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SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

Campaigning on Climate:

A Study of Environmental Political Action Communications and Application to the Penn State

Board of Trustees Elections

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to analyze digital climate communications to identify trends and strategies to apply to the Penn State Forward campaign. Though there is notable research around climate change communications, this thesis seeks to understand how to apply strategies and recommendations to university elections, specifically for the Penn State Board of Trustees. To accomplish this, I used the Moral Foundations Theory and qualitative analysis to identify four categories of campaign communications styles: Rage Against the Machine, Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates, Behavior Change, and Sustainability as a Value. Finally, I used these learnings to develop a campaign playbook for Penn State Forward outlining a full climate candidate's campaign.

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Introduction

On August 9, 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released their Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report, titled *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*. In this document, one fact was made abundantly clear: “it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2000 years” (*IPCC AR6 Working Group I*). This isn’t a singular opinion. According to NASA, 97% of published climate scientists “agree that humans are causing global warming and climate change” (*Do Scientists Agree on Climate Change?*).

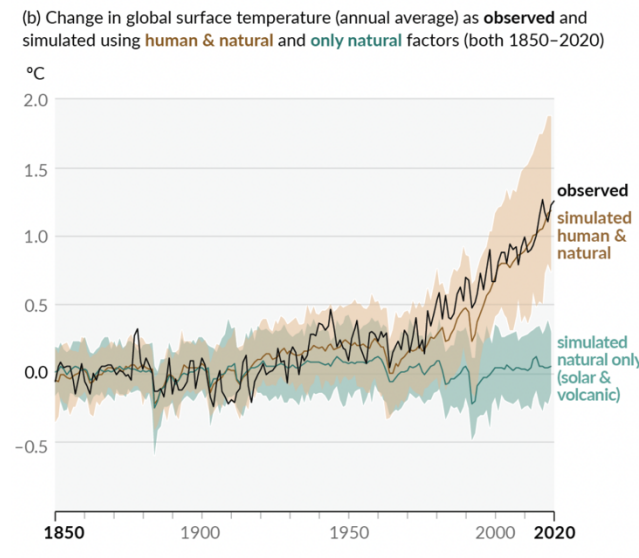


Figure 1: Global Temperature Increase and the Influence of Natural and Anthropogenic Forces

Figure 1 depicts this reality, illustrating the dramatic increase in global surface temperatures, largely dictated by the amplification of the greenhouse effect caused by the anthropogenic release of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and

perfluorocarbons. The impact is staggering: greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere are continuously climbing; the last four decades have been “successively warmer than any decade that preceded it since 1850”; and global sea levels are rising faster than experienced in over a century (*IPCC AR6 Working Group I*). The “atmospheric CO₂ concentrations [in 2019] were higher than at any time in at least 2 million years” and “global mean sea level has risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in at least the last 3000 years,” and the global changes are evident (*IPCC AR6 Working Group I*).

Climate change also impacts communities and economies. As Earthjustice explains, climate change fuels extreme weather events through increasingly intense hurricanes, larger and longer-lasting wildfires, extreme heat, expanding drought conditions, precipitation changes, and rising sea levels (“How Climate Change Is Fueling Extreme Weather”). Though not all extreme weather can be attributed to climate change, the increasing frequency and intensity is evident through the occurrence of billion-dollar natural disasters in the United States over the past 44 years.

Table 1: Time Period Comparisons of United States Billion-Dollar Disaster Statistics

Select Time Period Comparisons of United States Billion-Dollar Disaster Statistics (CPI-Adjusted)

Time Period	Billion-Dollar Disasters	Events/Year	Cost	Percent of Total Cost	Cost/Year	Deaths	Deaths/Year
1980s (1980-1989)	33	3.3	\$219.8B	7.5%	\$22.0B	3,017	302
1990s (1990-1999)	57	5.7	\$335.3B	11.5%	\$33.5B	3,075	308
2000s (2000-2009)	67	6.7	\$621.6B	21.3%	\$62.2B	3,102	310
2010s (2010-2019)	131	13.1	\$994.7B	34.1%	\$99.5B	5,227	523
Last 5 Years (2020-2024)	115	23.0	\$746.7B	25.6%	\$149.3B	2,520	504
Last 3 Years (2022-2024)	73	24.3	\$461.6B	15.8%	\$153.9B	1,534	511
Last Year (2024)	27	27.0	\$182.7B	6.3%	\$182.7B	568	568
All Years (1980-2024)	403	9.0	\$2,918.1B	100.0%	\$64.8B	16,941	376

Between 1980 and 1990, the US experienced 37-billion-dollar disasters, adjusted for inflation. From 1991-2001, this jumped to 61, and from 2002-2012, the number nearly hit triple digits. Most recently, over the span of 2014-2024, billion-dollar disasters hit 200 (Smith). More directly, CNN reports that, in 2023, “extreme weather events cost the US \$150 billion per year, due to direct impacts such as infrastructure damage, worker injuries and agricultural losses” (Buchwald). This problem is only expected to worsen, with a 2024 study published in *Nature* estimating that climate change may cost the global economy \$38 trillion by 2049. Furthermore, this value is based on the 2005 valuation of the US dollar, meaning it likely undercounts for the true cost after inflation in 2049 (“Climate Change May Cost \$38 a Year by 2049, Study Says”).

These costs are already manifesting. Insurers refuse to cover homes in areas at high risk for natural disasters, as losses from natural catastrophes now total \$100 billion a year, over six times the amount a decade ago. (“Climate Change Is Upending Homeowners Insurance Nationwide”, Aldern). Droughts and heat stunt crop yields, limiting farm revenues and outputs (Climate Change Impacts | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). On a global scale, “heat-related deaths have surged 23% since the 1990s, now reaching 546,000 a year per the “2025 Report on *The Lancet* countdown on Health and Climate Change” (Shah). Climate change, once framed as a future issue, is here, and will only continue to worsen without action.

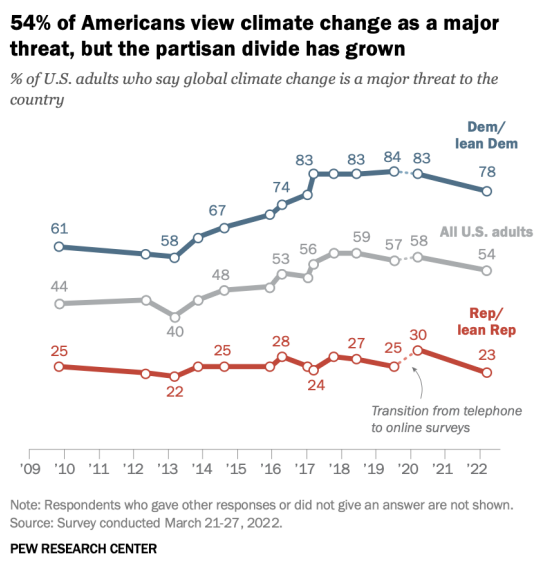


Figure 2: % of U.S. Adults Who Say Global Climate Change is a Major Threat to the Country

Luckily, people are beginning to realize the dangers of climate change. As of a 2023 Pew Research poll, over half of U.S. adults view climate change as a major threat to the country (Kennedy et. al.). It is apparent that younger generations (gen z and millennials) address climate change more than older generations, believing that climate should be a top concern and taking personal actions to achieve it (Funk). But climate action isn't just a dream for the youth; it's real work being done now. The younger generations are talking about climate, sharing content, and engaging on social media, communicating the need for climate action. Gen Z leaders like Greta Thunberg and Xiye Baustida are making their voices heard by organizing international movements such as Fridays for Future ("Fridays For Future"). They are realizing that, while climate change is clearly harmful to the environment, it also poses a massive human and economic challenge, one that needs to be addressed before it is too late.

Universities are often overlooked in the pursuit of climate action. Colleges provide a unique opportunity for action. Their research informs sound policy and, in tandem with university outreach, helps educate the public about climate change to build the political capital to enact such policy. University curriculum, especially at Penn State, which has one of the largest living alumni communities amongst universities, can determine whether hundreds of thousands of people are knowledgeable about climate change and have the skills to promote a sustainable future through varied career paths (Kines). And university mitigation efforts, especially at large public institutions like Penn State, can determine whether communities (both urban and rural) have the resources and capacity to respond to ongoing climate change impacts like increased natural disasters. Penn State's potential impact is magnified by its location in Pennsylvania, which produces around 1% of the world's fossil fuel emissions and notably has the power to decide federal policy priorities through its outsized electoral power and importance in determining energy policy nationally (Minott).

More directly, universities have a massive physical impact. Penn State's University Park campus alone is roughly 7,000 acres with 600 buildings, emitting 220,614 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in the 2023-2024 fiscal year alone (*University Park Master Plan | OPP*, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory"). Add to this Penn State's 20 commonwealth campuses, numerous affiliates, and hundreds of thousands of alumni, and the wide-reaching climate impacts of the university becomes even clearer (*Campuses and Colleges*). Thus, major universities like Penn State have a choice; continue polluting or lead the reduction of waste and emissions for the millions of people connected to the school.

Students are weighing in on this choice, collaborating and presenting collective action to support a green transition. Within the last decade, climate activism at Penn State has grown significantly. One notable contribution is Fossil Free PSU, a recognized student organization started in 2014. A part of 350.org's national fossil fuel divestment efforts, Fossil Free PSU brought that mission to Penn State through petitions, collaborations, and events ("Fossil Free PSU").

Independent student organizations, such as Eco Action (Penn State's oldest environmental club), offer community-building activities, sustainability workshops, and on-campus Earth Day events ("Eco Action"). Paid sustainability ambassadorships are available through EcoReps, a Penn State sponsored organization that provides stipends to members focused on promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals ("PSU EcoReps"). By hosting student engagement events on campus, making the President's Box at Beaver Stadium zero-waste, and pushing for reusable takeaway containers in the dining halls, Eco Reps aims to make change through peer-to-peer conversations and by meeting students where they are.

More recently, anti-fossil fuels advertising coalition Clean Creatives enlisted student ambassadors to engage their peers and promote their tailored message across campus, landing them an interview with Onward State (Murphy). Their ambassadors tabled in the HUB-Robeson Center, handed out stickers to students, and presented to classrooms, taking a more niche approach by urging future advertising and PR professionals to reject fossil fuels. Additional groups, including the Student Farm Club, Food Recovery Network, and University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA), have emphasized sustainability within their efforts at Penn State ("Student Farm at Penn State", "Food Recovery Network", "Our Work UPUA").

Penn State has also developed multiple climate-focused learning opportunities, including a range of environmental classes across various majors and hands-on learning opportunities, such as the Student Sustainability Advisory Council (SSAC) and the Local Climate Action Program (LCAP). Minors such as Energy and Sustainability Policy, Community, Environment, and Development, as well as the new Geography for Sustainability major, provide supplemental environmental qualifications for climate-conscious students (“Penn State Launches Sustainability, Society and Environmental Geography Major”). While these efforts have made valiant efforts to increase sustainability at Penn State, they have failed to impact the most powerful decision-makers: the Penn State Board of Trustees.

