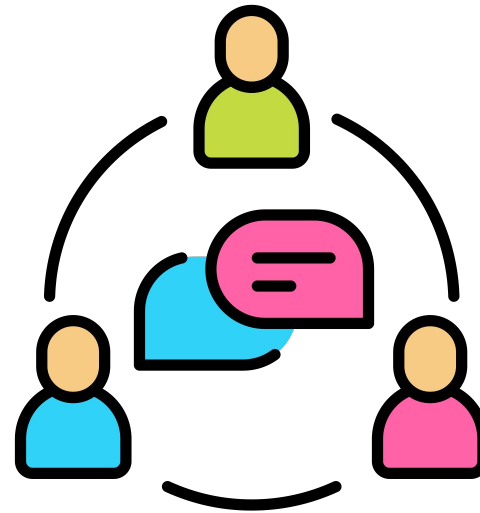


3.1

Strategic Communication Campaigns and Information Manipulation Campaigns

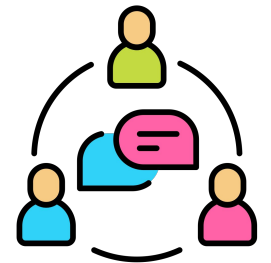
Note

- Interactive symbol: tasks for groups



Strategic Communication

- Build groups: How would you define “strategic communication”, and which types or forms come to your mind?



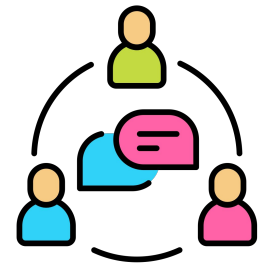
Strategic Communication

- **Strategic communication**

- **Purposeful** use of communication to reach certain ends (Hallahan et al, 2007)
- **legitimate**: e. g. public relations, marketing and advertising, lobbying or public affairs
- **illegitimate**: covert operations, (war time) propaganda, psychological warfare, information manipulation
- One form or shape of strategic communication: **Strategic communication campaigns**

Campaigns

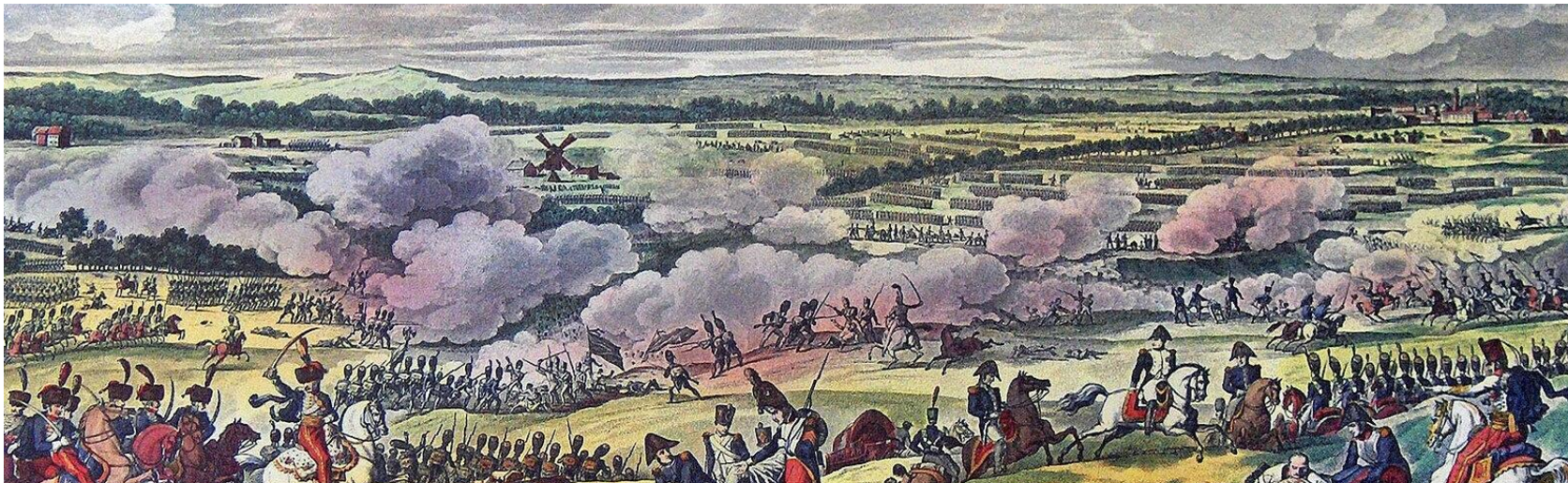
- In your group: How would you define a *campaign*, and which examples come to your mind?



