

The Political Infographic on Instagram:

A Comparative Study of Left and Right Aesthetics in the United States



Infographic with left-wing content and right-wing aesthetic, made by the author, Julia Pompilius

Student Name: Julia Pompilius
Student Number: 578537

Supervisor: Julia Peters

Master of Arts, Culture & Society
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

Amidst the rise and fall of former US President Donald Trump and the strong cultural and political backlash that ensued, a new form of political messaging flourished in the digital landscape of the social-networking application Instagram: the infographic. The infographic, a blended textual-visual format which presents concise bits of information, emerged with the birth of the modern-day newspaper. Today, however, during a period of high political polarization in the US, the political infographic has flourished on Instagram. In our digital age, the infographic is well-suited to the needs of an image-hungry, fast-moving public. They are widely created and shared by Instagram users and, in the event of a political scandal, they proliferate overnight. In text, the infographic offers information in the form of facts and figures, quotations from public figures, or simply moralistic statements. An infographic is nothing, however, without its visual dimension. It can therefore be considered as an aesthetic medium, one which pairs text and image in order to quickly and sensationally convey a political message. In the context of US politics, Instagram infographics typically fall into one of two broad groups: the left and the right. This research determines if and to what extent Instagram infographics from each group differ in *aesthetics*. Moreover, this study explores what this says about the aesthetic preferences of each group. Using qualitative visual content analysis, this research analyzed 100 infographics from the political left and right respectively for a total of 200 infographics. It found that the two political camps differ in three broad ways: in their color schemes, their usage of photographed persons, and in their use of the multi-slide feature, a function which allows several images to be posted as part of one infographic. While the left uses largely light color palettes, black & white photographs of people, and makes heavy use of the multi-slide feature, the right generally uses dark color palettes, colored portraits of people, and mostly uses the single-slide format. Further, analysis produced twenty aesthetic categories into which the aesthetic categories can be grouped. While the left was found to favor categories Light & Bright, Minimalist, and New Age, the right showed a preference for categories Straightforward & Personal, Patriotic, and Enemy. The preferences of each group not only reveal the proclivities and values of each, but also offer useful knowledge for successful visual campaigning techniques going forward.

Keywords: Instagram infographic, aesthetics, visual culture, US politics, taste distinctions

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1 Introduction

"Into various advertising signs and billboards he has inserted subversive statements advocating the power of the people or the liberation of an imprisoned Indian activist. But the hyper-realist materiality of the sign devours the difference of the texts; without distinction, it puts the plaques and their inscriptions in the imaginary museum witnessing to the everyday life of middle America."

- Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 2011

In a time of heightened political strife in the United States, from Donald Trump's recent presidency to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, political discourse has infiltrated the lives of even the most disengaged citizens. Proof of this can be seen on Instagram, where political infographics have become commonplace. The infographic, as a blended textual-visual format, is particularly adept at conveying political messages. It has thus become immensely popular as a tool for political parties, activists, think tanks, and simply concerned citizens using Instagram to promote their political stances. This research is interested in analyzing how political infographics are used by opposing sides of the political spectrum, not on the basis of text, but rather by their varying aesthetic presentations. It therefore seeks to answer the following question:

How do the aesthetics of Instagram infographics vary between the political left and right in the United States?

On a theoretical level, answers to this question will help us understand the role that aesthetics play in online identity formation, which, as many have noted (Fielitz & Thurston, 2019; Nahon, 2015), often translates to offline political activation. Furthermore, this investigation contributes to a limited body of literature concerning the use of aesthetics by politically opposed groups. In this study, the political left and right in the US serve as two points of distinction in the aesthetic presentations of infographics. This research therefore builds on similar academic investigations into horizontal (rather than vertical) distinctions in aesthetic taste profiles (Berghman & van Eijck, 2009; van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). It also understands aesthetics as a powerful tool for galvanizing political followers and even forming political movements. Therefore, on a societal level, this research explores how aesthetics can be instrumentalized by

real-life political agents to galvanize a support base or even strategically appeal to those who would not normally align themselves with the political views presented through the aesthetic object's content. If an aesthetic distinction does indeed exist between the political left and right in the US, this knowledge will be extremely useful for political organizers and campaign managers in their digital design strategies.

The use of aesthetics in political infographics is especially pertinent to Instagram, a social media platform where virtually anybody is free to share nearly any image they please. Given that Instagram is free, used globally, and allows anybody to post, it is only natural that political topics should make their way into the discourse. This is not a phenomenon unique to Instagram; nearly all social media platforms are rife with political commentary. However, Instagram, unlike Facebook or Twitter, is met with the challenge of being a primarily visual platform. Instagram posts always take the form of an image or video with an optional caption limited to 2,200 text characters. When captions surpass 125 characters, the remainder of the text is obscured with an option to “see more” if a user so desires. It is thus clear that Instagram prioritizes image over text. How, then, might an Instagram user quickly and effectively share information that positions text as prominently as image? The answer is the infographic, a digital medium that features text superimposed over image. It would seem that its primary function is to convey information, as it often presents graphs, facts and figures, and various other forms of data in order to inform. However, the Instagram infographic relies equally—perhaps even to a greater extent—on its visual components. As a result, in contrast to the traditional newspaper infographic, the Instagram infographic can be endlessly creative in its visual presentation. Some are characterized by their sleek design, concise text, and carefully considered color palettes. Others are brute and to the point, clearly prioritizing the communication of the message over a polished finish. Some present a bounty of information in the form of charts, quotations, and formatted lists, while others simply present a bold, moralistic statement. No matter the particular strategy of any given infographic, its use of text and image to swiftly communicate a political message makes it the ideal object of study for an investigation of aesthetics in political messaging.

This study offers insights into the functions of the infographic as an aesthetic medium that is perfectly suited to the needs of the image-hungry masses. Through aesthetic

differentiation, the infographic is able to market itself to a diverse range of Instagram users. This is particularly important in our digital age in which we are bombarded with an endless array of images on a constant basis and therefore crave individualized content catered to our particular tastes (Dikovitskaya, 2012). In such an environment, the infographic is the perfect means of disseminating information as it combines textual content with aesthetically pleasing visuals. Where newspapers and novels once informed and entertained the masses, social media sites such as Instagram now do the same. It is no surprise, then, that politically-engaged Instagram users have selected the infographic as their primary tool for spreading messages. This trend is reflective of a late modern impetus to combine activism with digital entertainment (Arora & Itu, 2012). As technological innovation forges onwards, this trend will undoubtedly follow suit, thus it is important to consider its many facets. Aesthetics are one such facet. This study therefore locates political infographics on Instagram in an emerging tradition of sensational media activism wherein aesthetics play a crucial role. Understanding if and how two politically opposed groups make use of aesthetics in their own infographics provides another axis of comparison along which to analyze this tradition.

This research therefore sets out first to identify the aesthetic qualities of infographics from two broad yet distinct political groups in the US—the left and right respectively—and then compare each side’s usage of and apparent preferences for the identified aesthetic qualities. I begin with an overview of the theoretical framework that informed this investigation, then move into a synopsis of my expectations going into this research, which are closely tied to the theory that informed it. Then, I offer a description of my research methods. Next, I share the results of my analysis, which are organized into three distinct parts: an overview of the broad aesthetic differences between each political group, the categorical preferences of each group, which are based on aesthetic commonalities between groups of similar infographics, and an exploration of the possibility that one or both sides could appropriate the aesthetics of the other. I conclude this research with an answer to the question *how do aesthetics of Instagram infographics vary between the political left and right in the United States?* as well as a discussion of the implications, limitations, and areas for further research resulting from this study.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Art, Activism, or Advertisement: Defining the Infographic

The infographic is a well-known purveyor of information in news media, but its surge on Instagram is very recent and therefore an underexplored territory of academic research. Firstly, the term infographic needs defining. Quite broadly put, infographics are “a visual rhetoric used to express the key political messages of the day” (Dick, 2020, p. 3). They are succinct bits of information presented in a textual-visual format which can be quickly consumed. They may present facts and figures, graphs and tables, or quotations from prominent political or cultural figures. The form became popular in US print media towards the beginning of the 20th century as newspaper circulation began to soar. Since, it has only become more ubiquitous as news media has become digitized (Dick, 2020). It has thus proven itself to be a durable tool for the swift dissemination of information. As a visual medium, it also has enormous potential as a source of aesthetic appeal. It is no surprise then that it now frequently appears on Instagram, an application that derives its power from images.

The Instagram infographic, however, deviates significantly from its traditional news-based relative. Firstly, as I will later explore in great detail, infographics on Instagram vary greatly in aesthetic presentation, sometimes taking advantage of highly artistic design trends and making inventive use of photographs, illustrations, and text. Further, in content, the Instagram infographic is not limited to the ‘facts and figures’ which so often dominate traditional news infographics. The Instagram infographic may include data in this format, but it may also display excerpts from literature, calls to action, or simply moralistic statements. To understand the popularity and viral nature of infographics, we might think of ‘memes’ – images that circulate the Internet, often imbued with humor (Shifman, 2014). Memes are similar to infographics in that they combine text and image and can be easily produced and circulated as part of a participatory online culture. However, while memes rely largely on humor and irony, infographics differ crucially in that they are chiefly didactic in nature, meaning they argue their respective political stance with the ultimate goal being to educate or persuade. Further, memes are fundamentally intertextual: they reuse popular visual motifs and text slogans which relate them to other memes

(Shifman, 2014). Infographics, by contrast, are mostly original in design, placing emphasis on the unique aesthetic presentation of each individual infographic.

Given that the infographic draws heavily upon the power of its aesthetic, it is useful to explore the infographic's relevance to the domain of the arts. As a highly accessible digital medium, it stands in contrast to art in a traditional sense, which often carries an indirect message, is scarce, and requires cultural capital for both its production and consumption. From a Marxist perspective, it would certainly be rejected as art on the grounds that it is mass produced and often borrows the visual vocabulary of advertisement, which is limited by its functional role in a capitalist market. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's (2006) analysis of the culture industry would understand the infographic as a product that is created to meet the needs of its consumer market—in this case, Instagram users. Indeed, the Instagram user base may be considered a market, one that demands visual material for browsing. This demand is satisfied through user-generated content, of which the infographic is increasingly a part. The infographic can thus be understood as a commodity that is manufactured and exchanged on Instagram.

However, as a visual medium, the infographic nonetheless presents aesthetic elements worthy of consideration, namely its visual and textual components and its resulting position as a visual medium within a participatory online culture. If we consider Claire Bishop's (2012) understanding of participatory art as that which is socially engaged, sometimes to the point of ceasing to be art altogether, the political infographic's relation to artistic discourses becomes clearer. Firstly, Instagram infographics are in fact made by the very users of the application, or the consumers themselves. This type of digital actor is known as the 'prosumer' (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2014). Secondly, given its existence on the social media platform Instagram, the infographic demands interaction from its viewers; an Instagram post is nothing if it is not 'liked' and 'shared' by Instagram users. Furthermore, with Instagram's 'carousel' feature—a function which allows a user to publish up to ten images or videos in one post—viewers are required to 'swipe' through the infographic, thereby involving themselves in the very process of the infographic's presentation. It is thus plainly evident that the success of an infographic depends on the participation of its audience. In regards to Bishop's claim that participatory art must at least present itself as something useful which affects change in society, this too is true of the

infographic. Its most obvious purpose is to convey information via text. In the case of the *political* infographic, this information is often charged with calls to action or moral appeals, directly embodying Bishop's description of the affective nature of participatory art. Together with the visual elements of the Instagram infographic—which, as we will see during analysis, can be quite complex—its participatory nature makes it a viable case for consideration as participatory art.

If the infographic is to be treated as a case of participatory art, we must then wonder at what social goal it aims to achieve. One might assume that the goal of any given infographic is dependent upon the political ideology that informs it: a pro-life infographic seeks to end abortion; an anti-capitalist infographic demands a halt to the exploitation of the working class. However, many have criticized this type of online activism as performative and ultimately limited to the screen, terming it instead “slacktivism” (McKay & Dunn, 2017). For better or for worse, politically motivated Instagram infographics, as a form of “low-cost, low-risk online activism” (Lee & Hsieh, 2013, p. 1) certainly fall into the “slacktivist” category. One might then surmise that its goal is not to spur action beyond the screen, but rather to exist in its own right as an aesthetic object. Indeed, as this research will explore, the design of infographics can be quite advanced. In this way, the infographic can be likened to the advertisement, which frequently makes use of innovative and inspiring design, often garnering appreciation based on aesthetic merit alone (Holm, 2016). However, no matter the “artiness” of any given advertisement, it is always bound to the logics of capitalism: it means to sell. The same can be said of the political infographic on Instagram. It is not an advertisement in the sense that it intends to plainly sell a product or service. It does, however, use aesthetics to market *itself*. Like advertisement, it too often borrows the trappings of high art and design. It thus becomes a trading card, one that can be endlessly traded and displayed via the digital alleys of Instagram. *Aesthetics* are a large part of what fuels this exchange. Who, then, stands to profit from such an exchange? The answer is two-fold. Firstly, Instagram users share infographics to their personal profiles. In so doing, they perform their own online identities (Hine, 2017). The gain, in this sense, is social rather than economic. Secondly, the creation and sharing of infographics, as incentive for users to engage with the Instagram application, indirectly generates economic returns for Instagram, whose primary source of revenue comes from user interaction with advertisements (Iqbal, 2021). The infographic can thus

be understood as an advertisement which sells itself, offering social returns for users of the application and financial returns for its owners.

2.2 Text and Image: The Aesthetic Dimension

As this research is primarily interested in aesthetics, it is necessary to consider what ‘aesthetics’ in fact mean in the case of the infographic. We know that infographic consists of both text and image. Text alone could be considered in terms of aesthetics, however, in an infographic, it is nothing without its accompanying visual components. Text and image thus work together in some way to leave an impact on the viewer. As this research is interested in the *political* infographic, it is necessary to consider how its aesthetic presentation relates to the political dimension. To recall Bishop (2012), who argues that in today’s art world, all art is assumed to be implicitly political, we might argue that the inverse is true, and that all political material has an aesthetic dimension. Jacques Rancière’s (2009) consideration of aesthetics in relation to politics would confirm this. As he understands it, the aesthetic dimension is the distribution of the sensible – the sensible being information that we can understand and feel based on our intellectual, psychological, and emotional faculties. The two faculties of chief importance to his theory are those that process knowledge and sensation respectively. The relationship between these faculties is incommensurable, however, the aesthetic allows us, as humans who experience the world, to make sense of material that appeals to both. In the case of the political infographic, we might classify the textual element as appealing to knowledge and the visual element as appealing to sensation. Rancière argues that when one faculty dominates over the other, a certain order of subordination is fulfilled, and thus a consensus forms between the two. By contrast, when there is no rule between the two faculties—when their relationship is incommensurable—a dissensus arises, and therein lies the aesthetic experience. In this way, the infographic makes use of text and image: neither subordinates, but rather both are indispensable to the other. Although the method of this research focuses on visual form rather than content, the latter cannot be entirely disregarded. The infographic, which communicates both textual and visual ideas, is an especially clear-cut case of an aesthetic object as Rancière defines it.