At Penn State, the Board of Trustees is one of the most direct -but underutilized- ways to make actionable change at the University. As the university’s highest governing board, it develops “guiding goals, policies, and procedures as well as reviewing and approving University budgets” (*Penn State Office of the Board of Trustees*). The Board consists of thirty-six members with voting power, nine of which are elected by alumni for three-year terms. The terms are staggered, with an election taking place each year to select three new trustees. Though the “board delegates day-to-day management and control of the University to the president”, they make the overarching decisions for the University. They wield the most power to make lasting change at Penn State, and yet, some students and alumni remain unaware of their existence.

Penn State Forward began during the 2022 election cycle to bring progressive viewpoints to the PSU Board of Trustees. Described as “a group of students, alumni, staff, and faculty...recruit[ing] and support[ing] young, forward-thinking candidates...to advance policy

that will create a more inclusive and sustainable university,” Penn State Forward has successfully elected three alumni-elected trustees. The group focused on climate action explicitly and notably has elected all their climate-focused candidates to date (“Penn State Forward | Join Us”). Prior to Penn State Forward, climate change and sustainability were not discussed in election cycles. Now, it is a main topic.

The campaign, however, has faced challenges reaching potential voters and encouraging participation. Whether it be denial or the belief that climate change is a “future problem”, the scale and indirect, non-immediate impact of climate change can lead to dismissal ((Kattler-Gold). Climate change can seem like “too big” of a problem, and people struggle to understand how their actions can contribute to real change. Most notably, the current media climate fuels these viewpoints, with a recent study by Yale Climate Collections finding that eight of the ten top online shows have spread climate misinformation (“Eight of the Top 10 Online Shows Are Spreading Climate Misinformation”). Combine all these factors, and it is a steep, uphill battle to convince voters to not just believe in climate change, but to feel passionately enough to act on it.

Furthermore, not many Penn State alumni know about and participate in these elections, and those who already participate do not foreground climate action policy in their campaigns. The Board of Trustees elections experience incredibly low turnout, with only 2.5% of the electorate voting. Of the current voters, the demographics do not correspond with the groups who care most about climate change as an issue (“2025 Alumni Trustee Election Demographics Report”).

Therefore, the focus of Penn State Forward's campaign is not to convert current voters; it's to encourage alumni that align with the mission to turn out and vote.

However, the problem is further complicated by the significantly limited research associated with these campaigns. Penn State Board of Trustees elections are unique, with a very niche voter base consisting only of college-educated voters who graduated from Penn State. On top of that, most alumni reside in Pennsylvania. While PSU Forward's sister program at Harvard runs similarly, they still are a stark contrast to many national, state, or local elections. Therefore, there is a notable lack in knowledge regarding how climate action campaign strategy can be applied to the Board of Trustees election.

Therefore, this thesis will examine past and current climate action campaigns and analyze how they communicate across a spectrum of forms, from social media content to in-person action. These efforts will be studied through the academic lens of Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory framework, and segmented by approach (rage against the machine, bold change advocates, behavior change, and sustainability as a value), to further uncover why they are persuasive. Using the insight uncovered from this research, I will create example campaigns that Penn State Forward can execute in future elections.

State and local elections are enormously important to climate action, particularly during the Trump era, where the federal government pulls back critical regulations and rebukes climate science. Thus, investigating how Penn State Forward can persuasively message on climate

change and convince alumni to participate in Board elections can provide a springboard for other campaigns. Furthermore, creating a campaign for Penn State Forward may have ramifications beyond the Board of Trustees election by elevating climate change as an issue and convincing people to act.

Literature Review

Background: Where the American and Pennsylvanian Public are on Climate Change

Several researchers have collected data about the concern the American public has about climate change (IPCC; Yale Climate Communications). They have found that 63% percent of people are concerned and 21% of people are not. In Pennsylvania, 60% of residents believe climate change will harm people in the US, and 53% believe local government officials should do more regarding it (*Climate Opinion Factsheet*). Additionally, polls have found that 77% of Americans think schools should teach about global warming (“Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2024”). Some articles have even envisioned this as not a spectrum of concern but rather types of reactions to climate change (Yale Climate Communications).

Barriers: Why Climate Change is Difficult to Talk About

One scholar proposes five main barriers to effective communication: distant, doom, dissonance, denial, and identity (Climate Paradox). A study found that individuals are more supportive of climate adaptation policy when they see climate change as an issue affecting themselves and their communities (Singh). Additionally, a separate analysis found that fear and shock were useful in generating awareness of climate change, but not in inciting prolonged action (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole). Other research found that the models, such as the “stories of self, us, and now,” can be useful in combatting climate change dissonance (Malena-Chan). Regarding denial,

a study has proposed the term “double reality,” or the idea that two realities exist simultaneously within individuals: one that “was the collectively constructed sense of normal everyday life” and another in which exists “the troubling knowledge” of climate change (Norgaard). Identity is brought up in additional studies that indicate there are small variations in readiness to act on climate change between genders, ages, education levels, and municipality sizes (Lehrer). Another study identified hurdles such as misinformation, climate despair, and scientific complexity.



Figure 3: The Story of Self, Us, and Now Framework (“*The Stories We Tell Shapes the Future*”)

Political Communications: What Researchers and Pundits Suggest

General studies have found that catering unique communications strategies to individual demographics can be crucial to instigating action (Lehrer). Additionally, research has found it valuable to consider the demographics of the conversation partner to identify a connection

between their lived experience and the issue of climate change (Ettinger). More specifically, interpersonal communications between activists and value-aligned citizens could prompt future conversations and support, but societal barriers remained a major limiting factor in producing tangible action from the conversations (Fine). In a study consisting of democrats, independents, and persuadables, the strongest overall argument for climate action was clean air and water (“Data for Progress: Green New Deal Messaging”). Another study found that, “40% of Young Voters [said] they will only support candidates who prioritize climate change,” and that young voters reported climate change and the environment as their most important non-economic issue for their top priority in 10 years” (“Youth Battleground State Poll”). Finally, research conducted across the political spectrum found that focusing on solutions, local community, choice, and personal benefits were key in climate communications (“Let’s Talk Climate”).

Pennsylvania and Higher Education Communications:

A study conducted in Pennsylvania for the 2024 Presidential election found that the “strongest climate and clean energy case for Biden [in PA] focuses on lowering energy costs, job growth, and protecting public health from air and water pollution” (Hart Research). Another study supported this point, finding that the majority of Pennsylvania voters “support gradually transitioning to 100% of energy being produced from clean and renewable sources over the next 15 years” (“Climate Solutions”).

In the higher education setting, one researcher suggests that, when teaching on climate, educators should “complement information with consistent behaviour by the lecturer, integrate local stories

and provide students with basic skills to communicate climate effectively” (Sippel). Another scholar found that cognitive dissonance theory can be valuable in mitigating dilemmas and “promoting climate action within the sector” (Nikula et al.). However, as the first article emphasizes, there is a lack of comprehensive research exploring “the link between climate communications and universities”.

This review of existing literature provides a basis for my campaign analyses, providing insight into what can help make a climate campaign persuasive. Alongside my analysis, this literature review will be the foundation for the Campaign Playbook, a campaign guide I will develop to apply my findings to Penn State Forward.

Methods

To develop a campaign for Penn State Forward, I had to develop a method for analyzing other messages. To do that, I have used the moral foundations and done a rhetorical and visual analysis of 50 messages.

What Are the Moral Foundations?

To approach this via an academic lens, I will be utilizing the moral foundations theory (MFT). As explained in chapter 2 of “Moral Foundations Theory: The Pragmatic Validity of Moral Pluralism,” MFT “proposes that the human mind is organized in advance of experience so that it is prepared to learn values, norms, and behaviors related to a diverse set of recurrent adaptive social problems” (Graham et al.). Essentially, MFT is the mental base from which our individual morals, influenced by culture and psyche, will be constructed. In their research paper, Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and their fellow authors outline the original five foundations of intuitive ethics: care/harm; fairness/cheating; loyalty/betrayal; authority/subversion; and sanctity/degradation (Graham et al.).

Foundation	Care/harm	Fairness/cheating	Loyalty/betrayal	Authority/subversion	Sanctity/degradation
Adaptive challenge	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two-way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid communicable diseases
Original triggers	Suffering, distress, or neediness expressed by one's child	Cheating, cooperation, deception	Threat or challenge to group	Signs of high and low rank	Waste products, diseased people
Current triggers	Baby seals, cute cartoon characters	Marital fidelity, broken vending machines	Sports teams, nations	Bosses, respected professionals	Immigration, deviant sexuality
Characteristic emotions	Compassion for victim; anger at perpetrator	Anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage at traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust
Relevant virtues	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, deference	Temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness

Adapted from [Haidt \(2012\)](#).

Figure 4: The Original Five Foundations of Intuitive Ethics

MFT, in general, is broad, and for good reason. As they explain, “MFT gives this varied set of researchers a common language for talking about the moral domain” (Graham et al., “Moral Foundations Theory”). This research is undeniably valuable within the study of moral psychology, allowing for better understanding of, and communication about, the overarching basics of morality. Yet, this is a broad understanding and doesn’t have a direct applicability in politics.

Elsewhere, Graham and Haidt explore the connection of MFT and the political sphere. Titled “Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations,” they propose the “moral foundations hypothesis,” which states that “political liberals construct their moral

systems primarily upon two psychological foundations—harm/care and fairness/reciprocity—whereas political conservatives construct moral systems more evenly upon five psychological foundations—the same ones as liberals, plus ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity” (Graham et al., “Liberals and Conservatives”).

This idea was tested across four different studies, accounted for external factors, such as age, gender, education level, and income, and used self-reported political identities. Ultimately, all four studies (moral relevance assessments, moral judgements, unwillingness to violate the foundations for money, and word use in religious sermons) supported their hypothesis.

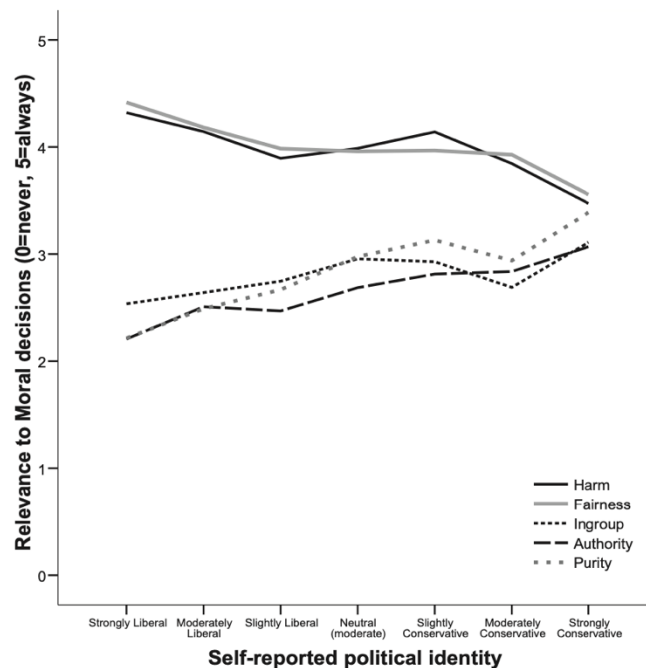


Figure 1. Relevance of moral foundations across political identity, Study 1.

