *Here is a [Twitter campaign example](#) by Sara Shea.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Evaluate Political Action Committee \(PAC\) Advertisements](#) by Alexa Sortino

Activity 2: Investigate the Portrayal of Unions in the News

- Many prominent news sources have sections of their websites dedicated to labor unions.
- Select at least 3 stories from each of the following news outlets:
 - [Labor Unions - US News](#)
 - [Labor Unions - Fox News](#)
 - [Labor Unions - CNBC](#)
 - [Organized Labor - The New York Times](#)
- Then, use the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing News & Newspaper](#) to conduct a critical evaluation of the articles you selected.
- **Create a TikTok video, Snapchat video, or social media post** in which you discuss how the news portrayal of unions influences citizens, voters, and democracy.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Investigate the Portrayal of Unions in the News](#) by Alexa Sortino

Additional Resources

- [Top PACS 2019-2020](#)
- [The Labor Press Project - University of Washington](#)
- [Labor Union Opinion - Gallup](#)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[*Building Democracy for All: Special Interest Groups, Political Action Committees \(PACs and Super PACs\), and Labor Unions*](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Examine the influence of public and private interest groups in a democracy, including policy organizations in shaping debate about public policy.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T4.13]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Digital Citizen
 - 2c: Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
 - 3c: Students curate information from digital resources using a variety of tools and methods to create collections of artifacts that demonstrate meaningful connections or conclusions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Ethics and Laws (CAS.b)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8



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