Campaigns

- **Definition**

- From the French term *campagne* = level field or open country. Terrain on which military operations take place and on which battles are fought, i. e., a field of conflict (Oxford English Dictionary, n. d.)



Source: [Wikipedia.com](#) (link)

Communication Campaigns

- **Definition**

- Organised **communication activities** in **selected** media **channels** within a **specific timeframe** aimed at **influencing behaviors** in **target audiences** for public benefit or the benefit of the principal or campaigning agent (Rice & Moxley, 2022)

Communication Campaigns

- **Stages**

- Preparation, execution, assessment

- **Evaluation**

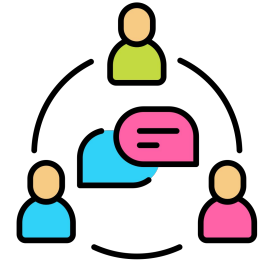
- **Formative** (ex-ante): In the **preparation** stage. Message design and audience analysis (Rice & Moxley, 2022) with regards to awareness, perceptions, and attitudes towards the respective issue, and channel preferences
 - **Process**: During the **execution**. Allows for potential adjustments during an ongoing campaign.
 - **Summative** (ex-post): In the **assessment** stage. Evaluation of outcomes and impacts, not only on activities and outputs

Communication Campaigns

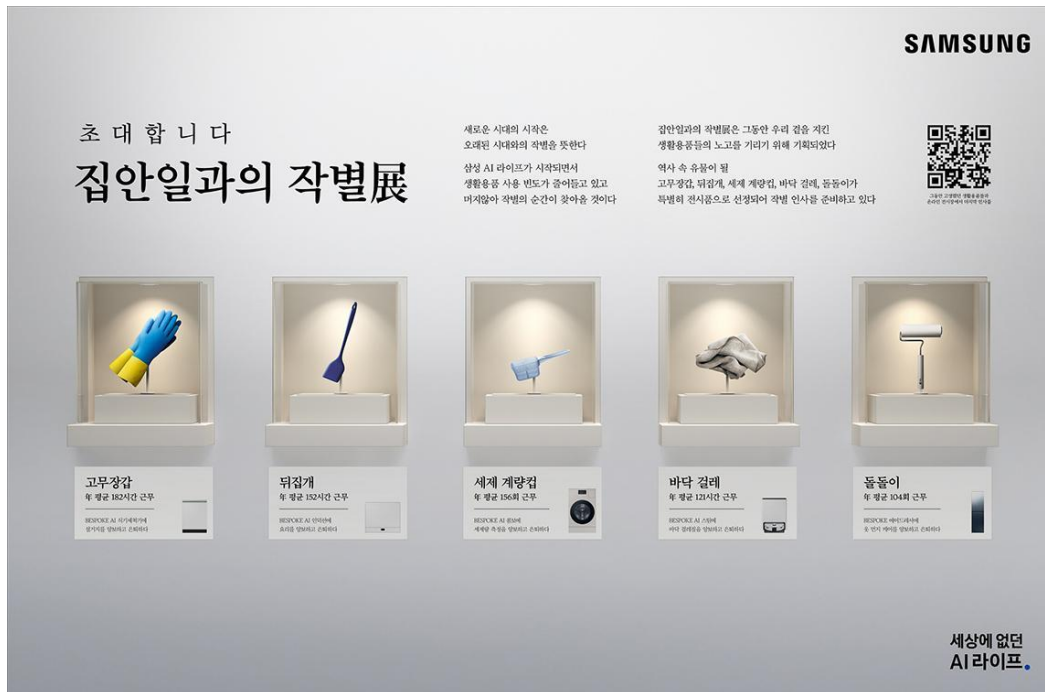
- **Goals and objectives**

- Political, commercial, health-related, prosocial, environmental, educational ends
- Accomplish or maintain a desired **reputation** among target audiences or the larger public (Joathan & Lilleker, 2020)
- Change **attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviours** of audiences (Rice & Moxley, 2022)
- **Fund-raising, education, persuasion** (Rice & Moxley, 2022)

Communication Campaigns



- In pairs of two: **Political, commercial, health, environmental, pro-social, or educational** campaign?