Figure 5: The Moral Foundations of Politics

Graham & Haidt also released “When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize,” which further explores how moral foundations apply to these two political orientations. Citing their study, the authors further argued that liberal morality is based on two foundations (fairness/reciprocity and harm/care), whereas conservative morality spreads more evenly across all five foundations. This piece ultimately concluded that liberals can perceive conservatives as unmoral, when their morals simply emphasize a different arrangement of the five main foundations. In proving this point, Graham & Haidt illustrated their initial findings in an alternative matter to their research study (Graham et al., “Liberals and Conservatives”).

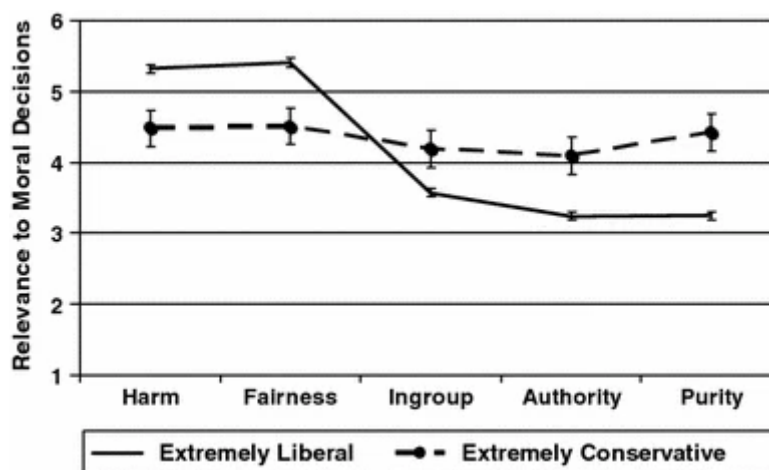


Figure 6: Relevance to Moral Decisions vs. Moral Foundations

This depiction of results exemplifies the same conclusion, but in a different structure. Though repetitive, this information becomes more valuable when combined with their next figure, which indicates how “social psychologists and social justice researchers discuss these domains”. By studying Scientific Journal Rankings (SJR) and the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

(JPSP) articles, the authors uncovered that these academic writings supported the harm and fairness foundations as “good,” whereas ingroup, authority, and purity were seen as “bad,” often associated with unjustness or oppressiveness. This enhances the findings of Graham & Haidt’s research paper, further showcasing the impact of the moral foundations divide (Graham et al., “Liberals and Conservatives”).

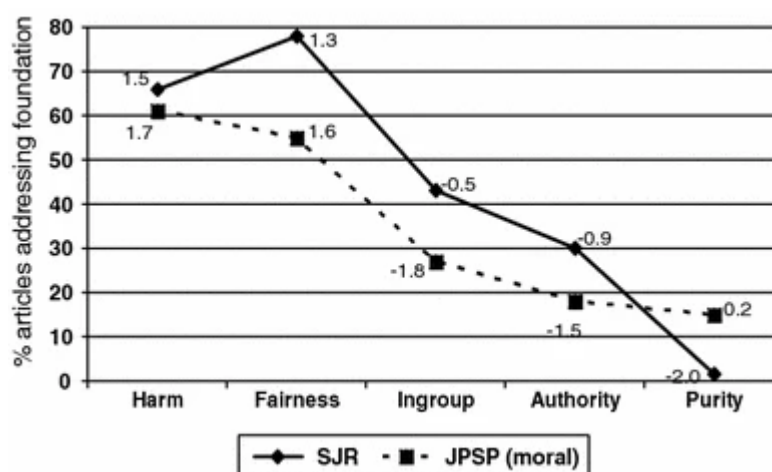


Figure 7: % Articles Addressing Foundation vs. Moral Foundations

They then apply it directly to social justice issues, emphasizing that, “Recognizing ingroup, authority, and purity as moral concerns—even if they are not *your* moral concerns—is crucial both for scientific accuracy and for the application of social justice research beyond the walls of the academy”. This is the central point to “When Morality Opposes Justice”: the traditionally conservative moral foundations need to be recognized “as moral (instead of amoral, or immoral, or just plain stupid)” to “open up a door in the wall that separates liberals and conservatives when they try to discuss moral issues.”

Why I Used the Moral Frameworks:

Ultimately, MFT provides a foundation for discussing morality and motivations. These two factors are at the core of this thesis's research, and by understanding what appeals to specific groups, we can better understand why these campaigns do or do not prompt action. Additionally, it provides guidance when developing a sample campaign, and aids in categorizing the sample of social media posts.

How I Implemented My Study:

To implement the moral foundations and uncover insights, I studied 50 climate-focused social media posts. Due to the nature of this research, my main inquiry is focused on connections and themes amongst the content studied. Because this medium is more difficult to quantify, I intend to identify key findings that can be used as building blocks for our campaigns, as opposed to simply statistics or numeric results. In tandem with the moral foundations, I intended to uncover how values can create emotional responses to political campaigns and apply my findings to a future Penn State Forward campaign. That said, I examined quantitative data when available, such as the amount of likes on a post, to add some statistical backing to my findings.

For each post, I noted the theme, political affiliation, emotion, media type, creator's following size, and primary moral foundations. To ultimately draw applicable conclusions, these data points were used to construct four categories for study: Rage Against the Machine, Advocates for Bold Systemic and Institutional Change, Behavior Change, and Sustainability as a Value.

Conclusion:

To effectively develop a sample campaign for Penn State Forward, I needed to create a method for analyzing social media messages from comparable platforms, including politicians and nonprofits. To accomplish this, I leveraged the moral frameworks to complete a rhetorical and visual analysis of 50 messages.

Analysis

Rage Against the Machine

The Rage Against the Machine categorization is composed largely of eco-socialist activists and focuses on shaming those in power. This strategy aligns closely with both the fairness and care foundations, which are generally more liberal leaning.

Fairness and care are at the core of Rage Against the Machine. Its focus on calling out injustices epitomizes the pursuit of fairness in governance. Their calls for radical change stem from dissatisfaction with the current political structure, largely due to unequal treatment of citizens and the planet. While not all activists align completely with this ideal, eco-socialism is built on the idea that “environmental degradation and social injustice stem from the same source: a world where profit is the highest goal” (“What Is Ecosocialism”). A focus on people and planet leads their thought, with eco-socialism being touted as “a radical alternative that puts social and ecological well-being first” (Löwy).

A primary example of Rage Against the Machine is Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard, a campus coalition that, in 2021, successfully moved Harvard “to divest its endowment from fossil fuels” (“Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard”). Most notable is their “Harvard Corp Loves Fossil Fuels” digital campaign. This campaign embodies winning strategies from other Rage Against the Machine

aligned organizations, such as Cambridge Climate Justice, Sunrise Princeton, and Sunrise UMass.

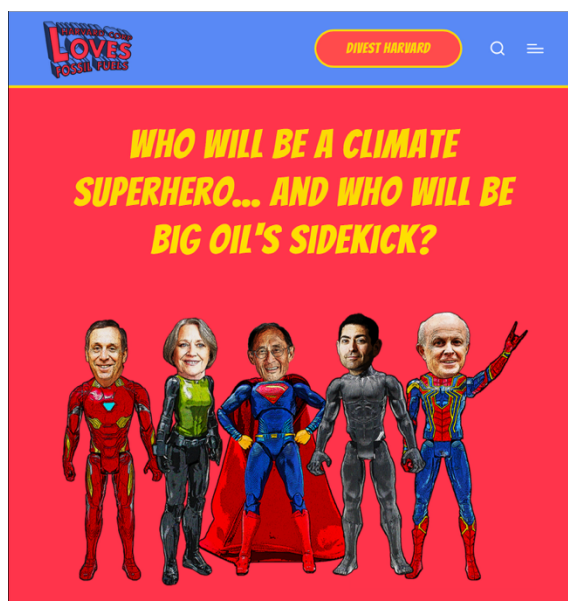


Figure 8: “Harvard Corp Loves Fossil Fuels” Landing Page

By focusing on the fairness and care moral foundations, Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard successfully made the case for collective action. In Harvard University Treasurer Paul Finnegan's description, they emphasize Harvard's motto, “veritas,” meaning “truth.” To truly be for the people, Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard claims, Finnegan's past as the Co-CEO of a private equity group that funded pipeline projects must be reconciled with. The pursuit of Finnegan's truth is central to their campaign against him, as they expose his anti-environmental past to voters that otherwise may not have known the full truth of Finnegan's experiences.

Furthermore, in their piece about Harvard Corporation's senior fellow Bill Lee, they acknowledge his past pursuits of fairness, going so far as to say, "his work as a special assistant to the Massachusetts attorney general to investigate racial bias in state courts makes it clear that he cares about issues of fairness." Intentionally framing Lee as a fairness warrior, the group focuses on encouraging him to stand by his past actions and seek divestment, as climate change inequitably affects minority groups.

Across the board, Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard calls for greater transparency from committee members, fair and honest elections, and more accountability, all to pursue a more fair and representative governing system.

Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard also appeals to the care foundation through their focus on current and future stakeholders' needs, harm reduction, and ethical investments. For example, in their description of Harvard University Treasurer Paul Finnegan, they emphasized that to be "a true Harvard Hero, [you] must look out for the future of students, faculty, and the community." This focus on "love thy neighbor" targets the care foundation, implying the importance of collective good over individual profit.

Additionally, when talking about Lee, who has already shown concern for others through his defense of affirmative action and his work investigating racial bias, Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard calls on this care for others to further their point of divestment. As they point out, "an industry whose activities disproportionately harm the least well-off (especially communities of color) is

no ally.” This strategic focus highlights the care foundation not only amongst viewers, but also to Lee himself.

Finally, their focus on ethical investments ties to the care foundation. Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard calls for responsible investing of the university’s \$4.2 billion endowment. Instead of profiting without regard for unintended impact, divestment intentionally removes harmful climate change contributors. This change would demonstrate a commitment to caring about the effects of their investments and would show a university alignment with climate action goals. As for stylistic choices, the most immediately identifiable strategy component is Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard’s campaign aesthetics. The campaign leverages bright colors, trending topics, and impactful slogans to catch and hold attention.

Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard tactfully leverages both color theory and political affiliations in their color choices. This campaign primarily uses loud colors, using a highly saturated red, blue, and yellow color scheme to “catch the eye and raise excitement” (Muhammad). While both red and blue have significant political associations, the combination of the two plus yellow highlights the nonpartisan nature of the campaign, as well as the comic book theme. Within color theory, especially in the political sphere, red is a “symbol of power and drive,” while blue exudes trustworthiness and credibility (“How Color Theory Can Propel Your Political Campaign to the Podium”). When combined with yellow, which “embodies optimism,” these primary colors create a perfect balance of energy, reliability, and hope (Muhammad). Additionally, they emphasize the vibrant color palette often associated with some of the world’s most iconic superheroes, including Superman, Spider-Man, and Wonder Woman (Skollwarynz, Perez et. al.).

Furthermore, this campaign was released in February 2021, amidst some of the highest grossing superhero films of all time (“Franchise: Marvel Cinematic Universe”). By understanding the pop culture environment and what was presently resonating with their target audience, Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard was able to successfully catch and retain attention.

Along with color choice and cultural alignment, Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard directly communicates through their slogan, “Who will be a climate superhero...and who will be big oil’s sidekick.” Other organizations, such as Sunrise UMass, likewise use catchy sayings, such as “climate change doesn’t wait, and neither can we” (@sunriseumass). In both examples, short one-liners are used to quickly convey the overall message of the campaign or group without overwhelming the viewers.

Another tactic used by Rage Against the Machine groups is humor. Memes, jokes, and satire are prevalent across these campaigns, as we see in Fossil Fuels Divest Harvard’s satirical superhero website. Value-aligned organizations such as Cambridge Climate Justice illustrate the successful use of popular meme formats to poke fun while also conveying their climate-focused message (@cambridgeclimatejustice).

A major benefit of the Rage Against the Machine organizations is their ability to develop and execute school-specific campaigns that bring together closely located people with a common cause. Groups such as Sunrise Princeton have used their platforms to orchestrate in-person protests with clear goals that target specific university leadership (@sunriseprinceton).

These tactics energize young changemakers to pursue a better future. Often targeted towards students, Rage Against the Machines harness the righteousness of youth before they become complacent.

Rage Against the Machine: Downsides

These campaigns often focus more effort on strong displays of support, such as protesting and organizing, as opposed to the milder acts Penn State Forward is seeking, such as digital voting. Furthermore, as evident from the examples, these groups are mostly geared specifically toward communities that are geographically close, encouraging in-person protest and action that is not always possible for a more diluted campaign. With over 700,000 eligible voters scattered across the world, a strategy based on proximity may not align with PSU Forward's goals ("Penn State Board of Trustees Demographic Report"). Students are also at the center of many of these efforts, a group not eligible to vote in the PSU Board of Trustees election.

Additionally, these campaigns may appear "extreme" or "radical" to some who, though they might share similar views, do not want to be as vocal or confrontational. Penn State Forward is specifically focusing on voting, a much less intense show of support. Whether in alignment with the mission or not, people may be hesitant due to the call for a restructured system, which directly opposes the natural desire to be skeptical of, or reject, change. These campaigns rely on the changemakers, the individuals who aren't afraid to shake the system, who are already politically active and making their voices heard.

Furthermore, though they have catchy slogans, Rage Against the Machine campaigns can lack nuance, which can pose a challenge to providing elected trustees with tangible policy goals. Yet, they help shift the Overton window (the collection of policies widely accepted throughout society), a main goal of the Penn State Forward campaign (“The Overton Window”). The nuance needed to navigate a Penn State Forward campaign becomes increasingly evident when considering that the group is involved in both the campaigning and governing side, as it is an organization that has successfully elected trustees. Therefore, general critiques of the Board also include critiques of sitting members who have been endorsed by the organization.

Rage Against the Machine is ultimately a valuable category to study in relation to the Penn State Forward campaign, specifically because of its audience of younger voters and its university-based nature. A main goal for the campaign is to increase voter turnout specifically within younger alumni, making Rage Against the Machine movements insightful contemporaries.

Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates

Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates aim to take the reins of power and make significant changes. Fairness and care go hand-in-hand for this category, with many policy initiatives and messaging choices combining the two.

Although they are based on the same moral frameworks, there is a notable difference between Rage Against the Machine and Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates. Focused on becoming a part of the system in order to change it, Bold Systemic and Institutional Change

Advocates are notably different from Rage Against the Machine's aggressive and extreme nature. With this category largely used by politicians, it is often used to establish a campaign that emphasizes the everyday man. For example, Senator Bernie Sanders, well known for being an independent and "against the grain" of standard politics, runs on a platform focused on "fight[ing] to create a better world for our children and grandchildren based on the principles of economic, social, racial, and environmental justice" ("Senator Bernie Sanders").

This tactic establishes the candidate as an everyman. It emphasizes that the current political system doesn't work for the common person, but this candidate can champion the people's concerns and lead the constituents to real change. In action, policies like the Green New Deal have come from Bold Advocates aiming to integrate social and environmental concerns into policy ("What Is a Green New Deal?").

Arguably the timeliest example of a successful institutional change advocate is New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani. Beating out republican and democrat career politicians, Mamdani ran on a message of making New York City more affordable. Many factors are quoted in his success; his age, his charisma, his opponent ("Why Zohran Mamdani's Victory Matters"). Yet, across multiple sources, two core factors prevail; his understanding of constituents' needs and his ability to motivate action.

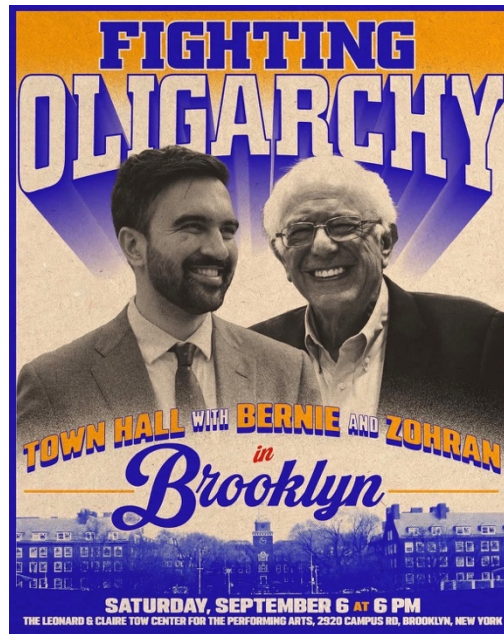


Figure 9: "Fighting Oligarchy" Instagram Post from Mamdani and Sanders

The fairness and care moral frameworks are heavily used in Mamdani’s messaging, particularly in establishing his main campaign promises. With 50 percent of working age New Yorkers having difficulty meeting their basic needs while “the wealthiest fifth of Manhattanites earned more than 53 times as much as the bottom 20 percent,” the wealth gap, and particularly the unfairness associated with it, was a focus of the Mamdani campaign (“True Cost of Living”, Chen).

His main commitment was creating an affordable New York for all, an idea fundamentally in line with fairness. By freezing rent and building affordable housing, Mamdani aimed to reduce the unjust barriers draining citizens’ bank accounts. Childcare was one of his main focuses, not only to care for children, but also to provide more equitable career opportunities for parents and

families. By focusing on both fairness and care, Mamdani built a platform that truly resonated with his audience.

Advocates are only successful if they truly understand the wants of their electorate. Mamdani understood that his constituents needed an affordable city, and that they felt passionately about making that a reality. He ran on supporting the everyday people, focusing on rent freezes, public groceries, affordable childcare, free buses, and affordable housing (“Appraising Mamdani’s Five Key Policies”). His connection to the everyman provided him the necessary basis to take on the wealthiest and most powerful. As one analyst of Mamdani’s campaign explains, despite the millions of dollars dedicated to anti-Mamdani rhetoric, “New Yorkers weren’t buying what the billionaires and fearmongers were selling” (Eldin).

Equally important in securing his win was his ability to reach and inspire voters. Building a network of volunteers 100,000 people strong, Mamdani was able to communicate his vision authentically and hopefully (Pilkington). His focus on hope for the future, combined with his social media prowess, helped lead him to victory.

Gen Z played a large part in Mamdani’s election campaign, due to his ability to connect with them. With threats of climate change, AI, and economic downturns, it’s easy to assume a dismal future. In contrast, Mamdani promised an abundant future, one worth fighting for. His inspirational vision of what’s to come helped lead him to victory, with one article claiming that, by electing Mamdani, “the city chose hope over tyranny and despair” (Eldin).

Mamdani integrated his constituent understanding and hopeful messaging into a revolutionary social media marketing campaign, harnessing popular social platforms amongst younger voters, like Instagram and TikTok. His team developed vertical short form content and compelling graphics, formatting their campaign in-line with the popular forms of content consumption on these platforms. A study by Buffer found that Instagram reels have 36% more reach than photos or carousels, making them a valuable tool for spreading a message and building awareness for the candidate (Lang). In the final 2 months of his Mayoral campaign, Mamdani posted roughly 180 pieces of content, with over 70% being videos. Not only does this contribute to the campaign's reach, but it also makes cross posting to other social media platforms, such as TikTok, easier.

The Mamdani campaign also leveraged A/B testing not only to understand what makes content successful, but to continue discovering what resonates with his potential constituents (Perello). Mamdani's team also used the common tactic of celebrity and professional endorsements, including *Stranger Things*' Joe Keery and former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, but also leveraged the growing influence of content creators by partnering with New York City creatives such as Kareem Rahma, creator of "SubwayTakes" (@subwaytakes).

In an interview with CNN, Debbie Saslaw, Mamdani's campaign digital producer, outlines additional aspects of their strategy. She attributed part of the campaign's success to their focus on original, authentic ideas instead of rapidly changing viral memes, and noted the importance of long-term digital strategies instead of one-time or inconsistent appearances (Sierra). The campaign has also found significant success by leveraging fan-made content to increase

awareness and engagement, using that traction to prompt in-person support and action (Kelly, Perello). By leveraging online outreach, the Mamdani campaign was able to increase real-world engagement, a beneficial tactic since physical communities are still a main source of information about issues and elections for people (Smyton).

Climate change is not an immediately identifiable issue within many of Mamdani's campaign efforts. Yet, as Mamdani himself stated, "Climate and quality of life are not two separate concerns. They are, in fact, one and the same" (Hetland). Instead of speaking on a "climate agenda," Mamdani introduced solutions to people's problems that also benefitted the environment. Reliable and affordable mass transit and green schools were not framed as solutions to an environmental crisis; they were effective and inclusive methods of improving the lives of New Yorkers. Instead of focusing on politically charged terms, Mamdani integrated climate action into his plan to address the leading public worries of not only New York City, but the United States as a whole ("Top Public Worries in the U.S."). This strategic move earned him the first ever Mayoral endorsement from Sunrise Movement, a "prominent youth-led climate group" (Kinniburgh).