To conclude Rancière's contribution to the theoretical framework of this research, I wish to call upon his analysis of the photo montage as it appears in film (2011). As I have previously mentioned, the infographic may consist of up to ten images, through which the viewer must swipe in consecutive order. This format is not unlike that of the photo montage, which consists of a series of images, disjointed in content, but, according to Rancière, united in aesthetic. The same can be said of the multi-slide infographic, which presents a series of individual images, each one different from the last, but linked together via the aesthetic. Conveniently, the montages in which Rancière takes an interest feature text superimposed over image, offering insights well-suited to the goals of this research. Text-over-image, he says, can be thought of as a sentence-image, wherein text does not give power to the image, but is rather an inextricable formal component of the image itself. This research treats the infographic in a similar way: text and its communicative message exist as part of the image, but their power is derived from the image itself. In a montage, or multi-slide infographic, the aesthetic acts as the binding glue that holds text and image together, even as they change from slide to slide. This is representative of what Rancière calls a 'new order' of image literacy, which draws upon a new sensitivity to image and its power over text.

This binding power of the aesthetic is at play not only within multi-slide infographics, but also between separate infographics of similar aesthetic impact. To quote César Bolaño, who has written extensively of the digital culture industries, "the phantasmagorical appearance of a relationship between goods... reduces this to an impersonal relationship in which the agents of the exchange are reduced to mere bearers..., automatons programmed to operate the machinery of the circulation of goods" (Bolaño, 2015, p. 11). Here, the 'bearers' are the infographic prosumers, while the 'goods' are the infographics. The 'circulation' is powered by the aesthetic, the relationship in and between infographics, which propels production of infographics onwards. This notion of mass production has roots in Horkheimer and Adorno's (2006) analysis of the culture industry, particularly their claim that mass-produced cultural products offer only empty entertainment rather than intellectually stimulating art. In short, they aim to please. This would explain the tendency of many infographics to adopt a pleasant, cheery appearance, no matter

the gravity of their topic. The entertainment value of such infographics again bears a similarity to advertisements, whose ultimate purpose is to sell.

2.3 Against Hierarchy: In Defense of the Amateur

It is important to emphasize that this research is not interested in drawing a hierarchical distinction between the aesthetic presentation or preferences of the political left and right respectively. However, in the design community, there is an attitude that a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design does exist. For example, two scholars of design and information technology at Matej Bel University have stated that “a good graphic designer is able to adapt existing historical or contemporary models and derive unique approaches” (Sperka & Stolar, 2005, p. 9). As such, a good designer should have a technical knowledge of the medium, a familiarity with design history, and the ability to bring an inventive flair to their own design practice. Good design will thus display a balanced layout, a comprehensive color scheme according to color theory, and an adroit use of typography (Sperka & Stolar, 2005). Typography is another aesthetic component of graphic design worth considering. As a stylistic component of design, typography is involved in the production of meaning for the image as a whole. The form of the text itself (font), its spacing, its weight, the way it interacts with its spatial surroundings: all of this contributes to the overall aesthetic presentation of the image (Drucker, 2006). As this research will explore, many infographics present these elements of ‘good’ design, with balanced compositions, coherent color schemes, and unique font. Such infographics bear the markings of *professional* design, sometimes going so far as to blur the line between infographic and art.

In contrast to the ‘professional’ even ‘arty’ look of many infographics, many appear quite basic, as if they were made with only the most rudimentary of editing software. I do not wish to argue that such infographics are inferior to those that fit the requirements of ‘good’ or ‘arty’ graphic design. It may be the case that consumers of more basic infographics appreciate the direct and honest appeal of a simplified aesthetic for the reason that it does not distract the viewer from the fact that what they see is in fact only an image on Instagram. To borrow Rancière’s description of Charles Bovary’s imbecile hat, it is “the status of ‘dumb’ art that makes of this imbecility – the incapacity for an adequate transfer of significations – its very potency”

(Rancière, 2011, p. 14). The foolish appearance of Charles Bovary's hat, its 'dumbness' so to speak, intimates a failure of signals that is in fact perfectly suited to the awkward circumstances of the situation. The simplistic infographic can be thought of in a similar way. An infographic that lacks in style may perhaps be better suited to the awkwardness of expressing a political plea on an image-based social media platform that exists to entertain. Similar to Charles Bovary's imbecile hat, the political infographic on Instagram may indeed be interpreted by some as being quite silly. It can thus be argued that those 'bad' infographics which make use of a simple aesthetic in fact aptly display the inadequacy of the infographic format to fully convey a political plea in earnest.

To avoid possible negative associations with the term 'simplistic aesthetic', we might draw a link between simplicity and amateur media. Indeed, Instagram is in essence a platform for amateurs; anyone can publish nearly any image, regardless of artistic or professional qualifications. In this sense, the infographic can be considered a piece of amateur media, the online presence of which has greatly proliferated in recent years due to an increasingly participatory digital media culture (Motrescu-Mayes & Aasman, 2019). Amateur media are marked by their crudity of form, clumsy operation of the medium, and the general impression that they were made 'at home.' Amateur is linked in concept to DIY, or do-it-yourself, a genre of craft which denotes any form of participatory, low-cost creative activity. In print media culture, DIY has a historical link to branches of leftism, as it was widely used by alternative subcultures, such as punks, anarchists, and struggling artists (Eichhorn, 2016). However, as we will later see, the amateurish look can appear on both sides of the US political binary. We might then think of the amateur infographic as somewhat empowering for its creator, who can circulate their own interpretation of a political issue far and wide, no matter their lack of skill or even equipment. This is not to say that the amateur infographic circumvents Instagram's fundamentally exploitive use of users' images; the infographic's very existence on Instagram necessarily means a profit generated for the owners of the site. However, the generally unrefined appearance of an amateur infographic at the very least sends the message that anyone can become a creator. As Bishop (2012) has noted, *equality* often comes at the cost of *quality*. We might then say that the

amateur infographic is a more democratic form of the infographic, not only in the sense that anyone can theoretically participate, but in its aesthetic *transmission* of this message.

2.4 Aesthetics and Political Distinction

In this research, I wish to explore a link between aesthetics and political distinction, something that has a basis in previous scholarship. For example, Goriunova (2016) explores the aesthetics of online memes as a force of social and political power. She argues that digital aesthetics trigger social responses in those who consume them, which ultimately leads to a process of individuation. It is then reasonable to suppose that political identity could form as a result of consumption of aesthetic material, such as memes or infographics. Sturken (2009) pursued a similar line of thought in her analysis of a new patriotic aesthetic that arose under former US President Barack Obama. Obama's successful run for presidency was aided in part by the immense popularity of his campaign poster designed by street artist Shepard Fairey. Sturken explores how, in contrast to the 'kitsch' aesthetic that had for so long defined US patriotism, Fairey's aesthetic, as achieved by a skewed red-white-and-blue color palette, reference to past design movements, and formalistic style, inaugurated a new era of political campaign aesthetics. These aesthetics are also involved in brand culture, to which Fairey is also tied professionally. My investigation of infographics responds to this idea that media aesthetics are strongly linked to political identity and greater socio-cultural developments.

This research is particularly interested in determining if there exists a link between left or right political identity and aesthetic preference. An example of similar research is Hyunjin Seo's (2014) investigation into the differences of propagandistic images posted on Twitter by Israeli and Palestinian interests respectively during the 2012 Israeli-Hamas conflict. The author performed visual content analysis on these images. One finding showed that the Palestinian side was more likely to feature images of persons from their own side while the Israeli side more often displayed images of Palestinian enemies. Seo's research thus established an aesthetic distinction between two politically opposed groups. Decades prior, psychologist Johann Schneider (1985) conducted research into the aesthetic preferences of individuals with authoritarian-conservative political views. He used an experimental research method, showing subjects a range of shapes,

dots, lines, and patterns. The results showed that highly conservative individuals favored ordered patterns and regular polygons, while those with less conservative views showed a preference for random patterns and irregular polygons. For Schneider, this finding confirmed Adorno's conjecture that those with more authoritarian characters do not possess a taste for modern art forms, which are more likely to feature abstract, conceptual themes over clear and direct messages. The study was thus able to successfully determine a distinction in aesthetic preference between different politically-oriented subjects.

This research, which also looks for aesthetic preferences according to political differentiation, will help to reveal if there exists a fault line in aesthetic taste profiles that is not strictly hierarchical in the Bourdieusian sense; that is, high versus low cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Rather, this study seeks to determine if position on the US political spectrum (broadly, left versus right) can serve as a point of distinction in aesthetic taste. In this way, it responds to previous scholarship suggesting that taste distinctions can occur horizontally across social groups rather than just vertically (Berghman & van Eijck, 2009; van Eijck, 2012). This investigation thus seeks to enhance our understanding of how aesthetic taste profiles can vary along a non-hierarchical distinction pattern, namely that between the political left and right in the US.

Although this research is interested in uncovering a non-hierarchical difference in aesthetic preferences, Bourdieu's (2010) theory of cultural capital could indeed explain *why* such distinctions exist. According to this theory, those with high cultural capital are freer from economic necessity and thus better able to cultivate a taste for form over function, which usually requires some education or training. In terms of advertisement design, which I have argued to be very similar to infographic design, this would mean that those with high cultural capital would respond more positively to an aesthetic that makes use of more modern, abstract design elements. To the contrary, those with low cultural capital typically display a taste for necessity, which favors an aesthetic regime that presents functional forms, inviting viewers directly into the world of the artwork. The relationship between Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and political alignment in the US is weak but arguably existent. A 2015 US study showed that the higher the education level of a person, the likelier they are to have consistently liberal political views (Pew Research Center, 2019a). We can thus loosely generalize that those on the left end of the

spectrum are at least expected to have higher cultural capital according to Bourdieu's theory. If the results confirm the expectation that the left-leaning group displays 'artier' or more complex aesthetics than those of the right-leaning group, we can suggest that Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital may be a contributing factor.

2.5 Context: US Politics Today

This research looks at the aesthetic qualities of Instagram infographics as they vary between the political left and right. The basis for this interest is grounded in the recently elevated levels of political strife in the US. Much scholarship has been dedicated to the rising levels of US political polarization, especially since the 2016 election of former president Donald Trump (Bitecofer, 2020; Darmofal & Stickler, 2019; Abramowitz, 2014). The two parties, Democrat and Republican, are touchstones for the two opposing political paradigms that dominate the nation: left and right. Let us begin with a look at the former. By international standards, the Democratic party is far from what most would consider to be leftist. As the sole realistic alternative to the Republican party, it nonetheless represents mainstream leftism in the US, despite embodying decidedly centrist policies. Since the 1980s, the Democratic party has come to be associated with corporate interests, transnational finance, tough-on-crime policies, and, perplexingly, welfare cuts. In place of a strong welfare state and checks on the economic market, Democratic leaders focus their rhetoric on representation and multiculturalism (Mudge, 2018). This shift away from what used to be policies dedicated to welfare support and union backing has in fact caused much intraparty struggle: a diverse array of left-leaning politicians and voters, lumped together into one Democratic party (Mudge, 2018). This struggle was made especially evident by US Senator Bernie Sanders' runs in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. Sanders' injection of his own social democratic rhetoric into the nation's political discourse revealed a cleavage within the Democratic party as well as its voters. Many, especially younger voters (Shelley & Hitt, 2016), embraced Sanders' further left message and became more vocally opposed to establishment Democrats. As a result, in the 2020 election, the Democrats lacked a strong candidate capable of uniting the party (Smith, 2020). Yet, with the close victory of current US President Joe Biden and a Democrat-controlled House of Representatives, the Democratic party appears to have the

upper hand in governance despite a divided electorate. Nevertheless, we see a general trend of younger and more educated individuals voting Democrat (Gramlich, 2020), which could have bearings on the aesthetic taste profiles of the left.

By contrast, the Republican party adapted fairly well to the shock of Trump's presidency, despite initial resistance from some Republican politicians (Graham, 2020). Trump's 2016 victory nonetheless ushered in a new era of conservatism in the US, following the emergence of the Tea Party and 'alt-right' movements in the last decade (Mudde, 2017). Unlike the neoconservative years of George W. Bush's presidency, which embraced moral idealism, militancy, and international intervention (Muravchik, 2010), Trump's brand of conservatism introduced a new wave of populism into the US political landscape, resonating with a base of voters disenchanted with establishment politics. His rhetoric was characterized by nativist and authoritarian messages that often played on a fear of immigrants, especially those of Muslim faith, and of the domestic labor repercussions of transnational open trade deals (Skonieczny, 2018; Mudde, 2017). Consequently, Trump became adored or hated not so much for his policy choices, but rather for his spectacular pathos of unfiltered speech and social media usage. Trump thus enjoyed extensive media coverage and an especially passionate support base during his presidency, while his trademark red hat bearing the slogan "Make America Great Again" became a clothing staple for many Republicans (Kellner, 2017). In spite of select harsh critics, Trump managed to unify the Republican party, having secured the votes of both traditional and "alternative" conservatives as well as the backing of most of his fellow Republican politicians.

Trump's presidency did, however, spark a significant cultural backlash from left-leaning opponents. The burgeoning Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements were only emboldened by Trump's divisive and often racially charged rhetoric, leading to public displays of resistance from celebrities and countless protests in the streets (Dimaggio & Shinjo, 2020; Zeitchik, 2018). This too took shape on social media sites where responses to Trump—both positive and negative—abounded (Jost et al., 2018). The effects of Trump's presidency thus transcended the political and penetrated the cultural, deepening the divide between those who opposed and those who favored all that he stood for; more simply put, the new left and right. More than ever, political identity had become a crucial element of *social* identity (West & Iyengar, 2020).

Therefore, despite much division on the left, both sides of the political spectrum had become united in their disdain for the other, leading to all-time high levels of polarization that extended beyond the political arena and into public cultural spheres (West & Iyengar, 2020). Under Trump, no matter the particular sect of one's leftism or rightism, their opinion of him situated them on one side of the highly polarized sociopolitical binary of left versus right. This division has flourished on Instagram, where the infographic has emerged as a prominent source of highly aestheticized political discourse.