Source: [Famous Campaigns](#) (link)



Source: [Famous Campaigns](#)



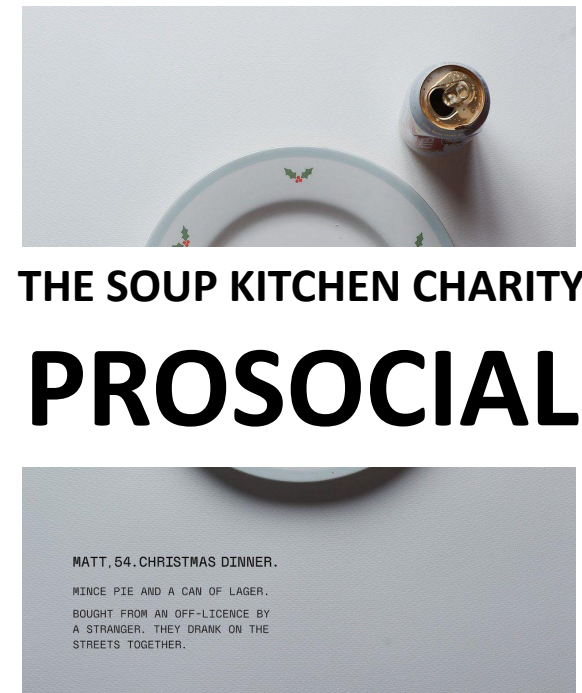
Source: [NHS](#) (link)

Communication Campaigns

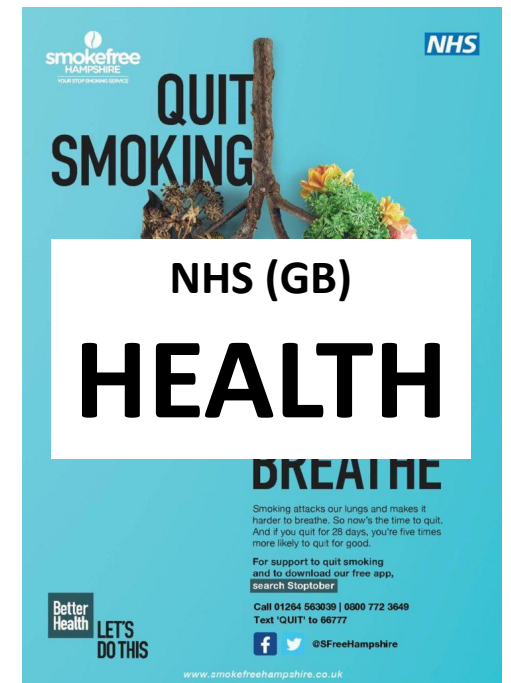
- In pairs of two: **Political, commercial, health, environmental, pro-social, or educational** campaign?



Source: [Famous Campaigns](#) (link)

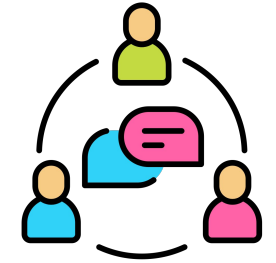


Source: [Famous Campaigns](#)



Source: [NHS](#) (link)