More generally, Bold Systemic and Institutional Change advocates are primarily politicians who run on the idea that "the system must be changed from the inside out." Campaigns based on this tactic often center around a single figurehead, someone who is "against the grain" and brings hope for a system change. This often takes the form of younger politicians who stand in contrast

to the political spaces dominated by older generations, but these advocates are not beholden to a particular stereotype. Some examples include:

Bernie Sanders: Currently a Vermont senator and a former presidential hopeful, Sanders has been a leader of the Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates strategy. As an older white man, Sanders aligns with the status quo, but, as an independent, contrasts the current system by going against the two-party system (“Senator Bernie Sanders”).

Summer Lee: The congresswoman representing Pennsylvania’s twelfth congressional district is a young, black woman. She breaks the status quo by not being the “stereotypical” political figure and brings new ideas and representation that shakes up the current political environment. She is no establishment figure and represents her constituency with a point of view different from her predecessors (“Congresswoman Summer Lee”).

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: A young, Latina woman representing New York’s fourteenth district in Congress, Ocasio-Cortez pursues strong policy that doesn’t just align with the Democratic party but pushes for more “radical” governance. This push for change has gotten her blowback from conservatives. Similarly to Summer Lee, she is not the stereotypical political figure but is representative of the area she holds office for (“Representative Ocasio-Cortez”).

As a strategy that aims to use the systems in play to make change, The Bold Systemic and Institutional Change advocacy strategy has a unique characteristic that proves to voters that this candidate isn’t just like every other politician. Instead of leveraging major donors and PAC

money, this strategy is based on grassroots campaigns built up of many small donations by the people they represent, not the elite who want to maintain their power. As opposed to Rage Against the Machine, Bold Change pursues a change in representation, not an overhaul of the system. This less intense approach allows candidates to target a wider swath of demographics, which is necessary for broader appeal and ultimately election wins.

Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates: Downsides

Because of its reliance on strong opposition to the status quo, this strategy creates an added barrier to adoption. It evokes David vs. Goliath, painting the candidate as the underdog fighting against a system that to many seems impossible to change and a futile effort. It can be perceived as too optimistic or unlikely, and though it is less radical than Rage Against the Machine, it still demands a major change and a hope for a future that has yet to be proven.

Furthermore, this method is often most effective in liberal environments. Penn State is a traditions-focused community, meaning this tactic might not be as successful as it would be in a major city or more diverse areas. Finally, anti-corporate and anti-elite messages shares a premise with discourses that are used to inflame attitudes of climate change denialism, posing a harmful aspect of this strategy (Gardam et al.).

“Bold Change” branded politicians face an additional flaw: accountability. While all elected officials are expected to show their constituents that they have accomplished their campaign

promises, accountability may be most important for those running on Bold Change ideology.

Voters rally behind impactful, noticeable change, and if that is not delivered on, support falters.

Former Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey is a key example. Though his 2024 election included more “liberal” policies, including expanding affordable healthcare, building the clean energy economy, and raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, he still lost (“Where Does US Sen. Bob Casey Stand on Various Issues?”). A political historian at the University of Pennsylvania cited his failure as an inability “to break out of the mold of a ‘generic Democrat’” (Lin).

Therefore, while Bold Change can be a successful campaign strategy, it requires consistency and follow-through that is evident to the voters once in office. This is especially true for career politicians, whose past records don’t always align with their current Bold Change persona.

However, the idea of Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates is still valuable to the Penn State Forward campaign, as it aligns with Penn State Forward’s goal to get representative alumni elected to the Board of Trustees who reflect the progressive values of their younger, more forward-thinking constituents without isolating other demographics required to win.

Behavior Change

The Behavior Change category focuses on accomplishing change through individual actions and behavior shifts. Behavior Change primarily focuses on the care moral foundation, encouraging individuals to take a particular action that, when done en masse, creates significant change. As Sierra Club notes, “This is the classic political strategy of fostering change through living

example. If millions of people make similar choices, the system might begin to move even in the absence of policy changes” (Mark).

The lack of response efficacy (thinking your actions will not make a difference) is quoted as one of the main reasons that, despite the fact “most people believe climate change is happening...many don’t act” (“What Behavioral Strategies Motivate Environmental Action”). Thus, finding ways to effectively initiate individual actions may be a key method for expanding, and succeeding in, climate action efforts.

A prime example of the Behavior Change strategy in action is Penn State EcoReps’ “America Recycles Day” Instagram post. Focusing on the care foundation, this post uses catchy, collective phrases such as “Let’s turn good habits into lasting impact - one recycle at a time” to emphasize care for others and the planet (@psuecoreps). It promotes acknowledgement of the impacts of our everyday actions, and how they can be easily adjusted to support a broader mission and a healthier planet. In this specific example, EcoReps uses an attention funnel based around care: grab attention; explain the importance of every action; quantify the impact of said actions; motivate action through in-person events; and contextualize individual actions within a nationwide event.



Figure 10: EcoReps' America Recycles Day Post

In addition to the care moral foundation, Behavior Change strategies often utilize similar style and design strategies to increase the effectiveness of their campaigns. In the examples highlighted in this section, a common strategy prevails: the use of Instagram carousel posts. Of the five posts that will be spotlighted in this category, four utilize the carousel posting format.

This is likely for a few reasons. Primarily, “Instagram carousels enable you to share more in-depth content. With this type of post, you don't have to choose between images or videos. You can combine both and tell a better story” (Ross). In addition to supporting more detailed content, carousels have been found to drive more engagement than other posting types (Rogers).

Notably, Behavior Change posts often leverage environmental or sustainability branding and content. Specifically, green color schemes, leaf graphics, and lightbulbs are constants across

these posts, signaling an environmental cause. Dalhousie University Office of Sustainability's post, "Waste Wednesday," encapsulates this (@sustainabilityatdal).

These sustainability cues are valuable for quickly communicating the environmental nature of the post, as "the color green is psychologically linked to nature, health, freshness, and renewal, creating an immediate, positive, and often uncritical emotional response in the consumer" ("Why is the Color Green so Often Associated with Environmental Claims?").

Additionally, Behavior Change social media posts often focus on one specific call-to-action, particularly ones that have an immediate or obvious impact. In the University of Texas Sustainability's post, "Save Water and Energy," they make clear asks of the audience, including "take quick showers," "turn off lights," and "get leaks fixed ASAP" (@otksustainability). Not only are these explicit instructions, but they also call for actions that make the outcome obvious. When someone takes a shorter shower, they can visibly see less water going down the drain. When you turn off the lights, it is obvious that less power is being used, since the lights aren't on.

Another example of simple daily swaps is Sustain PSU and Penn State EcoReps' Instagram reel about toothbrushes (@sustainpsu). Beginning with the fact that "1 billion plastic toothbrushes are thrown away each year in the U.S. alone," the video prompts viewers to change to bamboo toothbrushes. Not only does this show immediate impact, but notably, it puts the control into individuals' hands. Unlike the Bold Advocates, who associate much of the actionable steps to government officials, Behavior Change transfers that power to everyday people. Practicing small

sustainable habits “often improve personal well-being, save money, and inspire others to take action” all of which promote continued environmentally friendly behaviors (Kvizhashvili).

Finally, a notable tactic used by Behavior Change strategies is to leverage holidays to encourage sustainable lifestyle changes. PSU EcoReps posted on America Recycles day, using the aligning holiday to further their message. Sustainability influencers have also made use of this tactic, such as Leah Thomas’s Thanksgiving post on her profile, Green Girl Leah (@greengirlleah).

The day before Thanksgiving, she posted a guide to “preventing food waste with a few easy habit changes,” using timeliness and holiday excitement to increase her post’s relevance. By tying food waste to a holiday, Thomas was able to make a long-standing problem into a uniquely “today” issue. This aligns with the recency illusion, which is, “the tendency to assume that something is objectively new, and thus threatening, simply because it’s new to you” (Montell). This illusion helps explain why, though the issue of food waste is certainly not new, framing it in a unique context that is timely may incentivize individuals to care more, at least temporarily.

Behavior Change: Downsides

Behavior Change campaigns or posts often center around one specific sustainability issue or action, which is not ideal for a political platform built on a multitude of causes. With sustainability being just one facet of Penn State Forward’s policy commitments, utilizing Behavior Change strategies may not be ideal for supporting the broader campaign message.

What's more, the same techniques that signal sustainability (such as using green) have been leveraged by less altruistic means, sometimes being "used by marketers to suggest an eco-friendly product without the need for substantive claims" ("Why is the Color Green so Often Associated with Environmental Claims?").

Also, behavior change campaigns are often used by more institutionalized or bureaucratic groups, such as the Penn State funded EcoReps. PSU Forward runs in contrast to these systems, advocating for wide-reaching and significantly impactful change. These posts, especially when created by large organizations or companies, can be off-putting, and can seem like the group is pushing the onus onto the individual, instead of addressing the major agents driving climate change.

Additionally, Behavior Change tends to focus on actions that have an immediate or obvious impact, which is largely not the case for Penn State Forward's issues. However, calls-to-action specifically focused on voting and its outcomes, as opposed to issue-specific changes, may be able to use this strategy.

Furthermore, many of these behavior change recommendations are not novel ideas. They are repeated advice many sustainability-minded individuals have heard numerous times and often serve as more a "reminder" than a motivator for action, often relying on the illusory truth effect (the tendency to accept something as truth because you've repeatedly heard it) to instigate change (Montell). The Penn State Forward campaign isn't attempting to adjust a pre-existing

behavior, such as turning off the lights. It aims for viewers to engage in a new action by voting in the Board of Trustees election.

Finally, positive reception of individual calls for change isn't guaranteed. By putting the onus on ordinary people, and not the billion-dollar companies or politicians who contribute most to climate change, you face the opportunity of backlash. Thus, balancing a call for individual changes with actions such as holding officials and companies accountable or being transparent about your conduct, is crucial to the success of this strategy.

Though there can be complications, Behavior Change is usable for Penn State Forward. With careful construction and clear calls-to-action, behavior change focused campaigns or posts may help increase voter turnout.

Sustainability as a Value

Sustainability as a Value encourages action by claiming that protecting the environment is the “good” or “common sense” thing to do. Epitomizing the care moral foundation, Sustainability as a Value acts on an innate belief that we should want to care for the environment. Oftentimes, social media posts using Sustainability as a Value don't focus on the personal benefit of taking action; instead, they focus on preserving fragile ecosystems and protecting natural spaces from those who wish them harm. Whether preventing pollution, industrialization, degradation, or deforestation, campaigns in this category bank on a moral conviction to fight for those who cannot defend themselves.



Figure 11: World Whale Day post by Cetaceans.org

A great example of Sustainability as a Value in practice is Cetaceans’ World Whale Day post (@cetaceans_org). The main hook is not personal benefit; instead, it’s completely based on the viewer’s care for wildlife. When swiping through the post, words such as “protect” and “vulnerable” are used to further underline the focus on care. The final slide even acknowledges that “we know this takes more effort than signing a petition or sending an email, but it’s more impactful. Use our voice for cetaceans”, encouraging the audience to think beyond themselves and take time to protect wildlife.