3 Expectations

Based on previous research and the aesthetic theory outlined above, I expect a few aesthetic differences between left and right political infographics to become apparent in this research. Firstly, with Schneider's (1985) findings in mind, I expect to find that the right-leaning group will feature relatively uncomplex aesthetics. By uncomplex, I refer to ordered visual elements with little visual abstraction and text that is relatively un-stylized so as to communicate messages clearly and succinctly. Accordingly, I expect the left-leaning group to feature aesthetics that are more complex and bear a stronger likeness to trends in modern art and even commercial design that appropriates those trends, such as minimalism (Margariti et al., 2017). With 'complexity,' I expect greater depth and breadth of information, perhaps in the form of the multi-slide infographic and an abundance of visual design elements. The expectation that the left will incorporate commercial, 'high-end' aesthetics is based in Mudge's (2018) description of US leftism as being closely linked to corporatism as well as Sturken's (2009) exploration of Fairey's Obama poster, which was widely popular on the left and, as Sturken argued, employed an art-meets-brand-culture aesthetic.

Further, we will see that many infographics make use of photographic portraits. For this, Seo's (2014) findings regarding the use of images of people, specifically their depiction as either 'enemy' or 'icon,' is highly relevant for my investigation. Based on her findings, I expect to find a similar use of portraiture in infographics. In right-leaning infographics, I expect 'iconic' imagery to be more prominent than in those on the left. This is based in Trump's recent rise to prominence and his near cult-status among his voter base (Kellner, 2017). This is a well-established practice in visual representations of authoritarian political figures (Pisch, 2016), making it likely that the same could occur with Trump, whom many political scientists agree is not far off from fitting an authoritarian profile (Smith, 2019). To the contrary, I expect the left-leaning infographics to make limited use of iconic portraits, given that, as previously mentioned, the Democratic party has failed in recent years to produce a superstar candidate (Smith, 2020). I thus expect photographic portraits to serve as a crucial point of differentiation between left- and right-leaning infographics.

4 Methods and Data

4.1 Operationalization

In the above review of literature and theory, I have defined several key aspects of this research, including the infographic itself, aesthetic theory, and the state of US politics. However, it is still necessary to clearly state how these concepts were operationalized while gathering and analyzing data. Firstly, in this research, the infographic refers to any textual-visual Instagram post that seeks to educate, persuade, or appeal to its viewers in favor of its respective political standpoint. Some infographics are 'data-heavy,' making use of graphs, tables, charts, and so forth. Others offer lists of reading sources, suggested courses of action, or excerpts from influential political texts. Some simply present a slogan, such as "Protect Trans Lives" or "Vote Like Your Guns Depend on It." For the purposes of this research, these all qualify as infographics as they swiftly communicate key political messages that dominate US discourse today.

As this research is concerned with aesthetic variances between the political left and right, it is necessary to define these two categories. The two party-system in US politics makes this differentiation relatively easy to discern. However, there is still variation within each group. The left-right spectrum thus serves as a convenient tool for differentiating two vastly broad yet highly polarized circles of thought. For this research, two useful reference points are the Democratic Party on the left and the Republican Party on the right. I therefore collected infographics that touched on the respective liberal and conservative positions associated with each party. On the left, this includes issues like affordable healthcare, clean energy sources, racial justice, immigration reform, LGBTQ+ concerns, and reproductive rights (The Democratic National Committee, 2020). On the right, this includes issues such as border security, gun rights, pro-life stances, private health insurance, and respect for the military (The Republican National Committee, 2020). However, this research also includes infographics that deal with issues that go beyond the traditional two-party schism, but are nonetheless associated with one of the two sides. This includes radical Marxism and generally socialist messages on the left and 'alt-right' or classic libertarian stances on the right. Occasionally, an ideological overlap between the two ends of the spectrum occurred, such as stances taken against Biden coming from both the right and

far left. In these cases, the accounts that posted such infographics were consulted to determine political alignment.

Finally, I turn to the issue of aesthetics, which, as I have explored in the previous section, is a broad term with many meanings. In this research, 'aesthetics' refers chiefly to the following: color, compositional balance, style of text, representation of persons, and syntactic elements (here meaning material references, such as paint strokes or the use of a textured filter). In the case of infographics, it is also especially important to consider how aesthetics are informed by the stylistic aspects of text. This has basis in the idea that properties of text—such as font, letter case, size and color of text—are involved in the process of meaning making (Drucker, 2006). Photographs of people also factor into my consideration of aesthetics, since these also constitute a part of many infographics' visual presentations. In cases of multiple-slide infographics, the relation of one slide to another will also be considered in terms of a 'montage' function (Rancière, 2011). This function is understood as contributing to the aesthetic presentation of the infographic, since it not only calls upon an image literate viewership, but also allows the viewer to interact with the infographic through swiping, thereby changing the form of the infographic itself.

The central question of this research—how and why do aesthetics of Instagram infographics vary between the political left and right in the US?—is based on the idea that aesthetics are related to political identity. As a result, in this research, I understand aesthetics to be the expression of the infographics' creators, who to some extent are representative of the side whose political talking points they express. Furthermore, the popularity of a given aesthetic also serves as an indication of the taste *preferences* of those who consume the infographic; that is to say, the political left and right respectively. As this research is limited to content analysis of the infographics only, I can only conjecture at what this might mean for the taste profiles of those who consume and even produce them. However, with a sound theoretical approach, we may indeed be able to derive some intel into the taste profiles of each side from aesthetic presentation alone.

4.2 Methodology

In this research, I performed qualitative analysis on a selection of infographics of left and right political viewpoints respectively. Specifically, I used qualitative visual content analysis to discern aesthetic differences and trends amongst left and right political infographics. Qualitative visual content analysis allowed for a sensitive investigation into the many and varied aesthetic qualities of infographics. First, a selection of both left and right Instagram infographics were taken from the Instagram application. Then, visual content analysis was performed on every infographic from both groups, making note of the aesthetic features of each. The goal of this analysis was two-fold: (a) categorize all infographics (regardless of political position) according to their defining aesthetic features and (b) determine if, how, and to what extent such aesthetic categories are employed by each political camp respectively.

The visual content analysis was guided by the methods laid out by Philip Bell (2004) in his chapter *Content Analysis of Visual Images*, which lays out the steps of a sound visual analysis: selecting a corpus of images, identifying the visual variables of each image, and assigning constituent values to each variable. However, as Bell focuses on quantitative research, I blended his 'variable/value' approach with a qualitative approach that did not include the assignment of a number to each variable and value. Each infographic was thus treated as its own unique visual text. Variables were identified on the basis of aesthetic qualities, such as color palettes, the use of visual motifs or symbols, text-to-visual ratio, the use of patterned backgrounds, font characteristics, as well as the incorporation of imported elements, such as photographs of people or screenshots of news headlines. Many variables had associated values, which denote the particular attributes of their associated variable. For example, 'red text' was a value associated with the variable 'text color' (see Appendix D fig. 10). For those infographics that included photographs of people, a social semiotic approach (Jewitt & Oyama, 2011) was used to assess the portrayal of the depicted person and their relation to the viewer, such as point of view and facial expression. For example, facial expression was one variable with values 'smile,' 'straight face,' 'crazy face,' 'stern expression,' 'mid-speech,' and 'frown,' associated therewith.

Using Atlas.ti coding software, a four-step coding process was utilized. Firstly, an initial round of open coding generated an extensive list of codes associated with the many aesthetic

characteristics of each infographic, including the ones listed above. Next, a second round of coding refined this list and narrowed it down to only the most relevant aesthetic characteristics. For example, the code 'centered text' was determined to be irrelevant for determining any aesthetic difference because it was used so ubiquitously by both sides of the political spectrum. The codes that remained were then associated with more abstract concepts, such as high/low design, balance, and color scheme (see Appendix B codebook 2). At this stage, some distinctions between left and right were immediately apparent: differences in color scheme, photographs of people, and use of the multi-slide function. These obvious differences were thus selected for analysis.

The first two stages of coding revealed that there were aesthetic variances not only between the left and right distinction but also within each group. Sometimes, there were overlaps between the two. To make sense of the differences and overlaps within and between each group, infographics were grouped according to aesthetic category, which are groups of infographics sharing many visual qualities which work together to produce a synthesized aesthetic effect. This entailed a third and fourth round of coding, which, based on the findings from the previous rounds of coding, used a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2014) to assign each infographic an aesthetic category. First, aesthetic categories were initially conceived of in an 'open-coding' manner, meaning they were identified by the initial visual impact of the infographic. For example, a 'vintage aesthetic' was assigned to infographics that had a 'retro' look and a 'bold & strong aesthetic' was assigned to those that appeared to feature bold text and bright colors. After this initial round of aesthetic category assignment, infographics were grouped according to their assigned aesthetic categories and subjected to a fourth round of coding, this time more carefully selecting for the most prevalent codes featured in each respective category. For example, 'vintage aesthetic' heavily featured 'retro font', 'elegant font', and 'textured filter' codes while the 'bold & strong aesthetic' most often included codes 'all-caps text', 'big bold title', and 'bright color palette.' Finally, all aesthetic categories were reviewed and necessary adjustments were made so that all infographics were placed in the correct aesthetic category according to the prevalence of their assigned codes (See Appendix B codebook 1). Some infographics fell into more than one aesthetic category.

Once all infographics had been appropriately grouped by aesthetic category, the entire corpus of infographics (which consisted of both left and right) were separated into two groups of right- and left-aligned infographics respectively. This allowed each group to be analyzed for its apparent categorical preferences or lack thereof. Although this analysis was qualitative in nature, it was indeed useful to visually organize data according to the frequency by which certain codes appeared in certain categories and again, by which aesthetic categories were favored by the left and/or right-leaning group. This also allowed me to see which aesthetic categories were used exclusively by one side or the other. No tests of significance were performed, however, counting the number of times a left- or right-leaning infographic appeared in each aesthetic category allowed aesthetic trends (indeed backed by numerical support) to become evident (Sandelowski, 2001). Bar graphs for both political groups were then generated to visually display these data groupings, and both groups were then analyzed according to their top three categories (See Appendix C). Of the remaining categories, a few which offered special insights into the aesthetic tastes of each group were also selected for analysis. These select cases either displayed interesting thematic juxtapositions (such as the DIY and Low Concept categories), revealed a unique taste profile of one side (such as the Art Zine category), or displayed a trend of aesthetic appropriation (such as the right-leaning group's use of the Light & Bright category).

4.3 Sampling

Infographics were selected based on the content of their messages as well as the professed political stance of the account that posted them. Infographics posted by anonymously-run accounts, proclaimed political activists, lifestyle influencers, grassroots political organizers and sometimes political think tanks were selected, however those from official party and politician accounts were avoided in order to keep the sample representative of a more general public. 100 infographics from both the left and right were thus selected for a total of 200 infographics. All infographics were taken from Instagram using a screen-capture function to produce images for analysis. Many infographics consisted of multiple slides. In such cases, all slides were screen-captured and included in analysis. In addition to thematic content, infographics were selected on the basis of the number of 'likes' they received, with the minimum being 1,000. This ensured that

the infographics in question had significant reach and appeal to a wide enough audience. A broad reach is significant for this research as I am interested in aesthetics that represent the general preferences of each political side rather than the extent of the endlessly diverse content that populates the internet. To keep the sample relevant to contemporary political issues and to control for selection bias, only infographics from the past year (April of 2020 to April of 2021) were selected.

To account for Instagram's complex curation algorithm (Fouquaert & Mechant, 2021), I created two new blank accounts for the purpose of this research. One account was dedicated solely to finding left-wing infographics and the other to right-wing infographics. On the left account, twenty-two left-leaning accounts that frequently posted infographics were 'followed.' On the right account, fifty-four right-leaning accounts were followed. The goal of these steps was to provide Instagram's curation algorithm with data that would generate more similar content in suggested accounts to follow and on the 'explore' page of the application, a page that shows posts from accounts the user may be interested in but does not follow. More accounts were followed on the right-wing account because right-leaning infographics were more difficult to find and therefore more algorithmic input was deemed necessary in order to locate a sufficient number of right-wing infographics. This difficulty may be the result of the right's generally lesser use of infographics as a format, Instagram's censorship policies, or the limitations of my own digital footprint, which is algorithmically tied to all digital outlets of information via cookies and other data-tracking software. Having followed a sufficient number of Instagram profiles on each separate account, infographics were then selected. They were taken from the accounts that were followed, from similar accounts suggested by Instagram, and from the 'explore' page. Infographics were selected from the widest range of accounts possible so as not to privilege the favored aesthetic category of one account alone. However, due to difficulties finding right-leaning infographics with enough 'likes', right-wing infographics more frequently came from the same account.

5 Results: Broad Aesthetic Differences and Aesthetic Categories

This section will explore the findings of the analysis, which offer several illuminating insights into the aesthetic differences between left and right infographics. It will begin with a general overview of the most apparent differences between the two camps. Next, it will explore the different aesthetic categories that were revealed through analysis. In total, twenty aesthetic categories arose from this analysis: Art Zine, Bold & Strong, Dark & Austere, Do-It-Yourself (DIY), Enemy, Fun & Youthful, Futuristic, Iconic/Reverent, Ironic, Light & Bright, Low Concept, Maximalist/Eclectic, Minimalist, Painterly, Patriotic, Soft & Gentle, Standard Educational, Straightforward & Personal, New Age, and Vintage (see Appendix B for descriptions and examples of each category). This section will focus first on the top three which are evidently favored by each side respectively. Then, it will take a look at certain unique aesthetic categories that tell us something unique about the aesthetic trends on each side. Lastly, it will explore the potential for a future direction in political infographic aesthetics.

5.1 Broad Aesthetic Differences

5.1.1 Color Scheme

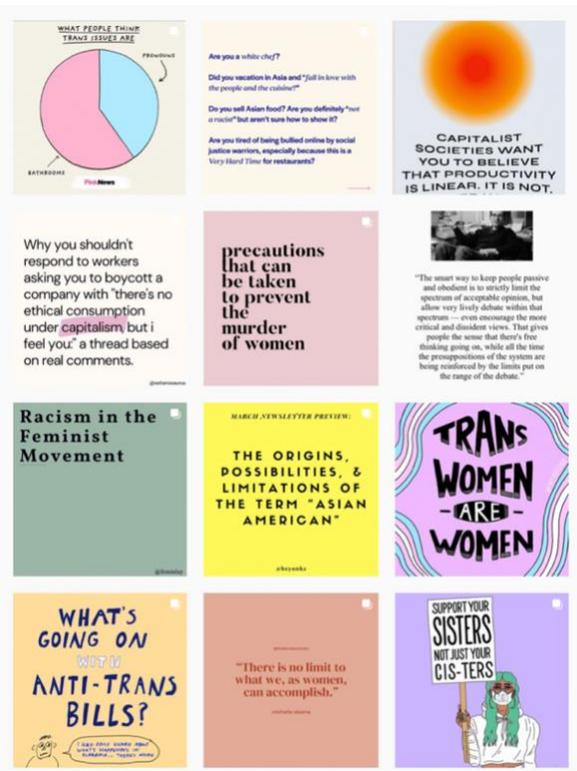


Figure 1 Selection of left-leaning infographics



Figure 2 Selection of right-leaning infographics

Analysis showed that the sampled left-leaning infographics do differ from their right-leaning counterparts in a few broad but significant ways. Firstly, right-leaning infographics appear to take on a generally darker tone. They often feature dark color palettes and many make use of a dark filter imposed over the background image. Accordingly, they frequently use white or light text, presumably to stand in contrast to a dark background. On the contrary, left-leaning infographics generally present a warmer and lighter appearance. Many feature pastel color palettes with yellow, pink, orange, and white backgrounds. This stark difference, visible from just a cursory glance at figures 1 and 2, would suggest that the two seek to capture different moods. With its lively colors and pastel palettes, the left-leaning group seems to appeal to a happier, easy-going disposition. By contrast, the dark backgrounds and shadowy filters of the right-leaning group appear to evoke a sense of doom. The former seems a fitting approach for a

medium which thrives off of user-interaction, which indeed seems likelier to occur with the open and inviting appearance of a lighter color palette. However, the right-leaning camp may be playing into a more calculated aesthetic pathos, one which uses dark colors to foster a sense of fear or urgency. Take, for example, figures 3 and 4, depicted below, which exemplify the contrasting tones of left and right infographics.