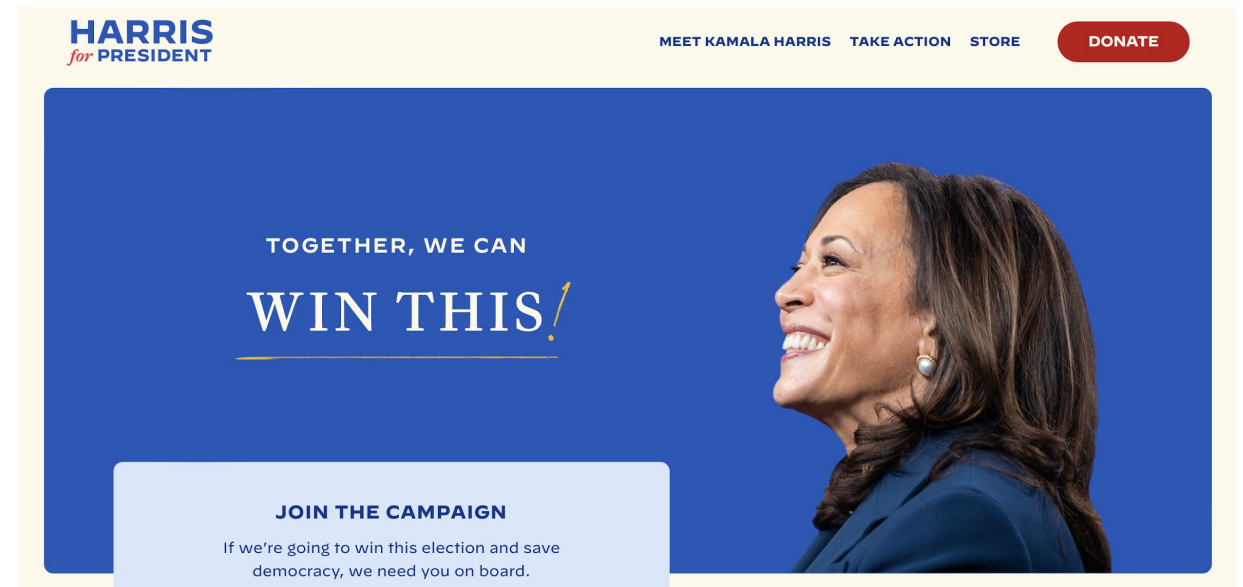
Communication Campaigns



- In pairs of two: **Political, commercial, health, environmental, pro-social, or educational** campaign?



Source: [Famous Campaigns](#) (link)



Source: kamalaharris.com (link)

Communication Campaigns

- In pairs of two: **Political, commercial, health, environmental, pro-social, or educational** campaign?



Source: [Famous Campaigns](#) (link)



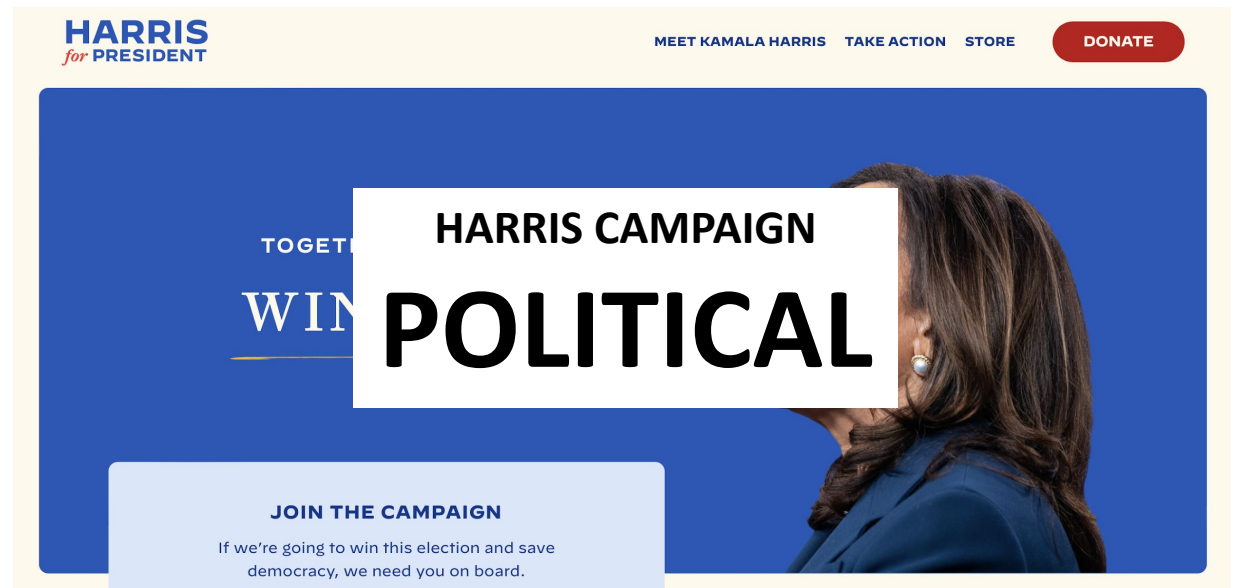
Source: kamalaharris.com (link)

Communication Campaigns

- In pairs of two: **Political, commercial, health, environmental, pro-social, or educational** campaign?