Much like in Behavior Change campaigns, carousel posts appear to be a popular choice for messaging. As Slate explains, “With up to twenty slides available, you can craft a detailed narrative that unfolds with each swipe, making it perfect for sharing complex information or multi-part stories” (“Understanding What Is a Carousel Post and How to Use It Effectively”).

Unlike Behavior Change, green color schemes and leaf graphics do not seem to dominate.

Instead, nature visuals appear to prevail, with posts like Patagonia's "Defense of Public Lands" using natural landscapes (@patagonia). As this example illustrates, Sustainability as a Value has widespread applicability and appeal, from a self-proclaimed "non-profit endeavor created for the primary purpose of helping you take action for cetaceans" to an outdoors company with \$1.47 billion in annual sales ("ABOUT", SGI News). More so than other categories, Sustainability as a Value is widely applicable.

Carousel posts also allow for the use of a persuasion structure like the "fear-then-relief" technique. Defined as "Invok[ing] fear in the other person. Then, when they seek a solution, provide one that leads them in the direction you choose", this structure can be a valuable tool to provoke action ("Fear-Then-Relief"). In the World Whale Day post, we can clearly see this structure in action. Slide one catches the reader's attention by targeting something they value. Slides two and three then invoke fear of said value being violated. Slide four outlines specific repercussions of this violation, deepening the fear. Then, slides five and six provide "relief" by providing a solution (in this case, handwritten letters).

Yet, it still retains the clear call-to-action of Behavior Change, with local examples such as Clearwater Conservancy's "Watershed Cleanup Day" post, which outlines a date and time for "keeping Pennsylvania beautiful" (@clearwaterconservancy). Especially with localized posts, the call for selfless action is front and center, prompting sustainability-minded individuals to act.

Additionally, we see Sustainability as a Value reflected within the University in the Penn State Climate Action Plan, a coalition of students urging Penn State to act on climate. Their petition, which ultimately collected over 2,100 signatures, led with the statement, “We, the community of Penn State, call on the University to employ its vast resources to combat climate change and become a responsible leader in creating a more sustainable future”. Focusing on emissions reductions, carbon capture research, fossil fuel divestment, sustainability initiatives, and the creation of a Climate Action Commission, Penn State Climate Action campaigned on the premise that sustainable actions were the right thing to do for the environment (“Sign the Petition”).

Sustainability as a Value isn’t purely altruistic. Though they still highlight nature as a value, posts such as World Wildlife Fund’s “Nature Needs Us Now” post highlight personal impacts and social proof to motivate action (@world_wildlife). In this post, the first fact shown is, “Americans agree that protecting nature is essential for clean air, water, and a stable food supply”. Though still focused on sustainability, outlining the impacts of environmental action can add substance to the call-to-action, providing tangible evidence of need.

In this example, “social proof” is also leveraged. Social proof, defined as “mak[ing] decisions based on the actions and decisions made by a larger group” explains the wording of that primary fact (Clemens). World Wildlife Fund could easily have eliminated “Americans agree that...” from the beginning of the post. But, without those three words, the post loses social potency. Not only is it reminiscent of the bandwagon effect (adopting certain behaviors or beliefs because many other people do the same), but it pops the “normative bubble” (“Bandwagon Effect”).

The normative bubble refers to the “gap between what Americans *think* others think about taking climate actions and what others *actually* think” (Jenks). People vastly underestimate how “climate-friendly” their peers are. As explained in *Behavioral Scientist*, “Nearly 6 in 10 Americans believed people should install solar panels on their homes. However, only 3 in 10 of those same respondents believed that most others agree with them” (Rakhimov et. al.). Based on this idea, research found that “the strongest unique predictor of intention to take high-impact climate action is whether a person believes that other people are already taking that action” (Jenks).

This popping of the “normative bubble” helps explain why posts like World Wildlife Fund’s are successful. We see this idea across examples, with one National Park History post’s caption beginning with “Public lands are INSANELY POPULAR” (@nationalparkhistory). Thus, unlike Rage Against the Machine and Bold Advocates, Sustainability as a Value provides an alternative to inflated politicization, focusing on bringing people together for a shared value instead of calling people out.

Sustainability as a Value: Downsides

A notable downside of Sustainability as a Value is its reliance on morality. Attempting persuasion based on “what is morally correct” is often not the most successful tactic, so relying solely on that poses challenges (Suttie). Add to that the fact that sustainability is not even a top 5

worry on Americans' minds, and the tactic becomes increasingly tricky ("Top Public Worries in the U.S.").

As discussed, a key element to success with Sustainability as a Value is social proof. While applicable for nationwide campaigns, finding data based on Penn State Forward's unique electorate and their attitudes towards sustainability would prove difficult. Within this election, the general citizen is less of a "peer" than a fellow alum is, making generalized statistics less impactful to potential voters.

Despite these concerns, the Sustainability as a Value strategy could still prove fruitful to the Penn State Forward campaign by appealing to environmentally conscious individuals. These value-aligned constituents could be motivated to act, spurred on by their pre-existing commitments to sustainability and environmental protections.

Application

Applying the takeaways from my research and analysis, I developed a Campaign Playbook for Penn State Forward. This Playbook covers branding, messaging, and strategy, with sample messages and social media post mock-ups.

Branding

Because Penn State Forward mostly communicates with potential voters online, it must grab attention amongst the endless content seen on social media. The campaign requires a recognizable Penn State Forward brand that also develops the candidates' "brands". The branding I propose will enable the campaign to have a consistent, recognizable image and to subtextually communicate features of the campaign, similar to Mamdani's use of bodega branding to convey his commitment to affordable groceries and grassroots support.

The use of bright colors and bold fonts in the Rage Against the Machine campaigns influenced the Penn State Forward redesign. The color scheme includes colors the campaign already uses, which are also part of the Penn State palette. These bold colors will capture attention while having a recognizable affiliation with Penn State. Making use of Penn State Forward's updated color scheme, I redesigned a simpler and more colorful logo to quickly grab attention, inspired by the Divest Harvard campaign. I also added two new fonts, emphasizing both the impactful nature of change makers and the personal touch of grassroots campaigns. Additionally, I drew

inspiration from the Behavior Change campaigns to inform Penn State Forward's sustainability branding. Incorporating green and eco-focused graphics into the campaign, which are already associated with sustainability, will grab the attention of potential voters who care about climate change while establishing that sustainability is a core campaign priority.

Messaging

With a voter turnout under 3%, it is clear that Penn State alumni either are not aware of the election or do not understand the importance of voting. Therefore, the key goal of this section was to communicate to voters who may support Penn State Forward why they should vote. To explain this, I created sample messaging explaining what the Board does, and what it could do on climate.

Communicate *How* Their Vote Matters

Accountability and solutions-focused attitudes are key in climate communications, so it is essential to explain to voters how the Board of Trustees can take climate action with specificity, and how the candidates have the background, skills, and expertise to make that change happen. This will help Penn State Forward reduce a common issue of getting voters to support the full slate, not just one candidate. Explaining how a candidate will take action can be used to show how their running mates are an invaluable part of that change. All these methods will in turn help Penn State Forward increase turnout amongst alumni who care about climate change.

Connect Climate Change to Other Issues

When researching how climate-focused campaigns communicate about sustainability, it became clear that climate action is often a priority but not always voters' *top* priority. Therefore, messaging pro-environmental electoral candidates needs to connect with the other causes potential voters already care about: social issues and economic concerns.

Additionally, the Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates campaigns underscored the need for multi-issue campaigns, while persuasively messaging the ways in which these connect. Therefore, Penn State Forward must continue to recruit a diverse set of candidates alongside a climate-focused candidate. This makes it clear that all candidates care about sustainability, as they have chosen to run alongside a climate-focused candidate, while also amplifying the climate-focused candidate by establishing them as an ally in many causes voters care about. Later in the Playbook, these concepts are applied in an example International Women's Day post, which emphasizes the connection between gender equality and climate action. By connecting other issues to climate action, Penn State Forward can increase turnout amongst alumni who *would* vote for a climate action candidate but *would not* have voted based on their climate action focus alone.

Turn Out the Vote

My analysis suggested that electoral candidates can generally broaden their appeal by showing voters that they are personable, trustworthy and competent, and share voters' values. Alumni likely want to see candidates as *people*, not just figureheads, who—like them—care about the environment or Penn State. Running candidates with knowledge and experience motivating

climate action, who are able to articulate why, does this for voters who care about climate change. Using a mix of words affiliated with different reasons someone would be motivated by the climate action platform (climate justice, sustainability, and environmental protection) helps the campaign reach a diverse group of climate voters. Connecting the campaign in a positive way to Penn State shows voters who care about the institution that the candidates care about the University too. Doing all with a positive vision for the future and telling people exactly how by including a call to action in every post avoids the climate doomerism that can stifle action.

Strategy

The campaigns discussed in *Rage Against the Machine* pushed for institutional and significant change while disrupting the system, all goals of the Penn State Forward campaign. While the Penn State Forward campaign is not as disruptive as *Rage Against the Machine*, these campaigns' creative and eye-catching strategies still provided guidance on appealing to motivated, advocacy-focused young people (such as using social media), a key demographic for Penn State Forward.

Bold Systemic and Institutional Change Advocates campaigns demonstrate how to develop a candidate's personas and promote their brand and campaign issues. Candidate introduction videos, more dynamic social media content, and a greater focus on establishing candidate personality will enable Penn State Forward to better establish candidates' personas.

The Behavior Change campaigns influenced the development of individual action content, such as voting and sharing posts. The Penn State Forward campaign relies on grassroots efforts, so motivating individual changes and efforts is crucial. This understanding guided the creation of the “Engaging Voters” section, with candidate-specific support recommendations and calls for easy individual actions (like sharing the campaign's social posts).

The last category, Sustainability as a Value, was useful in developing campaign tactics for voters who already care about the environment. From this research, I recommended an Earth Day campaign and short-form content ideas (such as “The Board of Trustees’ Effect on Climate Action”) that show people who care about the environment why they should vote in Board of Trustees elections.



Figure 12: Campaign Playbook Cover

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Figure 13: Table of Contents



Figure 14: Branding Page





Figure 16: Sustainability Branding



Figure 17: Messaging Page

CAMPAIGN AUDIENCE

05 

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Young alumni (ages 22-35 years old)
- Located in Pennsylvania (primary), or the East Coast (secondary)
- Heavy internet use
 - Primary platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok
- Liberal/left-leaning

COLLEGES:

- Arts and Architecture
- Earth and Mineral Sciences
- College of Communications
- The Liberal Arts

CAREERS:

- Nonprofits/Advocacy
- Higher Education
- Government/Politics



SAMPLE VOTER

Allison H.