Figure 3 First slide of left-leaning Infographic taken from Instagram user @chicksforclimate



Figure 4 Right-leaning infographic taken from Instagram user @freedomeconomics

In textual content, neither are particularly charged with strong emotion; they present simple arguments on behalf of their respective issues: the left, in promotion of sustainable shopping brands, and the right, against socialism and in favor of capitalism as an economic system. Yet the two clearly employ vastly different color schemes. With the left-leaning case, a pale green background sits behind a yellow-outlined lavender text box and a blue-green illustrated globe. In stark contrast, the right-leaning case uses a solid black background with bold white text announcing its message. These two cases exemplify the general trend of left-leaning infographics to utilize colorful and bright color schemes and right-leaning infographics to do the opposite; however, this is not always the case, as we will later see.

5.1.2 Photographs of People

Another crucial difference between left and right infographics is the use of photographs of people, or, we might say, portraits. From the data, it is abundantly clear that the right makes much greater use of portraits than does the left. However, despite featuring fewer portraits overall, the left in fact features black and white portraits much more frequently. These findings suggest a difference in motivation behind the use of portraits. The right's relatively heavy reliance on portraits in infographics suggests a wish to appeal directly to viewers by simulating a face-to-face interaction. Right-leaning infographics most often feature portraits which display a chest-up shot of their subjects who are most often gazing directly at the outside viewer and smiling (see fig. 6). It thus appears that the right-leaning camp uses portraiture in a functional or signficatory sense, in order to communicate a clear, personal message.

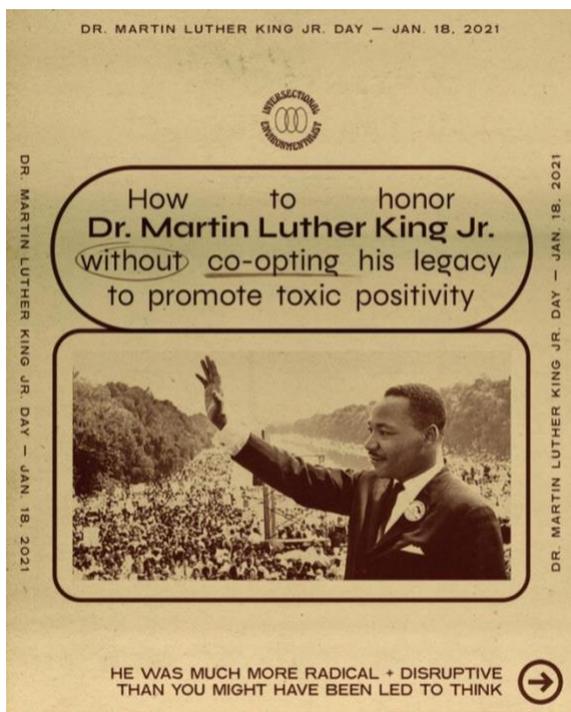


Figure 5 First slide of left-leaning infographic with black-and-white portrait posted by Instagram user @intersectionalenvironmentalist



Figure 6 Right-leaning infographic with colored portrait posted by Instagram user @brigitte_gabriel

The black-and-white portraits of the leftist group perform a slightly different role. Firstly, their black-and-white filter seems to ground the infographics that contain them in a legacy of historical legitimacy. Whether or not the photographs in question were actually taken

at a time before colored photography existed is irrelevant. The black-and-white filter leaves the impression that these photographs were carefully selected from an historical archive or perhaps hunted down in an old textbook. In short, these photos present as being educational in nature. Furthermore, analysis revealed the black-and-white photographs of people in the left-leaning group to feature a much wider variety of photographic perspectives, including more profile shots, full-body shots, shots of persons in action, and posterior views of subjects. This range in perspective also points to an authorial intent to display subjects in a manner that falls more closely under the umbrella of photographic realism (Roberts, 2007). The pictorial representation of subjects *as they were* rather than as they were staged by the photographer suggests a reportorial function of these photographs. In figure 5, we see how Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is presented in profile, extending his arm outwards and smiling softly down and away from the camera's lens. His posture along with his seeming disregard of the camera pointed at him suggests an organic moment just fortuitous enough to be caught by the photographer. The infographic's inclusion of such a photograph solidifies its didactic effect, intimating to the viewer that what they see is a report of a historical event as it really took place. In this sense, the black-and-white portraits included in left-leaning infographics are not entirely unlike the colored portraits of their right-leaning counterparts: they are both functional above all else. However, in the former group there is a greater distance between subject and viewer, creating a sense of historicity from which something can be learned. This effectively grants legitimacy to the infographic as an educational tool.

5.1.3 Slide Sequence

A third evident difference between left-leaning and right-leaning infographics is the usage of multiple slides. As previously mentioned, Instagram allows users to publish up to ten images or videos as part of one post. Strikingly, left-leaning infographics make far greater use of this feature than do right-leaning ones. Multi-slide infographics often feature a sort of title slide followed by slides with greater depth of textual information, more photographs, and even sometimes embedded videos. Most infographics remain visually consistent from slide to slide, with the title slide setting the standard for those that follow. However, some alternate

rhythmically between two colored backgrounds, while others change colored backgrounds with every swipe. A very few entirely shift aesthetic presentation, with the tile slide establishing an initial aesthetic and those that follow presenting only plain text or a screen-capture of a tweet or news headline. The infographic shown below in figure 7 exemplifies the dominant trend of remaining aesthetically consistent, but offering both additional images and text, often embellished with emphatic design elements such as underlined text and bullet-pointed lists.

black trans leaders from history
a book report by @alokvmenon

Trans history in the US tends to focus on white trans people like Christine Jorgenson, one of the first to publicly undergo gender confirmation surgery in the 1950s. While Jorgenson quickly rose to fame, many Black trans people — and especially Black trans women — were disappeared in her shadow. White trans women like Jorgenson began to achieve acceptance by appealing to the dominant norms of white womanhood (domesticity, respectability, heterosexuality) and differentiating themselves from Black gender variant people. The media often ridiculed Black trans women as failed imitations of Jorgenson. Combatting historical erasure, Black trans scholar Dr. C. Riley Snorton highlights an expansive tradition of Black trans life and resistance.

In 1836 Black trans sex worker Mary Jones was charged with larceny for stealing the wallets of her clients. On June 16, 1836 Jones showed up to court wearing a wig, white earrings, and a dress. Everyone in the audience and the court mocked her for her appearance — someone even tried to grab the wig off her head and everyone in the court laughed in her face. When asked why she was dressed this way she said, "I have always attended parties among the people of my own Colour dressed in this way — and in New Orleans I always dressed this way." Jones pled not guilty and was sentenced to five years in prison. A week after her trial a lithographic portrait called "The Man-Monster" became widely circulated as a way to demonize Jones.

In 1945 a Black trans woman named Lucy Hicks Anderson was arrested and convicted of perjury. The government accused her of lying about her sex on her marriage license. In the face of virulent racism and transphobia during the trial, Anderson had the conviction to argue: "I defy any doctor in the world to prove that I am not a woman," and "I have lived, dressed, acted just what I am, a woman." When asked if she wore a wig she responded, "If I think I look better with a wig, I do." Prosecutors kept asking if she had male sex organs and Anderson refused to answer. After Anderson was arrested she was forbidden from wearing women's clothes in men's prison.

In the 1950s a Black trans woman named Ava Betty Brown was tried for the charge of female impersonation and fined \$100. The local news reported her home address after she was charged. The case was written about in the Black press like Ebony and Jet magazines where she was labeled the "Double-Sexed Defendant." In response to being misgendered Brown declared: "If I'm a man, I don't know it!"

Jim McHarris was a Black transmasculine person who began to exclusively wear male clothing in 1939. He lived in Memphis, Chicago, and other midwestern cities working a host of jobs as a cook, auto mechanic, and shipyard worker. In 1953 he moved to Kosciusko, MS where he became engaged to a woman. In 1954 he got pulled over by the police at a traffic stop and underwent a pat down search, accusing McHarris of being female. McHarris was forced to strip off his clothes and reveal his breasts and genitals in front of the judge and arresting officers. After serving thirty days in jail he argued, "I ain't done nothing wrong and I ain't breaking no laws."

Our ability to exist in public today is thanks to Black trans leaders like this who paved the way. Their self-knowledge, determination, and everyday resistance in the face of criminalization led cities to mostly stop enforcing cross-dressing laws.

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Image Credits

- Mary Jones depicted as "the Man-Monster," Henry R. Robinson (1836) via africandiasporaphd.com
- Christine Jorgensen (1926-1989) via biography.com
- Mary Jones depicted as "the Man-Monster," Henry R. Robinson (1836) via americanhistory.si.edu
- Lucy Hicks Anderson via getmaude.com
- Ava Betty Brown, *Black on Both Sides: A racial history of trans identity* by C. Riley Snorton, University of Minnesota Press (2017)
- Jim McHarris, *Ebony Magazine* (1954) via facebook.com/weshouldbesen
- @loveiswakeup, Loveis Wise

Figure 7 Multi-slide left-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @alokvmenon

The multi-slide format not only offers a greater volume of aesthetic material, but its implementation alone alters the aesthetic form of the infographic. With this format, the infographic evolves from a single, static image into a moving series of images, each of which responds to that which precedes it. With a small stretch of the imagination, we might say that this dynamic assemblage of images is not unlike the compilation of images that constitutes a montage in a film. Both employ a series of images which have no immediately obvious link, yet are related through context and often, aesthetically united. We can thus say that the multi-slide infographic is indeed similar to the montage, which, according to Rancière (2011), functions as part of a new order of image literacy, wherein signs and other visual symbols testify to a common understanding of the world and human existence in the late modern age. Sensitivity to this type of understanding allows viewers to make sense of the discreet images that constitute a montage, to intuitively link one to another. This has become commonplace among those born into the digital age, as they are required to register and make sense of a near-endless bombardment of images. The infographic in figure 7 remains aesthetically consistent throughout, allowing viewers to follow along with the progression of the slides. Consistency of aesthetic therefore allows the infographic to exist in bloated form, offering a 'user-friendly' experience of consuming greater quantities of media.

The multi-slide infographic differs crucially from the traditional photo montage of film in that it depends on the viewer's participation for efficacy. The viewer is required to physically interact with the infographic by swiping from slide to slide. They may take time absorbing the information on each slide, skip through hastily, or even just glance at the first slide without swiping at all. They become a functional part of the infographic itself, controlling what information they view and when. They are thus granted some degree of agency in the multi-slide infographic's presentation, as their swiping is absolutely necessary for the infographic to have its full effect. The multi-slide infographic thus takes Rancière's new order of image literacy one step further by implicating the viewer to some extent in the operation of the infographic itself. From the data, we see that left-wing infographics are far more likely to employ multiple slides. The implication thus arises that the montage function is favored by the left-leaning group as an aesthetic element which invites a degree of participation from its audience.

5.2 Aesthetic Categories: Left-Leaning Preferences

I have just identified the broad aesthetic differences between the left- and right-leaning political infographics of Instagram: color scheme, use of portraits, and the multi-slide function. I will now explore the aesthetic categories into which infographics are grouped that resulted from this research. This section will thus explore the three most prevalent categories of the left-leaning group. These categories are strongly favored by the left and therefore understood as speaking most loudly on behalf of the general aesthetic preferences of that group. A consideration of these categories will allow for an exploration of difference along the axis of aesthetic category rather than individual aesthetic characteristics alone, which will hopefully deepen our understanding of the broad scale of difference between the two camps.

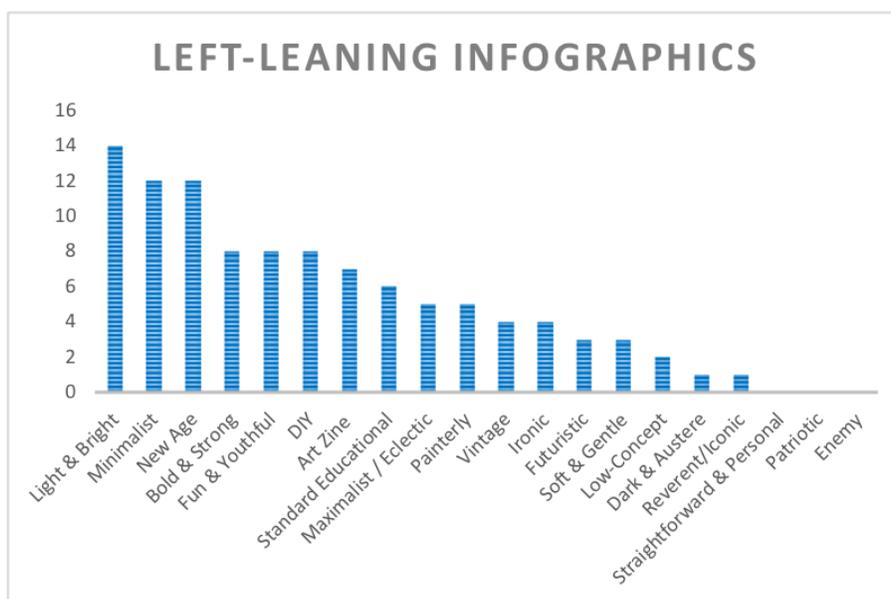


Figure 8 Distribution of left-leaning infographics by aesthetic category

5.2.1 *Light & Bright*

Analysis of the left-leaning infographics by aesthetic category revealed the Light & Bright aesthetic to be the most favored of all the categories. By far, the most important characteristic of this aesthetic category is the color palette, which is predominantly pastel and/or bright. The category also incorporates colorful, stylized text. These infographics often feature a solid—

rather than patterned or abstract—background. The majority are multi-slide infographics, with the first slide bearing a large title. Titles are often made with a flowing, elegant, or retro-looking font. Others display titles with a more modern font style, featuring sans-serif text with wide, rounded characters. This aesthetic category is also text-heavy, meaning text is featured more prominently than visual elements, such as illustrations or imported photographs. It thus combines an abundance of textual information with light, easy-to-consume aesthetics.