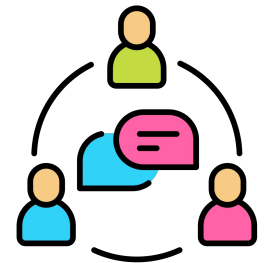
Source: [Famous Campaigns](#) (link)



Source: kamalaharris.com (link)

Communication Campaigns

- In your group: What are the characteristics of these campaigns with regards to the target **audiences**, **emotions** evoked, and the aspired **goals**?
 - **Cases:** Samsung, British NHS, The Soup Kitchen Charity, Surf Shark, Harris Campaign

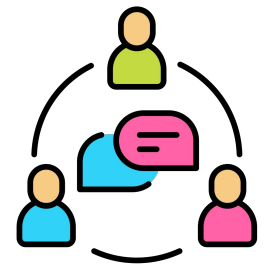


Harmful Types of Communication Campaigns

- **Negative campaigning**
- **Populist campaigns**
- **Astroturf campaigns**
- **Influence campaigns/info manipulation campaigns**

Negative Campaigning

- What characterises negative campaigning?



Negative Campaigning

- **Definition**

- Publicly attacking ideas, policy proposals, past records and known flaws of competing candidates
- Demobilisation hypothesis: reducing voter turnout, fuelling disenchantment with politics
- Counter hypothesis: Increases interest and knowledge, and makes elections salient (Nai, 2020)



Source: [WSJ](#) (link)

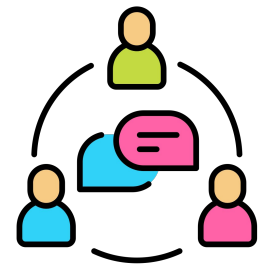
Negative Campaigning

- **Example**

- One of the nation’s hottest political fights last year was for control of Virginia’s closely divided legislature. The battle between the two parties in a key swing state was expensive and lengthy—and extremely negative. Voters were exposed to a deluge of TV attack ads. [...] the Republican candidate said in an ad that his Democratic opponent had let ‘violent criminals walk easy’ as a prosecutor, while she replied in her own TV spot that he was ‘bad for women, bad for kids and bad for Virginia.’ Another candidate accused her opponent of being a “domestic abuser” based on a 20-year-old accusation that was dismissed in court. Yet another was accused of consorting with “militias and hate groups,” in part because, while a sheriff, his office met with leaders of a protest march to go over the rules they would have to follow. (Seib, 2024)

Populist Campaigns

- What characterises populist campaigns?



Populist Campaigns

- **Definition**

- **Anti-elite rhetoric:** Divides society into the *poor people* vs. the *corrupt elites* and accuses credible media sources of being fake news
- **Dismisses facts,** spreads disinformation, and fuels hate (Dekeyser & Roose, 2022; Hameleers, 2020)
- **Driving force of disinformation** and other online harms on a domestic level (Kazharski, 2019)

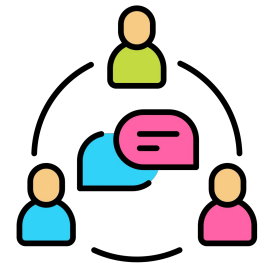
Populist Campaigns

- **Anti-elite frames**

1. Define a social problem
2. Stress a sharp contrast between the people and political elites
3. Interpret the social problem as a product of the actions of the elites
4. Emphasise how people are affected negatively (Dekeyser & Roose, 2022)

- **Example**

- In your group: Can you find examples of anti-elite frames that circle the public sphere? Prepare to briefly describe your example along the four steps you see above