Female, 28

Philadelphia, PA

Public Relations '19

Allison currently works for her local government, organizing events and managing constituent interactions. She enjoys spending time outdoors and keeping up with current events. She loves PSU, but believes some change is necessary.

Figure 18: Campaign Audience

SEGMENTED AUDIENCES

06 >>>

CLIMATE JUSTICE

- Highly campaign-aligned, progressive, or leftist
- Very politically involved
- Has an organizing or advocacy background
- Frequently online
- Studied/works in something connected to the issues they care about (Women's studies, social injustice nonprofits)
- Understands the connections between climate change and social inequality
- Youngest group
- Diverse: LGBTQ+, BIPOC
- Urban
- Pro-divesting from fossil fuels and investing in climate research



SAMPLE VOTER

Rachel M.

Female, 24

New York City, NY

Political Science, Sexuality and Gender Studies, '24

Rachel is a Campaign Organizer for Sierra Club, and believes that institutional change is necessary for real climate and social progress. She enjoys spending time with her dog and thrifting.

Figure 19: Segmented Audiences, Climate Justice

SEGMENTED AUDIENCES

07 

SUSTAINABILITY

- Liberal or left-leaning
- Regularly votes
- College of the Liberal Arts, Education, or possibly Smeal (strategic communications, teachers)
- Women
- Globally-minded
- Suburban, from Pennsylvania originally
- Into compostables, bicycling, recycling
- Concerned about the environment, but not to the extent of significantly inconveniencing themselves
- Willing to make small, simple changes



SAMPLE VOTER

Maya L.

Female, 32

Lititz, PA

Elementary and Early Childhood
Education, '16

Maya is a 3rd grade public school teacher. She tries to make small eco-swaps, like bringing reusable totes to the grocery store. She enjoys spending time with her kids and watching popular TV shows.

Figure 20: Segmented Audiences, Sustainability

SEGMENTED AUDIENCES

08 >>>

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- Liberal or moderate, potentially conservative
- Rural
- White males
- Studied in the College of Agriculture or EMS (Environmental Resource Management major)
- Careers are not directly tied to environmental action
- Aren't motivated by "buzzwords" like "climate justice" or "sustainability"
- Will like the "common sense" aspects of the climate platform
 - Examples:
 - Better waste and water management
 - Locally sourced food



SAMPLE VOTER

Mark T.

Male, 30

Lancaster, PA

Energy Business and Finance, '18

Mark is an energy analyst in rural PA. He is a proud Penn State alum, but isn't very involved with the University post graduation. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, hunting, and cheering on Penn State Football.

Figure 21: Segmented Audiences, Environmental Protection

MESSAGING GUIDELINES



PLATFORM GUIDELINES

Connect the Board of Trustees to Climate Action

Most potential voters will not know what the Board of Trustees is, much less its potential sustainability impact. Make this connection clear through explanatory posts and continued messaging.

Tie Other Campaign Pillars to Climate Action

From racial justice to workers' rights, Penn State Forward's pillars all connect to climate action. Show these connections to build momentum for the whole slate, and show voters who care about sustainability why they should support the whole platform.

Leverage Penn State Values

Penn Staters who vote in the Board of Trustees are alumni who care about the school's future. This group highly values Penn State's tradition, legacy, and community. Integrate these values, as well as common Penn State phrases, into messaging, and remind voters about candidates' service to the Penn State community.



Figure 22: Messaging Guidelines, Platform Guidelines

MESSAGING GUIDELINES



CANDIDATE GUIDELINES

Always Have a Sustainability Candidate

Not all of the slate has to be sustainability-focused, but there should always be at least one sustainability candidate on the ticket.

Include the Full Slate

Even candidates who aren't specifically focused on environmental issues will provide invaluable support to move sustainability initiatives forward if elected. Frame each candidate as a climate action supporter and explain the theory of change to show why it is integral that the whole slate is elected.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Remain Positive

Maintain an optimistic approach to the campaign. Don't bank on climate anxieties; establish the candidates as changemakers for a better future.

Prompt Action

End messaging with a quick and clear call to action. Key calls to action include: vote, volunteer, organize, and donate. For example: "Take two minutes to vote today!"

Specificity is Key

Don't simply say "[candidate] supports climate action." Explain how their background and experiences uniquely qualify them for the role, and what clear actions and initiatives they will take if elected.

Figure 23: Messaging Guidelines, Candidate and General Guidelines

MESSAGING SAMPLES



APPLYING THE GUIDELINES

Introduce the Climate Candidate

- Christa Hasenkopf has spent her life tackling one of the world's most pressing environmental problems: air pollution.
- Uma Moriarity has spent her career building the business case for climate action investing.

Explain the Board's Impact

- The Board of Trustees can take bold climate action by deciding to center social and environmental sustainability in Penn State's \$4.8 billion endowment investment strategy.
- Our school's ability to achieve net-zero emissions by 2035 depends on who is elected to the Board of Trustees.

Connect Penn State Values

- Penn State has long been at the forefront of agricultural, energy, and engineering education and innovation.
- Our land-grant mission demands that we help Pennsylvania innovate and respond to environmental problems.

Tie in Other Campaign Pillars

- We must support our faculty, from protecting their right to unionize to backing their cutting-edge climate change research.
- Administrative transparency will ensure the University's commitments, including those to climate action, are honored.

Figure 24: Messaging Samples, Applying the Guidelines

MESSAGING SAMPLES

12 

SAMPLE MESSAGING

Example 1: Candidate Focus

Christa Hasenkopf has spent her life fighting one of the world's most pressing environmental problems: air pollution. She's spent over a decade mentoring Penn State students, and knows that prioritizing sustainability education and climate change research will enable Penn State to remain competitive in student recruitment and career outcomes. But that's impossible unless the people on Penn State's highest governing board want our university to be a climate leader. Vote today for Christa's slate: the Penn State Forward team.

Example 2: Issue Focused

The Board of Trustees has even more power than President Bendapudi—they chart Penn State's institutional priorities! With that power, they must honor the University's land-grant obligation to care for Pennsylvanians, including by reducing the environmental impact of our campuses. The Penn State Forward slate has a common-sense plan to reduce waste, support local farmers, and make our campuses carbon neutral. That's why I'm voting for them on April 20, and I hope you will join me.



Figure 25: Messaging Samples, Sample Messaging



Figure 26: Strategy Page

STAGE 1: NOMINATIONS



MAIN GOAL: ESTABLISH PENN STATE FORWARD AS A CLIMATE CAMPAIGN

Though Penn State Forward's platform remains consistent across years, it's important to redraw links to climate action every election cycle.

Direct Outreach:

- Social media messaging
 - "Vote Uma for a Penn State that prioritizes environmentally and socially conscious investment of its \$4.8 billion endowment."
- Climate Candidate Community Outreach
 - "I'm running for a greener Penn State; support my candidacy by nominating the Penn State Forward three for Board of Trustees!"

PSU Forward Social Media:

- Emphasize climate candidate's background and impact in initial announcement
- Encourage nominations for a more sustainable Penn State

Multiple-Strategy Messaging:

- Some alumni may be driven by climate impact: lead with climate as a way to introduce candidates.
- Some alumni care more about a candidate's personality or expertise: Emphasize climate through telling the candidate's story. Why does the candidate care about climate change?

Figure 27: Stage 1: Nominations

STAGE 2: MAIN CAMPAIGN

15 

GOALS

The main goals for stage 2 of the campaign are educating potential voters, building support from the existing base, and prompting action, such as voting and sharing.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:



Prioritize videos and carousels over single photo posts!

CAMPAIGN COMPONENTS

- **Educational Content**
 - Board of Trustees and candidate education
- **News**
 - Campaign-related climate news
- **Endorsements**
 - Alumni, faculty, and students
- **Engaging Voters**
 - Get supporters to take action
- **Holiday Campaigns**
 - Leverage timely events to highlight campaign pillars
- **Paid Content**
 - Ads and boosted posts
- **Club Outreach**
 - Connecting with student groups
- **Press**
 - Local news coverage

Figure 28: Stage 2: Main Campaign



>>> BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Students and alumni often aren't familiar with the Board of Trustees, their structure, much less how climate action intersects with the Board. Therefore, educating potential voters will be key in encouraging engagement and action.

Sample Content:

- How can the Board of Trustees take climate action? (video)
- We need Board members who care about our future (carousel)



>>> CANDIDATES

Building out the climate candidate's personality and making voters familiar with their names and faces can help build support.

Sample Content:

- Candidate introductions (video)
- Candidate's experience in climate
- Ties to sustainability work at Penn State (club, organization, or activism)

Always remember to plug the whole slate at the end!



Figure 29: Educational Content

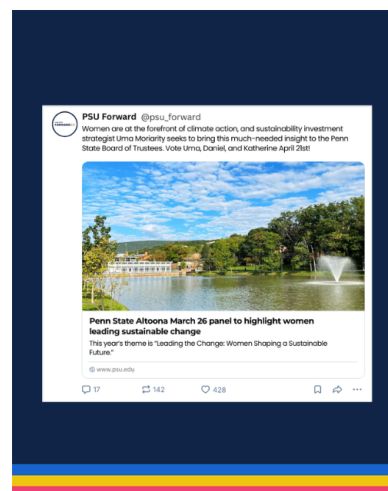
SOCIAL **NEWS & ENDORSEMENTS**

NEWS

Sharing Penn State or campaign related climate news can be an effective way to draw in and educate potential voters.

Content to share includes:

- Notable environmentally-focused university updates
- Articles about the climate candidate
- Student/local eco-activism coverage



ENDORSEMENTS

Endorsements from sustainability-focused alumni, faculty, and students will build campaign awareness and credibility.

Prioritize people who have:

- A significant online presence and are willing to share their post
- Previously worked in climate activism or sustainability at Penn State
- Work in environment-related jobs
- Have an Earth and Mineral Sciences or Agricultural Sciences degree

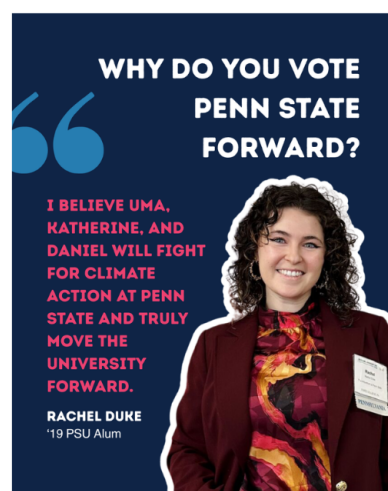


Figure 30: News & Endorsements

SOCIAL MEDIA **ENGAGING VOTERS**

ENGAGING VOTERS

- How to support the climate candidate's campaign
- Encourage letters to the editor about climate action and sustainability
- Explain why liking, sharing, and commenting on PSU Forward's social media helps grow our climate action platform
- Ask voters to make their own posts and share with their communities
- Prompt voters to share their climate "why" for supporting the campaign
- Highlight data from previous elections relevant to climate
 - Example: Elections can be decided by only a few dozen votes, but Earth and Mineral Science alumni are always underrepresented.