Figure 9 Multi-slide Light & Bright left-leaning Infographic posted by Instagram user @goldhouseco, originally made by Instagram user @haveanicedayy_

Figure 9 shows a particularly cheerful infographic. Its background is a pale yellow, studded with decorative orange and white stars. Each slide bears a large stylized orange and yellow title at the top, featuring both bold, all-caps font and a dainty cursive. The text is set on angle and italicized. Some titles are emphasized with a drop shadow effect or a large orange stroke. Below each title, all-caps orange text offers information, with the occasional use of yellow to emphasize certain portions. The light and warm color palette endows the infographic with a gentle and easy-going quality. The graphic elements do not dominate, allowing the text to figure prominently in the overall composition. Still, the decorative stars, angled text, and mix of font styles gives the eye plenty to consider. It is complex, but not overwhelming. Altogether, its balanced composition, creative use of font, and comprehensive color palette indicate that someone with an extensive knowledge of design created this infographic. Further, its light and pleasing colors paired with its “cutsey” font give the impression that this infographic could just as well serve as an advertisement for a trendy smoothie shop or a yoga clothing brand. Yet its

emphasis on text insists that it intends to communicate information. The pairing of light, agreeable design with the goal of educating makes for a captivating, but perhaps unexpected aesthetic impact. The altogether pleasantness of this infographic may not strike one as being the most fitting for a serious discussion of racism against Asian Americans; however, it does cohere as an advertisement seeking to draw in a buyer.

5.2.2 *The Minimalist*

Just behind Light & Bright is the Minimalist aesthetic, which analysis revealed to be the second most preferred aesthetic of left-leaning infographics. The Minimalist aesthetic is based mostly in the colloquial usage of the term, which refers to anything with very limited ornamentation (VanEenoo, 2011). In this research of infographics, it is characterized by its muted color palettes, solid backgrounds, lack of ornamentation, and predominance of plain, simple text. Most Minimalist infographics feature multiple slides. At the onset, the title slide of those infographics establishes a Minimalist aesthetic. Unlike the other aesthetic categories, whose title slides are often heavily decorated but followed by a series of slides featuring mostly plain text, Minimalist infographics are largely visually bare and text-heavy throughout. The exclusivity of text is the defining feature of this aesthetic category. Its implementation thus becomes the focus of the design, allowing the viewer to ponder the placement, orientation, and stylization of the text alone. Text thus becomes figure, presenting the viewer with a deliberate spatial form that also directly communicates a message. In a few cases, one or two slides following the title slide may feature a small graphic or photograph, but these elements are overpowered by the multi-slide function, which propels the viewer further along a line of text-dominated slides.

Figure 10 offers an example. Here, the title slide establishes the Minimalist aesthetic of the infographic with a mild, cream-colored background. It is clean and simple, but lacks the abrasiveness of a bright, pure white. Its deep blue text is written plainly in a basic sans-serif font with small portions emphasized in an elegant, italicized serif font. The text is left-aligned, as it would be in any standard English reader. The font size is consistent throughout, thus no title is made strikingly obvious. A simple pink arrow urges the viewer to scroll onwards. The following slides alternate between deep blue and cream background and text. The third slide

presents a blue-to-pink gradient colored graph, accompanied by larger text expressing the title. Finally, the fourth slide presents basic text with a slightly larger title pronounced at the top. The Minimalist infographic may therefore gradually take on some complexity in the slides that follow the first. Still, this aesthetic category's tendency to utilize plain, solid backgrounds and emphasize plain text over graphic elements strongly evokes a Minimalist aesthetic.



Figure 10 Minimalist left-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @ireneshiangli, in order from top-bottom, left-right

The left-leaning group's preference for the Minimalist aesthetic reveals something about their intended audience. Minimalism, as a Western artistic philosophy, arose in the middle of the twentieth century and rejected ornamentation, preferring rather to express the 'essence' of an object or idea through the most limited use of material. Its later adoption by commercial graphic designers, especially those in the emerging technology industries, launched it into the mainstream (VanEenoo, 2011). While many critics have argued that it has since become overused in design, to the general public, its appearance serves as a mark of principled, 'good' design. The left-leaning group's heavy use of this aesthetic style suggests their intention to appeal to the same demographic targeted by the minimalist design of countless popular advertisement campaigns (Margariti et al., 2017); in short, an educated class of people with expendable income and a somewhat selective eye for design. We can thus speculate that left-leaning infographics hold greater appeal to the class of people described above.

5.2.3 *New Age*

Tied with Minimalist for the second most favored aesthetic category of the left-leaning group is the New Age aesthetic. This category's most prominent feature is its nebulous, gradient-colored backgrounds. These backgrounds incorporate a range of colors, mostly pastel in tint. Many include a hazy, dichromatic orb, which can perhaps best be described as a visual 'aura.' These decorative backgrounds invoke the sensation of flying through clouds or gazing at a far-off fog of stars in the night sky. It is for these reasons that the category has been named 'New Age.' One infographic in this group even features distinctly spiritual imagery, with two glowing silhouettes of human figures kneeling and touching hands before an illustrated globe (see fig. 11). Most, however, simply feature text imposed over an abstract background.

In this category, text varies more greatly than do the backgrounds. Notably, several follow a wavy or curved path, intimating a loose, flowing stream of information. The font varies, from hand-written, to vintage-looking, to plain text embellished only by a simple text frame. Some such text frames take on the appearance of a web browser window, such as the one shown in figure 12. There is thus a link drawn between this category and the Internet, which can also be understood in terms of the New Age: a boundless realm that has emerged only in

the past few decades, one where information travels freely. Altogether, this aesthetic conveys a feeling of transcendence: a meditation on calm colors and soft forms, as if to lull viewers into a state of deep contemplation and reflection.

The overall tone of the New Age infographics is not dissimilar to the tonality of spiritualism, meditation, and self-care discourses which are increasingly popular among young people, especially those in leftist and contemporary feminist circles (Miller & Grise-Owens, 2020; Berry-McCrea, 2018). Both invoke feelings of calm, connectivity, and transcendence beyond the bounds of physical limitations. The data from this research shows a clear left-leaning preference for the aesthetic presentation of these ideas, suggesting an appeal to a young and mindful audience. Such an audience is accustomed to advertisements selling them health-based lifestyles, self-help remedies, and mindfulness strategies (Berlinger; 2021; Wolf, 2019; Thomas; 2017). The left-leaning group's adoption of this approach for political messaging, which often touches on quite serious subjects, might seem at first misguided. However, if we understand it as a strategy to appeal to a young consumer audience, we can conjecture that the left-leaning group's evident preference for this aesthetic is reflective of popular market trends in advertisement, which have proven themselves to be indeed appealing to this demographic.

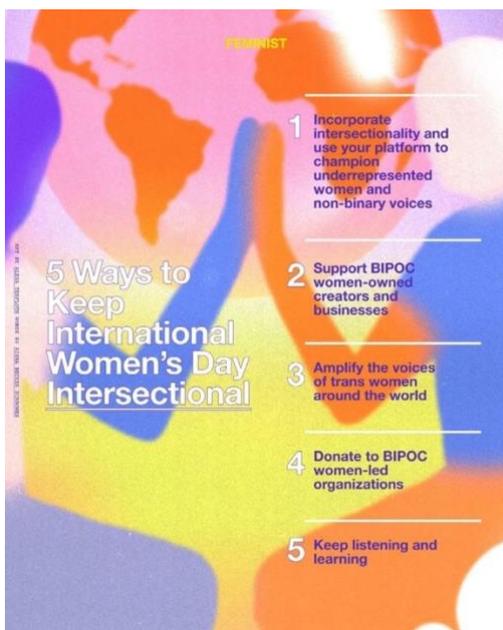


Figure 11 Transient left-leaning Infographic with posted by Instagram user @feminist



Figure 12 Transient left-leaning Infographic with transient aesthetic and computer browser window posted by Instagram user @chnge

5.3 Aesthetic Categories: Right-Leaning Preferences

I have just explored the top three categories of the left—Light & Bright, Minimalist, and New Age—all of which bear similarities to popular advertisement design trends, some of which features art-derived visual cues. I now shift gears to examine the most frequently featured categories of the right-leaning group. This section will thus look at the top three categories favored by the right—Straightforward & Personal, Patriotic, and Enemy—identifying each of their defining components and exploring implications for what this might tell us about the aesthetic presentations and preferences of the right-leaning group. It is worth noting that all three of these categories are employed *exclusively* by the right, telling us just as much about what the left-leaning group does *not* prefer as what the right-leaning group does.

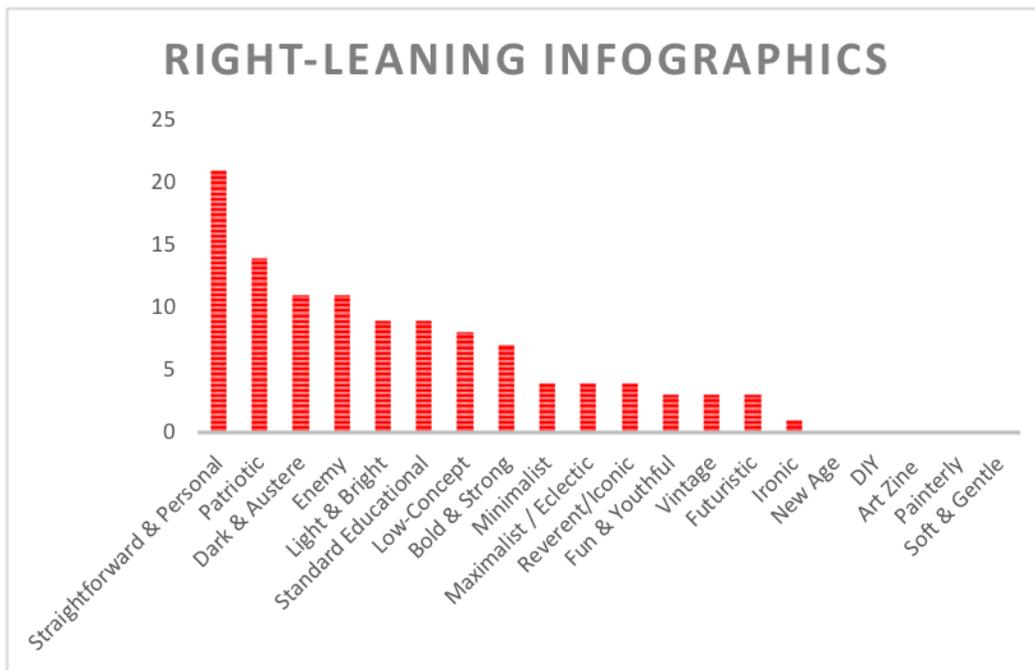


Figure 13 Distribution of right-leaning infographics by aesthetic category

5.3.1 *Straightforward & Personal*

The Straightforward & Personal (S&P) aesthetic is by far the most utilized of the right-leaning group. Its most prominent feature is a photograph of a person, or portrait, which is always accompanied by text. The portraits are overwhelmingly colored and depict their subjects from the chest upwards. They often stand before a dark black or blue background, some of which make use of a subtle decorative pattern. Other backgrounds consist wholly of the photograph itself. Many of the photographed subjects are smiling—most of them women—while others display a straight face, and a few are captured in the middle of speech. In the vast majority of cases, the portrait occupies only one vertical half of the infographic, while the other half is filled with text expressing a quotation from the depicted figure. The quotations are often emphasized by a large, decorative quotation mark at the start of the sentence. The text is often white, allowing it to stand out against a dark background or on the photograph it overlays. Some quotations consist of plain text, while others are slightly more stylized, either through all-caps text, italic emphasis, highlighted text, or some combination of the three. It is often common for these infographics to feature a small logo of the organization or personality who authored the infographic. Altogether, the S&P aesthetic uses photographic portraits paired with bright, simply-presented text to functionally speak for the subject. It thus appears as if the photographed person speaks directly to the viewer, hence the name ‘Straightforward & Personal.’



Figure 14 Straightforward & Personal right-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @project_veritas



Figure 15 Straightforward & Personal right-leaning Infographic posted by Instagram user @students4trump

The two infographics shown above are united in their usage of portraits, solid back backgrounds, prominent quotations communicating speech, and large logos. The portraits are crucial to this aesthetic category, as they establish a personal connection between the speaker of the quote and the viewer of the infographic. The direct gazes of the subjects emphasize this connection. The black backgrounds provide high contrast to the subjects, further accentuating their presence. Moreover, the solid backgrounds minimize distraction while the dark black color suggests a somber mood. The bold logos seem to grant authority to the infographics and their respective messages. They seem to indicate that a legitimate organization or group—rather than the lone individual voicing the quote—has endorsed this message. Perhaps the most interesting element of these infographics is the decorative quotation mark. This element is favored overwhelmingly by the right-leaning group, and even more so within the S&P category. Its most obvious role is to indicate a quotation, or an excerpt of speech, presumably from the depicted human subject. Its more conspicuous function is to lay emphasis on the person voicing the message via the quotation. The voice of the depicted speaker is thus brought to the forefront of this type of infographic. It is endowed with authority by the large quotation marks,

which suggest exceptionality to the message being communicated. This is duly reinforced by the dominating presence of the portrait, whose subject serves as the mouthpiece for the quotation communicated through text. The speaker thus becomes a leading icon: an individual whose voice speaks definitively on behalf of those she represents.

5.3.2 Patriotic

Analysis of the data revealed the Patriotic aesthetic to be the second most frequently used aesthetic of the right-leaning group. This aesthetic is quite broad in the sense that it encompasses many infographics that are included in other categories. The reason for this is that the defining features of this aesthetic are easily adaptable to other infographics. For example, most of the infographics in this category make use of a photographic background, but it is not necessary that they display a chest-up portrait of a single person as is the case with the S&P category. All of the infographics in this category feature a red, white, and blue (RWB) color palette, invoking the colors of the US flag. Furthermore, many display a photograph of an actual flag, making explicit the link to US patriotism. Like the S&P aesthetic, logos are prominently featured, again legitimizing the infographics as being part of a larger body of political activity. As a whole, the Patriotic aesthetic can be identified by its RWB color palette, frequent depiction of the US flag, and the prominence of photographic elements, be they portraits or otherwise.