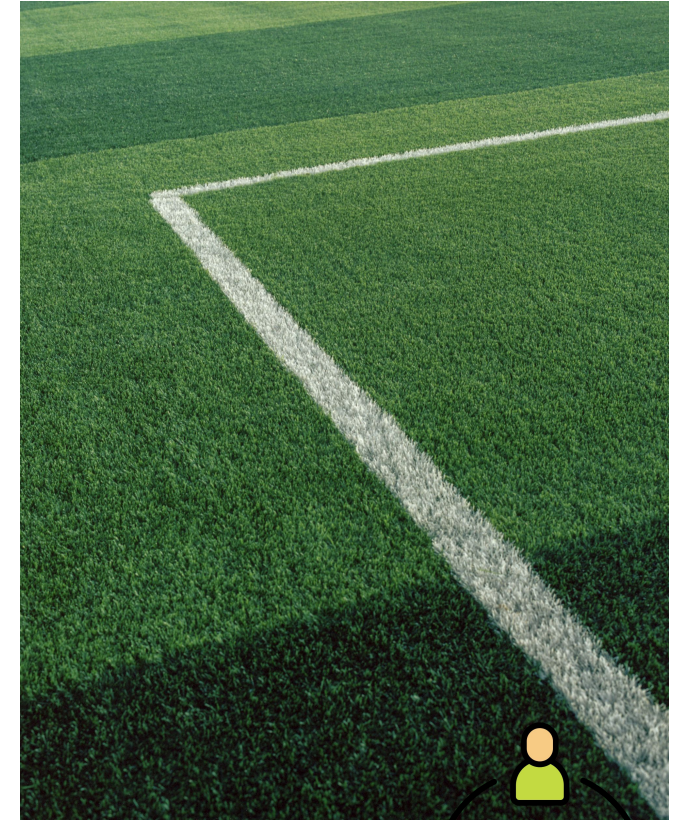
Populist Campaigns

- **Example** Trump's Drain the swamp slogan
 1. Washington is infested with corruption and bureaucracy
 2. Washington elites live a dissolute life while taxpayers are hard working
 3. Rich elites live off the hard work of the American people
 4. Elites squander money while streets and public schools are decaying

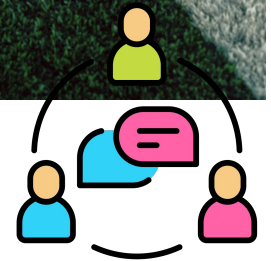
Source: Zimmer, 2020

Astroturf Campaigns

- In your group: What characterises Astroturf campaigns? The term is based on the name of one of the largest US firms for artificial turf – AstroTurf. Try to find a definition for astroturf campaigns based on this knowledge



Source: [Wikipedia](#)
(link)



Astroturf Campaigns

• Definition

- Named after an American brand of artificial turf as applied in sports and other stadiums
- A campaign that appears to be a genuine grassroots movement but is, in fact, centrally planned and orchestrated to make exactly that impression (Keller et al., 2020)
- The goal is to exploit the authenticity of a genuine grassroots movement to change peoples' attitudes and behaviours (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2024)
- Key tactics: manufacturing user comments and spread them via fake accounts or covered trolls to make them appear as authentic voices on social media (Zerback et al. 2021)

Information Manipulation Campaigns

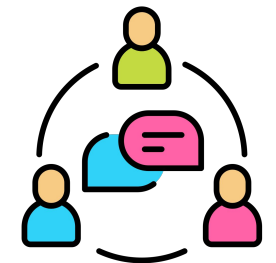
- **Influence Campaigns**
- **Psyops**
- **Info Ops**
- **Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)**
- **Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)**

Information Manipulation Campaigns

- In your group: According to Justin Arenstein, CEO of Code for Africa, what characterises information manipulation campaigns?



Source: [DW Akademie](#) (link)



Influence Campaigns

- **Definition**

- “A set of activities coordinated by a foreign power that involves the promotion of misleading or inaccurate information or other specially-adapted actions aimed at influencing the decisions of politicians or other public decision-makers, the opinions of all or a part of the population, and opinions or decisions taken in other countries.” ([MPF](#), 2023, p. 3)

Psyops

- **Definition**

- Using methods of communication and other means to influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours pursuing political and military objectives (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence n. d.)
- As an activity supplementing military conflict (narrow concept) or as an ongoing activity continued in peacetime (broad concept) (Krieg, 2023)

Info Ops

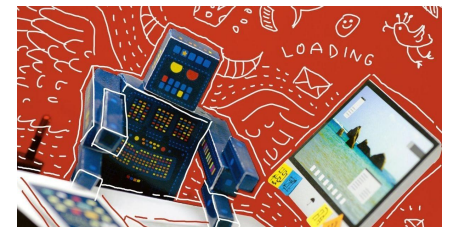
- **Definition**

- Broad concept: As “a battle over strategic narratives [...] ranging from [...] public diplomacy [...] to more subversive psychological operations” (Krieg, 2023)
- Stronger focus on means of strategic communication to influence decision-making
- Manipulating so-called “coincidental surrogates” or “useful idiots” in a target country