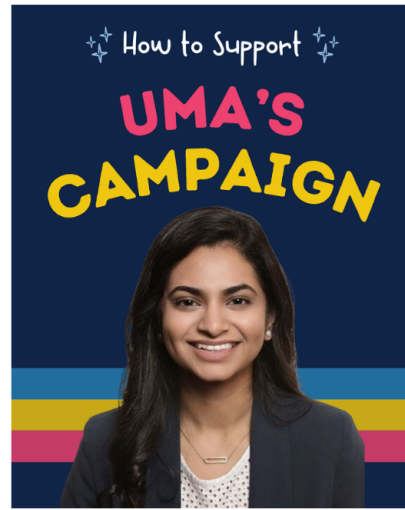


Figure 31: Engaging Voters

SOCIAL MEDIA **HOLIDAY CAMPAIGNS**

>> INT. WOMEN'S DAY

Highlight how climate change disproportionately affects women

In a carousel format, include statistics from UN Women:

- Climate change fuels increased levels of gender-based violence
- Climate change is a “threat multiplier” worsening gender inequality
- Women and girls are less likely to survive natural disasters



>> EARTH DAY

- On-campus campaign
- Share schedule of upcoming Earth Day events across campuses
- Document Earth Day events at Penn State Main Campus such as:
 - *Earth Hour*
 - *Earth Day at the Arboretum*
- Interview students and alumni about environmental concerns
- Bring candidates if they are local



Figure 32: Holiday Campaigns

CLUB OUTREACH & PRESS

21 >>>

>>> CLUB OUTREACH

Reach out to sustainability-focused clubs. This provides a great base for student involvement and engagement.

Clubs and organizations to consider:

- Eco Action
- UNA USA
- Student Farm Club
- SSAC
- Eco Reps
- Sustainable Solutions Engineering
- Blooms and Shrooms
- Penn State Community Garden
- Horticulture Club
- The Wildlife Society



>>> PRESS

Through interviews and community content, candidates can further share the climate platform. Brief several talking points that candidates should repeat.

Example:

- [Uma Moriarity Aiming To 'Future Proof University For Generations To Come' In BOT Campaign](#)

Outlets:

- Onward State
- The Daily Collegian
- Centre Daily Times
- Statecollege.com



Figure 33: Club Outreach & Press

STAGE 3: VOTING PERIOD

22 >>>

MAIN GOAL: GET CLIMATE-FOCUSED ALUMNI TO VOTE!

Direct Outreach

- Social media messaging
 - “Voting is open NOW! Cast your vote for the PSU Forward three, who will fight for climate action at the highest level of Penn State governance!
- Climate Candidate Community Outreach
 - “I’m running for a more sustainable Penn State; support my candidacy by voting now for the Penn State Forward three!”

Emphasize the Impact of Votes

- “Only 33% of Penn State Trustees are women. Your vote can change that!”
- “79 votes decided whether a climate-focused candidate was elected to the Board of Trustees. Your vote matters. Vote today for Uma, Katherine, and Daniel!”

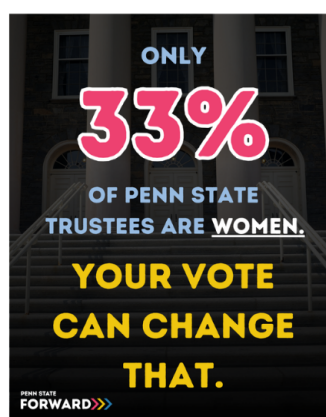


Figure 34: Stage 3: Voting Period

CONTENT BETWEEN CAMPAIGNS

23 >>>

MAIN GOAL: MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

Penn State Forward should maintain an active social media presence, even when not actively campaigning.

- Share sustainability accomplishments, with an emphasis on the campaign's or Penn State Forward trustees' contributions.
- Comment on current environmental issues or policy shortcomings, and how Penn State Forward's plan differs.
- Educate graduating seniors about the Board of Trustees' potential climate impact.

SAMPLES:



Figure 35: Content Between Campaigns

Conclusion

In this thesis, I aimed to gain insight into compelling strategies for digital climate communication for application to the Penn State Forward Campaign. To accomplish this, I used the moral framework theory and completed a rhetorical analysis of 50 climate messages. Through this analysis, I sought to uncover central themes and messaging tactics that could be used in future Penn State Forward campaigns. After conducting research and analysis, I created a digital playbook outlining branding, messaging, and strategy recommendations for future climate candidates.

It is important to note the limitations of this thesis. Most evident is my personal exposure to climate communications. Much of my data points and examples were supplied from campaigns that I or my advisors found compelling and are only a small sample of the vast climate communications available. Additionally, the basis of this thesis is qualitative, making it more open to interpretation than strictly quantitative research. Furthermore, my own biases and social media algorithm may have unintentionally influenced the content I found to include in my thesis.

As was pointed out in my methodology section, there is still little research on the intersection of climate and higher education. This thesis enters an entirely new niche, meaning more research and data about university elections would be beneficial to further understanding. Because of its limited constituency, research into other colleges across the United States and globally would be valuable in uncovering larger trends in collegiate climate communications.

Appendix A

Social Media Post Analysis

Figure A.1

Instagram Social Media Post Research

Theme	Social Media Post Link	Description	Figure	Political Party	Critique (Y/N)	Rank (TFS)	Foundations	Emotion	Media	Clicked?	Office	Interaction	Following Size	PA Hasset?	Distinct or Not?	Followers Size
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/H49d0M7um_source.web_copy	How Big Do We Call Mud Flats?	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
	pa/7999d77um_source.web_copy	Happy Earth Day! Let's Ask About It	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/4-wm0d7um_source.web_copy	Let's Ask About It	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
TRANSPORTATION	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
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ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy	Investment in High-Tech	Summer Lee	D	harm	negative	photo	Yes	Rep	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th		Yes	12th
ENVIRONMENTAL	pa/9799d77um_source.web_copy</															

Figure A.2

Users' Most Liked Posts of 2025 (Eco Groups)

Theme	Social Media Post Link	Description	Figure	Collabs (TPP)	Rank (TPP)	Foundations	Emotion	Media	Likes	Following Size
CELEBRITY	1/instagram.com/leonardodicaprio/reel/DK1jg	Leo DiCaprio Speaks About Film	Earth Alliance	2	1	ham	negative	video	109,537	3X
CELEBRITY	2/instagram.com/leonardodicaprio/p/DHqG	Leo DiCaprio Australian government	Earth Alliance	1	2	ham	negative	photo	71,146	3X
CELEBRITY	3/instagram.com/earthalliance/reel/DH7g	Leo DiCaprio Earth Day	Earth Alliance	2	3	ham	Positive	video	38,409	3X
FINANCIAL	4/instagram.com/climate reality/p/DHqYC	DOGE US Taxpayers Oil and gas	Climate Reality	0	1	ham	negative	photo	9,244	XXL
ENERGY	5/instagram.com/climate reality/p/DFD3d	Trump leaving Paris agreement	Climate Reality	0	2	ham	negative	photo	6,429	XXL
CELEBRITY	6/https://www.instagram.com/p/DK1Jw_BKfY	Laurel Kinyo attends Climate Reality Project	Climate Reality	1	3	ham	negative	photo	3,175	XXL
CELEBRITY	7/instagram.com/climate reality/p/DK1o2	Barack Obama quote	Climate Reality	0	3	ham	Positive	photo	3,175	XXL
HEALTH	8/instagram.com/psustudentfarm/reel/DGr	Feed the People Market Stand	Penn State Sustainability	2	1	fairness	video	162	XS	
ENVIRONMENTAL	9/instagram.com/pspublicpolicy/p/DJEx	Marisela Sotelo Tomero Award	Penn State Sustainability	2	2	fairness, ham	Positive	photo	106	XS
ENVIRONMENTAL	10/instagram.com/hubobson/gallery/p/DFNwR	Eco Repe At at the HUB Gallery	Penn State Sustainability	0	3	ham	Positive	photo	70	XS
GOVERNMENTAL ACTION	11/instagram.com/p/DMgFKdSGIS7m2q	2025 Summer Conference and Lobby Day	Citizens' Climate Lobby	0	1	ham	Positive	photo	435	L
	12/instagram.com/citizensclimate/p/DGJ7	Fossil Fuels Clean Meme	Citizens' Climate Lobby	0	2	ham	negative	photo	314	L
ENVIRONMENTAL	13/instagram.com/citizensclimate/p/DF3w	Inflation Reduction Act Climate Clean Energy	Citizens' Climate Lobby	0	3	ham	Positive	photo	286	L

Figure A.3

Users' Most Liked Posts of 2025 (PA Politics)

Theme	Social Media Post Link	Description	Figure	Colists (TPP)	Rank (TPP)	Foundations	Emotion	Media	Likes	Views (if no likes)	Following Size	Political Party	Elected?	Office	PA based?	District (or State)
DEI	ps://www.instagram.com/reel/DQ8H5V8ue	Against removal of DEI in schools	Summer Lee	0	1	fairness	negative	video		210,000	L	D	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th
CORRUPTION	ps://www.instagram.com/reel/DMA2vUZA	Yelling to release Eastern State	Summer Lee	1	2	fairness, harm	negative	video		84,300	L	D	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th
LEGISLATION	ps://www.instagram.com/reel/DL4wVw4C	Blocking the Big Beautiful Bill	Summer Lee	2	3	harm	negative	video	3,224	52,300	L	D	Yes	Rep	Yes	12th
FINANCIAL AID	instagram.com/denverwomencaucus/reel/D	Repeal Big Beautiful Bill	Mary Gay Scanlon	1	1	harm	negative	video	1,171		S	D	Yes	Rep	Yes	9th
	www.instagram.com/reel/DK0tGtd	Destroying 1 million pounds of food	Mary Gay Scanlon	0	2	harm	negative	video	1,120		S	D	Yes	Rep	Yes	9th
AID, ENVIRONMENT	www.instagram.com/ragsongaga/D4ag0A	Brandsen's Conservancy A Museum of Art	Mary Gay Scanlon	2	3		Positive	photo	777		S	D	Yes	Rep	Yes	9th
LEGISLATION	ps://instagram.com/repascottperry/DJFQR	Medicaid Fraud	Scott Perry	0	1	fairness	negative	photo	2,441		S	R	Yes	Rep	Yes	10th
LEGISLATION	ps://instagram.com/repascottperry/DHKB8	False, Elon doesn't want to eliminate medicare	Scott Perry	1	2	authority	negative	photo	678		S	R	Yes	Rep	Yes	10th
LAW ENFORCEMENT	ps://instagram.com/repascottperry/DG0dXJ	Honoring Andrew Duane	Scott Perry	0	3	authority	Positive	photo	575		S	R	Yes	Rep	Yes	10th

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