Figure 16 Patriotic right-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @yaas_america



Figure 17 Patriotic right-leaning Infographic posted by Instagram user @yaf_

Taking a look at figures 16 and 17, we can see how infographics in the Patriotic aesthetic category have room for variation yet remain akin in a few fundamental ways. Figure 16 shows how easily the Patriotic aesthetic can be easily adapted to fit the S&P aesthetic. Here, we see a portrait of Margaret Thatcher, who, despite being British, is often idolized by the American right (Gardiner & Thompson, 2013). Beside her, a quotation is delineated by white, all-caps text. Two logos—one visual, one textual—punctuate the space, again inserting authority into the totality of the infographic. Given these features, this infographic shares many qualities of the S&P category. However, this infographic is notably saturated with explicitly patriotic visual cues. Firstly, the decorative elements—the lines that divide portrait from quote and the logos—are limited to a RWB color palette. The background against which the quotation stands is not a solid black, but rather a photograph of the US flag. It is overlaid with a blue filter, which enhances the RWB color palette. Figure 17, by contrast, does not feature a portrait. Rather, its central visual element is a hand holding a small firework—which are most commonly used on Independence Day celebrations in the US—behind which hangs a US flag. Again, a filter is used, making the image appear dark and shadowy. The image fades into a black background in a vignette-like fashion. The text is bold, all-caps, and white, but is limited to the upper and lower edges of the image. The emphasis therefore lies on the celebratory hand-held firework and its US flag backdrop. By making great use of the Patriotic aesthetic category, it appears that the right-leaning group of infographics seeks to appeal to a demographic that already fits a typically conservative voter base, one who is proud to come from the US and therefore responsive to symbols that indicate a sense of belonging to that nation.

5.3.3 *Enemy*

According to the data, the third most favored aesthetic category of the right-leaning group is the Enemy aesthetic. This category's chief defining feature is the inclusion of a portrait of a political opponent. The enemy status of the portrait's subject is determined not by the identity of the person, but rather the way in which they are represented. All subjects in this category are negatively depicted, be it through camera angle, posture of the subject, or facial expression. Many subjects are shown waving their arms at what appears to be a moment of impassioned

exclamation, causing them to appear crazed. Others bear a scowl, a look of bewilderment, or an expression of anger. Often, subjects gaze downwards or away from the camera, denying the viewer a full view of their face and lessening the impact of a human-to-human connection. This stands in contrast to the use of portraits in the S&P aesthetic category. Beyond the portrait, this category frequently features black or all-photo backgrounds with bright highlighted text, often in all-caps. These characteristics seem to set a tone of urgency, with the brightly-emphasized text loudly announcing the infographic's message against a dark background or alongside a photographed person. In this way, the Enemy aesthetic is not entirely unlike the S&P aesthetic. It is the presence of the enemy figure that most obviously differentiates the Enemy aesthetic from the other right-leaning aesthetic categories that also employ dark tones, high-contrast, and bold, all-caps font.



Figure 18 Enemy right-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @students4trump



Figure 19 Patriotic right-leaning Infographic posted by Instagram user @deplorable_patriot

In the above two infographics, we see the Enemy aesthetic exemplified. The infographic in figure 18 displays Joe Biden in what appears to be a moment of rage. His mouth is open as if speaking, his brow is creased, he is hunched over and gazing downwards, and his hand is clenched into a fist with only his index finger slightly extended. Overall, he appears angry, malevolent even. Compositionally, he is relegated to the bottom right corner, occupying less

than half of the image's total area. Around him, bold, white, all-caps text is accentuated by a red highlight. In figure 19, we see a similar image, with current US Vice President Kamala Harris waving her hand frantically as her face is caught in a moment of impassioned speech: eyebrows raised, eyes widened, mouth open. She too is pushed into the corner of the image's area. A quotation overlays her image: plain black text emphasized by a neon green-yellow highlight. Here, we again see a quote, only this time, it lacks large, decorative quotation marks and an examination of its content would reveal the speaker of the quote to be someone *other* than Harris. The Enemy aesthetic thus diverges from the S&P aesthetic in its relationship between text and portrait. Here, the text does not serve as a vehicle of speech for the photographed subject. To the contrary, the text is oppositional. In figure 18, this is made visually apparent by the text's occupation of the majority of the space. In figure 19, it is accomplished by the text's superimposition over Harris's photograph. This adversity towards a depicted subject in an infographic is something exclusively utilized by the right-leaning group. It suggests a preference for a hostile aesthetic, one that intimates a willingness to fight and triumph over the opposition.

5.4 Significant Categories Outside the Majority

In the previous section, I have identified the top three categories of the right: S&P, Patriotic, and Enemy. Overall, these infographics feature direct messages communicated through clear font and bold, bright colors and portraits of people. Now, I take a look at certain categories that do not appear very frequently in either the left- or right-leaning group, but are interesting for my consideration of the aesthetic variances between left and right infographics. As previously stated, the analysis revealed twenty aesthetic categories. Many aesthetic categories overlap, and some are closely related. There are some, however, which stand out as being particularly telling cases for this investigation. These cases offer some unique insights into the aesthetic variances between left and right. Moreover, they even offer insight into aesthetic strategies of which future infographics might take further advantage. I will start with a comparison of two similar yet fundamentally different categories: DIY and Low Concept. Then, I will take a look at a unique aesthetic style of the left: the Art Zine aesthetic. Next, I will examine what appears to be

a growing trend of the right-leaning group to appropriate the aesthetics favored by the left-leaning group, with special attention paid to the Light & Bright category. Finally, I will explore the possibility of the left-leaning group's pursuit of this same strategy. This shift in focus is intended to reveal aesthetic variances that are less prominent in quantity, but nonetheless telling of each political side's preferences.

5.4.1 *DIY Versus Low Concept*

Analysis revealed two seemingly similar categories: DIY and Low Concept. Both visually signal a low skill barrier and an amateur level of craftsmanship. However, one is favored exclusively by the left-leaning group, and the other, (nearly) exclusively by the right. Let us first take a look at that preferred aesthetic of the left: DIY. DIY media may appear low in quality, but high in concept; perhaps evidence of the medium or means of execution remain visible in the final product, but a cohesive color palette and balanced composition are employed. This is often the case with the DIY aesthetic that appears to be favored by left-leaning infographics. This aesthetic category is marked by hand-written or hand-drawn elements, textured traces of the utilized medium, colorful text, irregular text paths, and bright color palettes. Its most defining feature is hand-written font or hand-drawn graphics. These features distinguish the DIY infographic from others that feature similar textual characteristics and color palettes. They also give the impression of handcraftsmanship rather than sleek digital design. Still, they possess certain aesthetic qualities that communicate theory-informed design.

Figure 10 displays a left-leaning infographic that aptly represents the DIY aesthetic category. As a multi-slide infographic, it begins with a title slide, which reveals a large title written seemingly by hand. Given that the Instagram infographic is a digital medium, it would follow that the image itself was made either by digital illustration software or by scanning an image created with an analog method, such as pen or mechanical print. In the case of this infographic, it is not clear whether the infographic was made by hand using ink and paper or digitally using an illustration software. However, it *is* clear—from the irregularity in shape and size of the font, the wobbly lines, and the inexactitude of spacing—that the author intended to give the *impression* of a hand-made image. This impression is strengthened by the childlike

drawing of a person speaking, as is indicated by the presence of a hand-drawn speech bubble. The illustrated person appears to have been quickly scribbled, with short zig-zag hair, a triangle for a nose, and an uneven rectangle for a mouth. The speech bubble is imperfectly drawn, with its forming line not even meeting to form a full circle. This infantile style continues on the slides that follow, which continue to display hand-drawn illustrations and hand-scrawled font. Altogether, it is clear that this infographic rejects the sleek, digitized appearance of most left-leaning infographics in favor of an amateurish style.

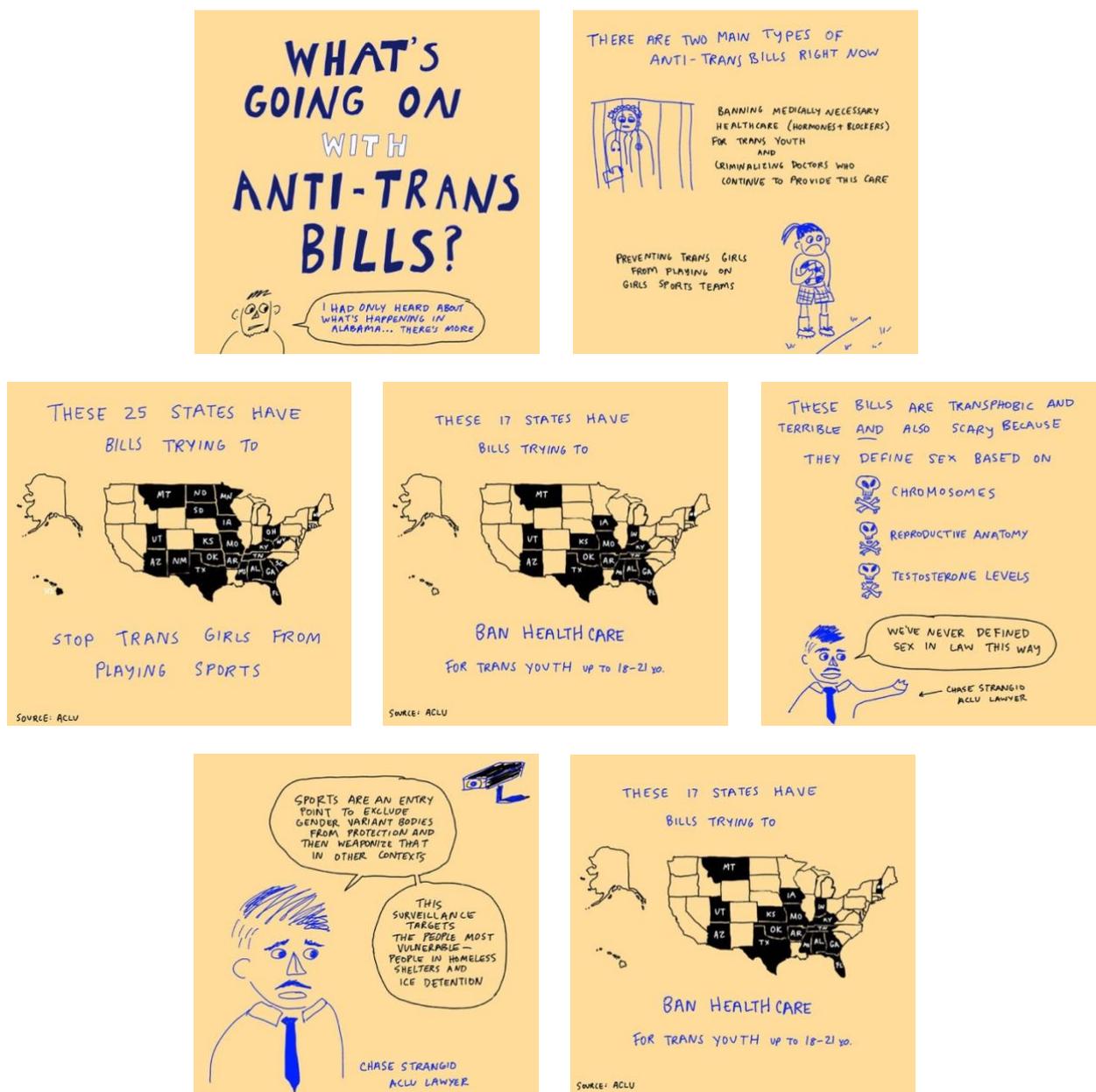


Figure 20 DIY multi-slide left-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @transboycomics, in order from top-bottom, left-right

Although the infographic in figure 10 indeed *appears* amateur, it nonetheless seems to have been thoughtfully designed. There are a number of factors to indicate this. Firstly, a consistent color palette is used throughout: a solid yellow-cream background with black and blue text and illustrations. Compositionally, the slides are balanced; the space is evenly split between text and graphics. Further, the slides shift between blue text with black graphics and vice versa, allowing both combinations to express themselves equally. The illustrated persons, though childlike and hastily drawn, are proportionally sound and accurate in spatial perspective. The second and third slides display a hand-drawn map of the US, which also bears correct proportions and even fine detail in state lines. Finally, the fifth slide features tiny hand-illustrated skull-and-crossbones as bullet points, showing creative liberties taken on the part of the author. All of these features suggest conceptual planning went into the execution of this infographic, despite being childlike in style.

For contrast, let us consider the defining aesthetic features of the Low Concept category. Interestingly, Low Concept is not used exclusively by the right-leaning group, however, the data does show the right's clear preference for this category (see fig. 13). This aesthetic is marked by its imbalance of composition, rather uninventive use of color, arbitrary use of background patterns and visual motifs (see figs. 21 & 22), and reliance on foreign elements from other software systems, such as Apple emojis. Infographics in this category frequently utilize plain, black or white text accompanied by a photograph of a person or set against a patterned background. The majority are text-laden while others include a portrait with limited text. Unlike the DIY category, Low Concept infographics do not feature hand-written font or any illustrations. Overall, it appears that the Low Concept infographics require little effort to execute. This is indicated by the above-described elements, which suggest a general air of informality and unprofessionalism.

Let us take a look at two particularly apt examples of the Low Concept aesthetic. Both are united in their overall amateurish style, yet differ in a few interesting ways. The infographic in figure 21 includes a photograph of Joe Biden that occupies just over half of the infographic's area. In the photograph, he appears to have been caught off guard. He holds an ice cream cone near to his face as he squints and gazes sideways away from the camera. His face is contorted

into a sort of grimace. It is an unflattering image, which also qualifies it as part of the Enemy aesthetic category. However, distinguishing it from the other Enemy infographics is its markedly crude design. Above the photograph of Biden is a black text box, which is positioned so that it cuts off the top of his head. It occupies an ambiguous portion of the overall image, sitting somewhere between one-third and one-half of the total area. At the top of the text box, underlined white text bears a title. Underneath, four dashes indicate a bulleted list. The text extends to the very edges of the image, leaving no room for margins. A lone white dash floats in the middle of the black text box, apparently unrelated to the rest of the text. Overall, there is little coherence to the aesthetic elements that constitute this infographic.