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)

• Definition

- Activities that use tactics including automation (bots) to spread content that is potentially harmful to users (Gleicher, 2018)
- Interventions to channel attention on social media into intended directions using bots, cyborgs, sock puppets, and astroturfing (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron 2024; Khaund et al., 2022)
- Concept ill-defined, as focus on automation and less on boundaries between non-problematic and problematic content (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron 2024)



Source: North,
2020 (link)

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)

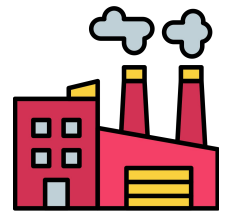
- Definition

- “FIMI is a mostly non-illegal pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes. Such activity is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner. Actors of such activity can be state or non-state actors, including their proxies inside and outside of their own territory.” (European External Action Service, 2024)

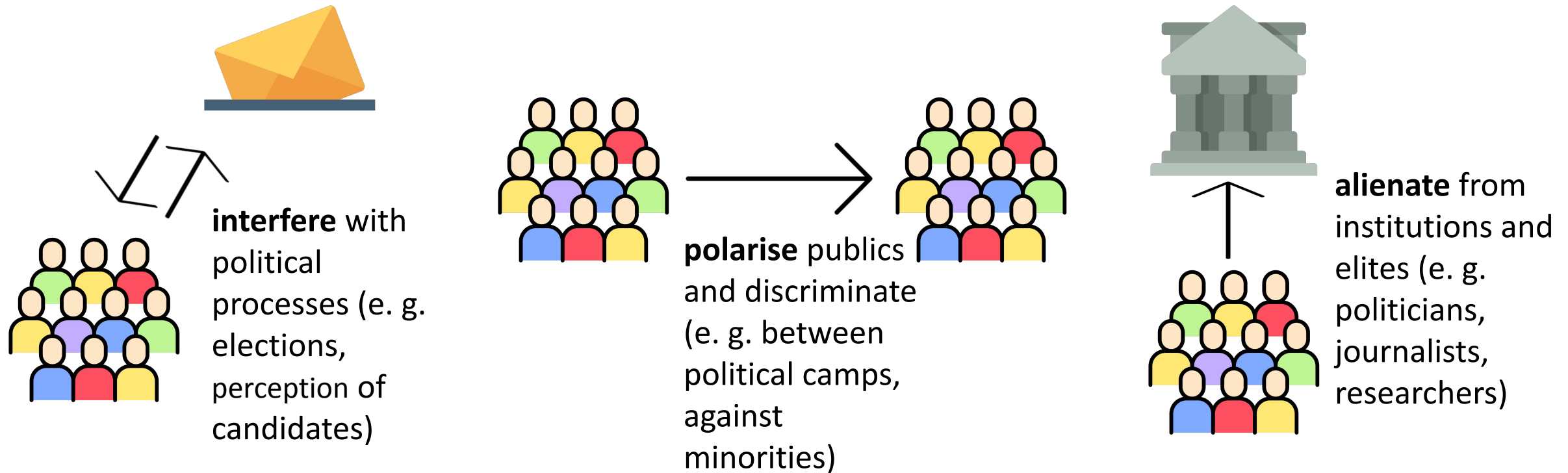


Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)

- Translation
 - **Foreign regimes, government agencies, and paid or ideologically motivated persons or groups** using **narratives** and other **techniques** to **disturb** and **manipulate** the **public discourse, political debate, and democratic processes** in target countries.
 - **Industrial scale**: e. g. the Pravda network disseminates approx. 3.6 million articles from Russian state media, pro-Kremlin influencers and government agencies per year ([DFRLab](#), 2025; [NewsGuard](#), 2025)
 - **mostly non-illegal**: targeting foreign publics with manipulative narratives is essentially not illegal – makes it challenging to counter the phenomenon



FIMI aims to interfere with democratic processes and poison public discourse. Some general goals are



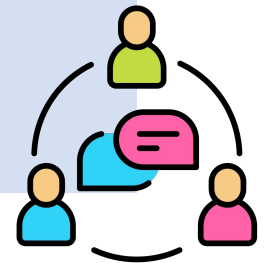
Source: own illustrations

Information Manipulation Campaigns

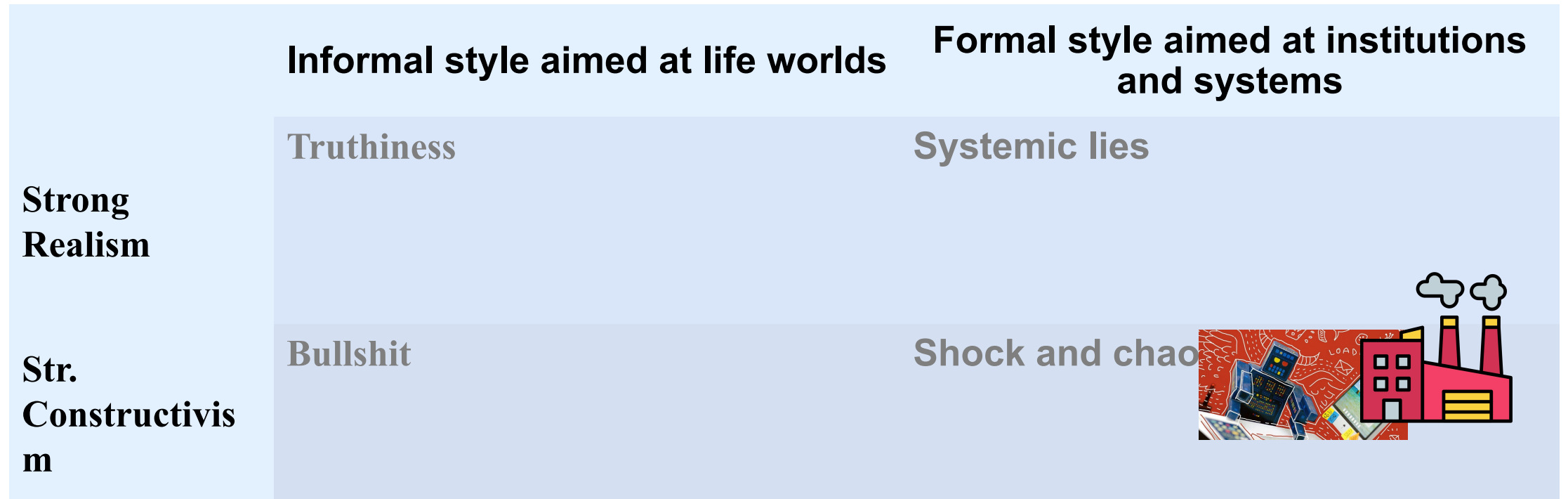
- In your group: Consider again the following matrix from a previous session. Where would you locate Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)?

	Informal style aimed at life worlds	Formal style aimed at institutions and systems
Strong Realism	Truthiness	Systemic lies
Str. Constructivism	Bullshit	Shock and chaos

Source: McCright & Dunlap, 2017



Information Manipulation Campaigns

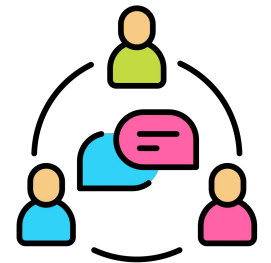


Source: McCright & Dunlap, 2017

The Concept of Weaponized Narratives

- **Definition** (Krieg, 2023)

- Foreign governments or their proxies subverting the discourse on an issue by spreading false or biased stories with the aim to denigrate a target state and justify their own actions
- In your group: Do you have any examples for these kinds of narratives, or could you think of one yourself?



The Concept of Weaponized Narratives

- **Examples (Krieg, 2023)**

- **Old Cold War KGB narratives to discredit the US:**
 - “Children in Third-World countries were being murdered in order to supply transplant organs for rich Americans”
 - “The AIDS virus had been produced as an offshoot of American experiments in biological warfare” (Taylor, 2002)
- **Modern versions: Kremlin narratives to justify invasion into Ukraine**
 - Ukraine and the US run 30 secret biolabs in 14 sites in Ukraine producing bioweapons (link to reports: [Debunk.org](https://debunk.org), 2022; [Euvdisinfo.eu](https://euvdisinfo.eu), 2023)
 - Ukraine tries to build a “dirty bomb” by using leftover from the abandoned Chernobyl nuclear power plant (link to report: [Debunk.org](https://debunk.org), 2022)

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