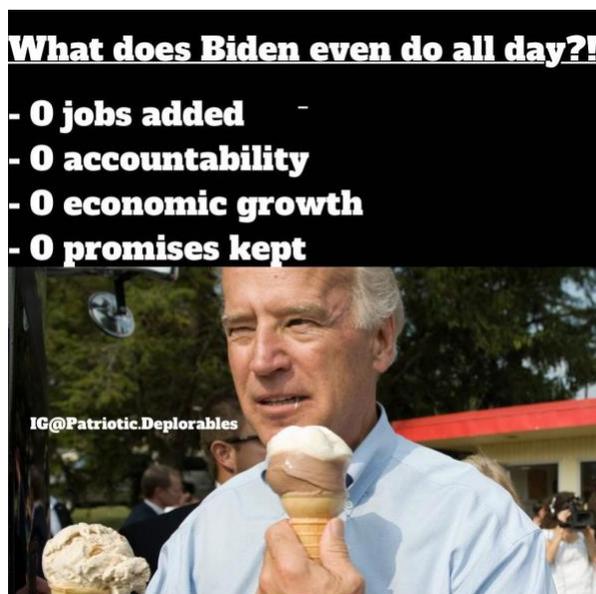


Figure 21 Low Concept right-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @patriotic.u.s.a



Figure 22 Low Concept right-leaning Infographic posted by Instagram user @thepatrioticrepublicans

Figure 22 is similar in impact, but differs most obviously in its lack of a photographic element. Plain, white text is centered on a colorful gradient background. The text appears slightly blurry and occupies the vast majority of the space. No figurative visual elements are present, leaving the multicolored background to function as the primary visual component. It consists of a peculiar mix of colors—yellow, blue, red, and green—not following any standard color scheme. Furthermore, the background is slightly pixelated, as if it were captured via a screenshot and enlarged, thereby worsening the image resolution. It is not an unbalanced composition, with the text filling out most of the space without overburdening it with too many

words, yet there is a sizeable space interrupting the middle of the text for no obvious reason. These clumsily arranged elements give the impression that the author did not devote much time nor effort to composing this infographic; perhaps they even created it using a simple text-post creation tool, such as the one currently offered by Facebook for status updates. The seemingly low effort and little planning devoted to the creation of this infographic is what qualifies it as Low Concept.

The differences between the DIY and Low Concept aesthetic categories should by now be apparent. The former takes on a homemade, amateurish look while retaining conceptual qualities that cause it to appear nonetheless thoughtfully designed. The latter also appears amateurish—despite being always made with digital tools—and lacks the appearance of a carefully considered design. We might suggest that the left-leaning group’s clear preference for the DIY aesthetic over the Low Concept aesthetic is evidence of a desire to appeal to a more design-savvy or art-educated class of individuals, one familiar with the history of the DIY movement or similar artistic trends, such as infantile or naïve styles (Hodge, 2019). This is not to say, however, that the DIY aesthetic is *superior* to the Low Concept aesthetic. Rather, it could be argued that the Low Concept aesthetic in fact succeeds where the DIY aesthetic fails: participation. In its very name, the DIY aesthetic implies a level of participation from the layperson: anyone can “do it” themselves. Further, we know that DIY as a stylistic trend is associated with alternative subcultures who often embrace a radically crude aesthetic in which anyone can partake (Eichhorn, 2016). However, I have argued that the DIY aesthetic as it is exemplified by left-leaning infographics still relies on developed design concepts. We might suggest that the direct and simple look of the Low Concept aesthetic is perceived by right-leaning viewers as being more authentically amateur than the DIY aesthetic, thereby appealing to notions of honesty and directness.

5.4.2 *Art Zine Aesthetic*

The aesthetic discrepancy between the DIY and Low Concept categories—and the left-leaning group’s clear preference for the former—continues with the left’s considerable use of another aesthetic category: the Art Zine aesthetic. Infographics in this category are characterized by

colorful backgrounds, formal decorative elements (such as abstract shapes or patterns), nonstandard fonts, and an overall impression of well-conceived design. By this, I again refer to a cohesive color scheme, balance of composition, and evident planning that went into the execution of the piece. However, with this category, we see infographic design taken a step further. Here, the line between design and art is blurred. In these infographics, we see a higher degree of artistry as it is commonly understood: mastery of a medium, technical prowess, and inventive use of formal aesthetic components such as color. Infographics in this category also make use of graphic design approaches one might expect to find in artistic publications, hence the label 'Art Zine' aesthetic. Such design philosophies include retro revival, minimalism, and futurism. These varied design styles are lumped together into one aesthetic category because they all establish aesthetic proximity of the infographic to the more serious realm of art and design. I will explore the aesthetic qualities that constitute this category in the following two examples.

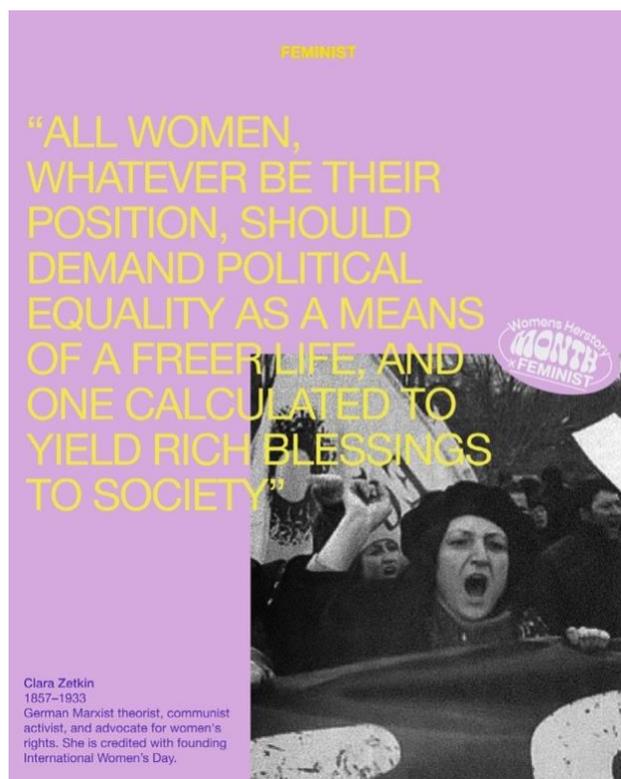


Figure 23 Art Zine left-leaning Infographic posted by Instagram user @feminist

The infographic in figure 23 includes a black-and-white photograph of a woman set against a purply fuchsia background. The woman, who is revealed to be Clara Zetkin, appears to be in the midst of a protest: her mouth is open wide as if screaming and she holds a large banner as part of a march. Behind her, others bear similar facial expressions and thrust signs into the air above them. This scene alone is consistent with the visual rhetoric of leftist circles, who are notorious for planning protests and demonstrations. Yet this photograph is not the sole focus of the infographic. Rather, it is tucked in the bottom-right corner, flush with the very edges of the image. Around the photograph, bright yellow text in all-caps displays a quote. The text begins on the background, but overlaps onto the photograph of Zetkin. It seems an unusual choice to obscure image with text, yet it aptly counterbalances the weight of the photograph relegated to the corner. Further, the bright yellow color of the text against the dark filter of the black-and-white photograph allow both to remain legible. To the left of the photograph, the presence of a legend lends historical authority to the infographic, like something one might see in a history book or museum. Finally, two logos dot the infographic. One, the same purply fuchsia color as the background, also extending over the photograph, unites the photograph with its background. The other—plain yellow text—sits squarely at the top of the image, balancing out the weightiness of the other elements which are skewed towards the bottom. Altogether, the infographic is balanced, uses a complementary color scheme (purple and yellow), and innovatively pairs text with image.

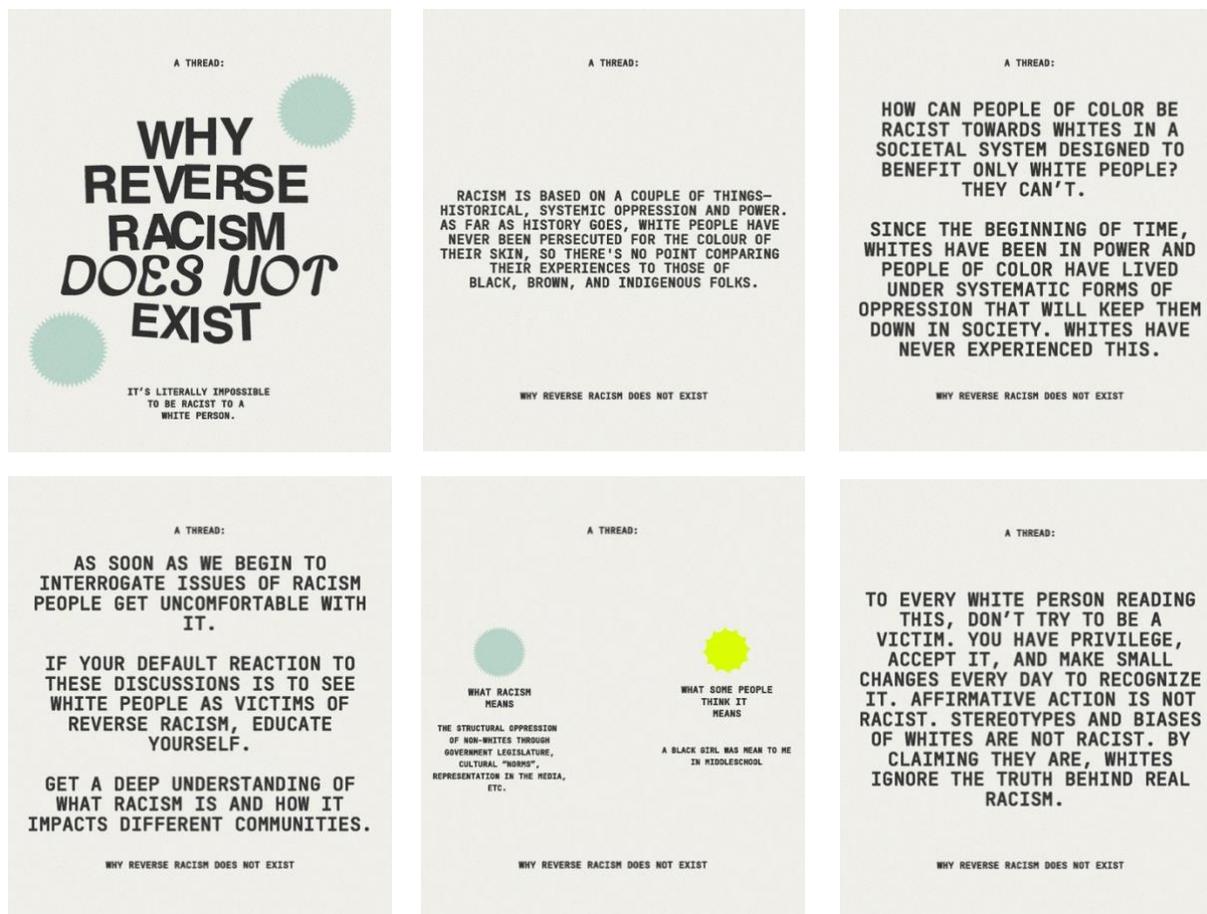


Figure 24 Art Zine multi-slide left-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @futurafreedesign, in order from top-bottom, left-right

The next infographic, shown in figure 24, features multiple slides and is dominated by text. The plainness of the solid-white background and the prevalence of text could categorize this infographic as Minimalist. Yet, the inventive typography and uneven spacing of the title slide's text, along with the presence of two seafoam green wheels aligns this infographic more closely with the Art Zine category. The text, though black and simple, takes on the particular appearance of the letters printed by a mechanical label maker. This reference to a somewhat outdated piece of printing technology in a digital image inserts a level of conceptual irony into this infographic while also giving it a retro stylistic flair. The colorful wheels enliven the otherwise black-and-white color palette and offset the predominance of text. From the designer font of the title, to the label maker font of the body text, to the sparse use of colorful shapes, this infographic again takes on the aesthetic appearance of something that might

appear in an arts magazine or a flyer for an alternative rock concert. Like the infographic in figure 23, it appears as if this infographic was created by an experienced graphic designer. Both of these infographics, therefore, are steeped in artistic professionalism.

5.5 Broadening Political Reach via Aesthetic Appropriation?

Thus far, I have established the three most prevalent aesthetic categories of each group respectively and explored some interesting categories which are not the most prevalent yet nonetheless reveal particularities about the aesthetic inclinations of each side. Now, I explore a phenomenon that offers some insight into a potential future development of political infographic aesthetics, that of aesthetic appropriation. Analysis revealed a trend which suggests that the right-leaning group has begun to borrow the aesthetics of the left-leaning group, particularly the Light & Bright category. This is made evident by the right-leaning group's use of this favorite aesthetic of the left in a smaller but still substantial number of cases. There is less evidence to suggest that this is happening on the left, but its potential may exist. This section will focus on the apparent exchange of aesthetics taking place between the two groups, with special attention paid to the right-leaning group, as this group displays this trend most obviously.

5.5.1 *Right, Light, & Bright*

The data show that the Light & Bright category is by far the most frequently appearing category of the left-leaning group; they also show that this category includes a substantial number of infographics from the right-leaning group. In fact, of the twenty categories, it is the fifth most utilized category of the right-leaning group. The Light & Bright category is thus the nearest to being a bilateral category between the two political sides. This raises questions regarding the motivations behind such a trend. Why would this aesthetic, which this research has shown to be a quintessential aesthetic of the left-leaning group, also feature somewhat heavily in the right-leaning group? It could be the case that this particular aesthetic, with its light and cheery appearance, is simply an effective tool for drawing in the human eye. Yet the right-leaning group clearly makes great use of other aesthetics which appear to be successful among their

viewer base. Alternatively, it may be the case that right-leaning infographic creators have noted the popularity of the Light & Bright aesthetic among younger, left-leaning Instagram users and decided to employ the same strategy. I therefore suggest that the right-leaning group's relatively high preference for the Light & Bright category is evidence of an effort to expand their own viewership base. This trend is particularly evident in the infographics posted by one account, @yaas_america, a nonprofit organization called Young Americans Against Socialism. Their title would confirm the suspicion that this aesthetic style is intended to appeal to 'young' people, a demographic typically understood as leaning further to the left (Gramlich, 2020).

Let us take a closer look at how this account utilizes the Light & Bright aesthetic with the infographic shown in figure 25. At a glance, it is plainly visible that this infographic differs in appearance from the right-wing infographics we have examined thus far. Firstly, it is a multi-slide infographic, which is very sparingly used in the right-leaning group, but widely employed by the left. Further, the data show that this infographic fulfills nearly all criteria for the Light & Bright aesthetic. The title slide features a solid, pastel blue background with bold, centered text in all-caps. The font appears somewhat unique, with its imperfect lines and almost hand-written look lending an air of informality, perhaps familiarity. The first three lines of text are white with a double pink-and-red drop shadow, while the last line is red. A white logo sits in the bottom left corner, and to its right, an arrow and text reading 'SWIPE' urges the viewer onwards. The color palette is RWB, drawing a link to the Patriotic aesthetic. Seven slides follow the title slide, most of which are dominated by plain, black text. The text is evenly centered and some portions are emphasized with a pink, brush-stroke highlight. The sixth slide, however, features a colored photograph of a person, which, as I have shown, is more characteristic of the right-leaning group. Yet, the pastel colors, designer font, and multi-slide format cement the infographic's place in the Light & Bright category, and moreover, in the broad aesthetic trends of the left-leaning group at large.

A final aspect of the right-leaning Light and Bright infographic worth considering is the recognition of the infographic's author, which takes the form of a photograph (see sixth slide of fig. 25). Photographic recognition of the author happens frequently in the right-leaning Light & Bright infographics and only once in all of the 100 left-winged infographics. This feature stands

out as distinctly-right leaning yet it is here employed by an aesthetic which I have argued is borrowed from the left-leaning group. The presence of these photographs has two potential interpretations. Either it is an effort to distinguish the individual creator of the infographic from the Young Americans Against Socialism collective; to effectively give credit where credit is due. Or, it is a deliberate elevation of the role of the author, a reminder that the infographic in question was indeed *authored* by someone with credentials. Both possibilities could be true. However, the second one represents an especially interesting development for the right-leaning infographic. The elevation of the author, almost to the status of icon which we have seen in other right-leaning aesthetics, implies a desire to celebrate the individual acumen of the author and attribute the claims made by the infographic to her. We can thus understand the author portrait as a move away from the anonymous amateur look of many right-leaning infographics and towards an aesthetic which values professionalism and accountability of the individual.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SOCIALISM



SWIPE

What You Need to Know About Socialism

When most young people first become aware of the reality that life is hard, they begin searching for something to make it seem less bleak and more manageable. Thanks in large part to effective marketing that can be more accurately described as **propaganda and poor education**, they often think they find this in socialism.

They're told that they have to destroy the evil capitalists, and evenly redistribute it amongst society so everyone has **equal outcome**, instead of **equal opportunity**. After all, no one needs to be a billionaire, but everyone does need to have some money to survive. They are taught that anyone who has more money than them is **taking advantage** of them, and they disdain the idea of businesses making profits.



SWIPE

What You Need to Know About Socialism

Young people are told that they need to be angry, and they need to **rise up** for justice and equality. **Violence may be considered necessary** in order to achieve their mission, as America has recently **witnessed firsthand** the tactics from the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia during the early 1900s.

What most young people don't learn, though, is that 20 million Russians were **executed** during the Bolshevik Revolution alone. That doesn't include the millions that died from **starvation, war, or epidemics**, all hallmarks of socialist and communist policies.

Merely, those sentenced to death by the government for being in the **wrong class**, having the **wrong political opinion**, or **saying the wrong thing**. [1]



SWIPE

What You Need to Know About Socialism

Throughout the 20th century, **communism took over** **100 million lives** around the world. [2]

Young people need to be taught about the history of socialism and communism around the world and the impact on human lives. They also need to be taught about the history of capitalism around the world, and the impact capitalism has on human lives.

Capitalism has also been responsible for **lifting more** people out of poverty, while socialism forces them into it. Just from 1990 to 2010, the market economy lifted more than a billion people out of extreme poverty. [3] Compare that life-saving number with the number of executions carried out through communism.



SWIPE

What You Need to Know About Socialism

Even for those who still live in poverty, their quality of life has **greatly improved** over the last century, thanks to capitalism. Things like refrigerators, washers, and even cars that were once reserved for **only the richest members of society** are now available to **many people** in the poorest income brackets of the most developed nations like America. More than that, **capitalism provides** them with the opportunity for upward mobility, something else that isn't possible with socialism. [4]

Life is hard; I cannot deny that. But life is a lot easier, and we are all a lot better off, thanks to capitalism. It is up to us, and especially our younger generations, to keep it that way.



SWIPE

About the Author

Rachel Witherspoon



Rachel Witherspoon is a young American graduate student with a passion for utilizing the knowledge found in economics, business, and political science to help others. She is a fierce advocate for America and an even bigger advocate for the First Amendment.



SWIPE

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- Become a contributing writer
- Take on a remote internship in one of our departments
- Tell your experience living under socialism in a YAAS testimony video



SWIPE

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2. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/100-years-of-communism-and-100-million-dead-1510011810>
3. <https://fee.org/articles/extreme-poverty-rates-plummet-under-capitalism/>
4. <https://fee.org/articles/capitalism-is-good-for-the-poor/>



SWIPE

Figure 25 Light & Bright multi-slide right-leaning infographic posted by Instagram user @yaas_america, in order from top-bottom, left-right

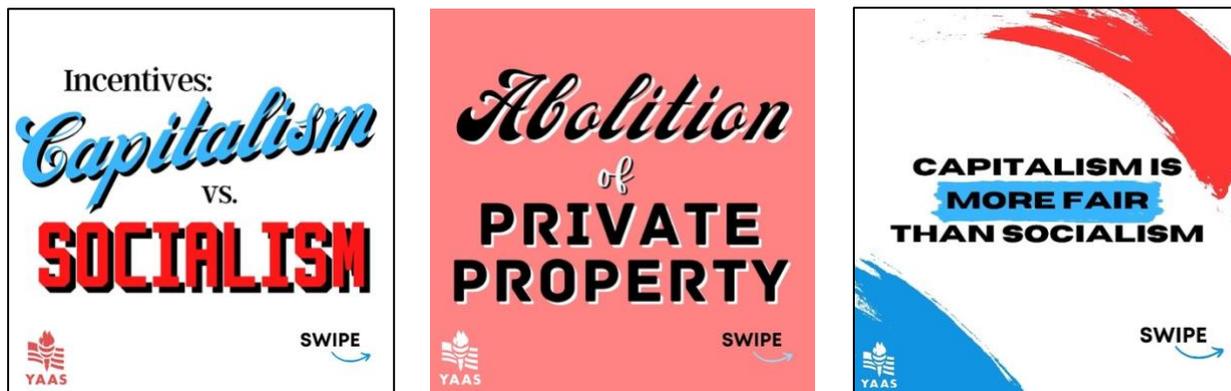


Figure 26 Title slides of 3 Light & Bright multi-slide right-leaning infographics posted by Instagram user @yaas_america

In figure 26, we see similar examples. All employ RWB color palettes, with either pastel colors or a sparse use of red and blue against a bright, white background. They also display a higher degree of artistry—as in their use of stylized text and formal decorative elements—than the typical right-leaning infographic. The left-most two make use of unique fonts, including a harsh, blockish typeface and an elegant, italicized cursive. The right-most infographic features two purely decorative paint brush strokes, framing the bold text that lies in the center. All infographics are balanced in composition and the decorative font embellishes the images enough so as to make up for the general lack of non-textual visual elements. Overall, these infographics are pleasing to the eye: light in color, clear in text, and easy to consume, much like the left-leaning infographics of the same Light & Bright category.

It is curious that so many of the right-leaning infographics posted by @yaas_america fall squarely into the Light & Bright category. Why does this account, situated firmly on the right end of the political spectrum, embrace an aesthetic that is so different from its fellow right-leaning infographics? The top three aesthetic categories of the right-leaning group—S&P, Patriotic, and Enemy—are all successful in terms of Instagram engagement; recall that the ‘like’ threshold for inclusion in this research is 1,000. We might then speculate that @yaas_america’s borrowing of the Light & Bright aesthetic is a strategic attempt to appeal to an audience *beyond* the already loyal consumers of right-wing content. Age is a factor worth considering. We know the average Republican voter in the US to be older than her Democrat counterpart (Gramlich,

2020), which suggests generational differences in taste may be partly responsible for variations in infographic aesthetics. We also know that millennials, who overwhelmingly vote Democrat (Pew Research Center, 2019b), have an affinity for what has come to be known as “millennial pink,” or light, pastel shades of pink that are often used in commercial products and marketing campaigns which target millennials (Bideaux, 2019). Indeed, a few shades of this pink are visible in the infographics shown in figures 25 and 26. It may be the case that designers of the Light & Bright right-leaning infographics are conscious of the design trends that have been so successful among an entire generation and now wish to tap into that demographic. We can thus speculate that, in an effort to appeal to a voter base beyond the typical right-winger, some right-leaning infographic creators are embracing what this research has determined to be a left-leaning aesthetic. Alternatively, this trend could be indicative of an attempt to attract a politically ambiguous population of young people, who, given their age and familiarity with social networking sites and digital media, might be more likely to respond to political messages expressed with the Light & Bright aesthetic.

5.5.2 *When They Go Low, We Go Low: Left-Leaning Use of Low Concept Aesthetic*

If right-leaning infographic creators are indeed beginning to cater their aesthetics to a traditionally left-leaning group of Instagram users, we might then wonder if left-leaning creators have pursued a similar strategy. Analysis of the infographics shows that the three most favored of the right-leaning group—S&P, Enemy, and Patriotic—are also the only three aesthetic categories which the left-leaning group does not employ. This would suggest that the left-leaning group is not as fond of this strategy as the right-leaning group appears to be. However, there is still some evidence to suggest the *potential* for employment of this strategy by the left. The Low Concept aesthetic, which, as previously mentioned, is predominantly used by the right-leaning group, is used by only two left-leaning cases. This may very well be the result of a simple lack of effort put forth by these particular infographics’ creators. However, it also represents the ability of the left to employ the Low Concept aesthetic and still receive a large number of likes. Perhaps the left’s limited use of this aesthetic is not strategic, but its mere existence shows that the aesthetic is at least not incompatible with left-leaning messages.

unbalanced composition and lack of carefully-placed text categorizes this infographic as Low Concept. The infographic in figure 28 consists of three slides, all of which are dominated by imported images of maps. A limited amount of text next to those images offers some information. Both infographics lack standard design elements, such as dividing lines, decorative embellishments, or text frames. Altogether, there appears to be a low level of craftsmanship in both of these infographics; only imported images of a purely informational nature are included and it appears that text is present strictly to convey the most necessary of information.

With these two Low Concept infographics, we see two examples of how the left-leaning group can embrace a pared down aesthetic presentation of political content. Like the right-leaning infographics of the same Low Concept aesthetic, these infographics communicate a simplistic visual message, seemingly to allow the text to speak for itself, unencumbered by excessive visual embellishments. Again, the simple design implies a low skill barrier for creation. It appears as if very little technical and theoretical knowledge of design was required to create these infographics, meaning that almost anyone could create something similar. Accordingly, these infographics could be considered as a form of amateur media, which by definition, implies one need not be a professional in order to partake in their creation. It may be entirely by coincidence that the creators of these two left-leaning infographics have embraced such an amateur aesthetic; after all, anyone can post nearly anything on Instagram. However, it is interesting that these two infographics received so many likes. Regardless of the author's intention, we see here the *potential* for creators of left-leaning infographics to use aesthetics which this research has shown to be more favored by the right-leaning group.

6 Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine how the aesthetics of Instagram infographics vary between the political left and right in the US. Qualitative visual content analysis made evident several broad differences between the two groups: the left generally uses lighter color schemes, multi-slide infographics, and black & white photographs of people, while the right generally uses darker color schemes, colored photographic portraits, and single-slide infographics. Further analysis revealed twenty aesthetic categories, which were conceived of based on their common use of certain font styles, color palettes, visual-to-text ratio, photographic portraits, and so on. I found that there were clear differences in the three most frequently used categories of each side. The left-leaning group of infographics showed a clear preference for the Light & Bright, Minimalist, and New Age categories. The right-leaning group, by contrast, favored the Straightforward & Personal, Patriotic, and Enemy categories, which were also used exclusively by the right.

Beyond the top three categories, I discovered certain trends in aesthetic category usage that were particularly telling of the aesthetic differences between each side. The left's preference for the DIY category implies a conscious effort to embrace an aesthetic which appears more participatory or democratic in nature, yet is still grounded in an informed graphic design practice. The left-leaning desire to appeal to a participatory culture is also expressed by their use of the multi-slide infographic, which requires some degree of participation from the viewer. However, I argue that this function is largely overridden by the generally professionalized look of left-leaning infographics, which implies a more elitist attitude. By contrast, the right's preference for the Low Concept aesthetic tells us that there are either more non-professional designers creating infographics on the right *and/or* that this amateurish aesthetic has proven itself successful among right-leaning Instagram users and so it is consciously chosen by designers for that reason. Next, the left-leaning group's use of the Art Zine category implies an appreciation on the left for artier design, suggesting a higher level of cultural capital and image literacy of those who prefer this aesthetic category. Finally, we see the right-leaning group's notable usage of the left-leaning group's top category: Light & Bright. I suggest that this is indicative of the former's attempt to appeal to younger audiences which

usually lean left. We see this to a much lesser extent on the left with their usage of the Low Concept aesthetic. This is a weaker example of potential aesthetic appropriation, but does show the *ability* of the left to successfully employ such an aesthetic.

Let us take a closer look at these trends. To begin, the broad tendencies of left-leaning infographics allow us to draw some conclusions about the basis of their aesthetic appeal. The inviting, lively appearance of the many left-leaning infographics which feature light color palettes implies that they exist to be consumed. Their bright palettes attract the human eye; they are easy to look at and pleasing to consume. Moreover, they are *well* designed in terms of balance of composition, coherent color scheme, and creative use of typography and other design elements (Sperka & Stolar, 2005), allowing for easy consumption by Instagram users. No matter the seriousness of their textual content, they appeal to what Holm (2016) has called the sensual experience of advertising. They employ seductive visual marketing techniques to draw in their viewers, encapsulate the dominant political credos of the day, and shape a visual culture around those issues. This is true of most left-leaning infographics, those featuring light color palettes as well as those with dimmer color palettes and darker tones. The sensual, “well-designed” appearance of such infographics pairs well with their tendency to include black-and-white photographs. Both bestow legitimacy upon the infographic as an officially-produced piece of didactic material, one which appeals to a hungry mass of visual consumers.

Altogether, the majority of the left-leaning infographics carry the trappings of sleek, professionalized, even artistic design. This in turn lends them *authority*—as purveyors of well-researched information, of news stories consumed by the arts-educated, whom, as we know from Bourdieu (1984), are often individuals possessing high cultural capital. I suggest, therefore, that the ‘professional’ aesthetic quality of the vast majority of the left-leaning infographics marks them as media which are expected to be consumed by educated individuals with a disposition for art that prioritizes form over function—hence the appreciation for aesthetic categories such as Minimalist or Art Zine. This does not, however, preclude them from being associated with advertisement. To again reference Holm (2016), advertisements very often aspire towards art. Therefore, the artiness of many left-leaning infographics in fact aligns them more closely with the visual culture of advertisement, only advertisement that is geared

towards a certain class of individuals: young, perhaps creative, and highly image-literate. This confirms my expectation that the left-leaning group will feature aesthetics associated with both modern art and commercial design.

The sleek aesthetics of professionalized infographics, despite appearing more frequently in the left-leaning group, are by no means unique to that end of the political spectrum. The right-leaning group does not pass on the opportunity to churn out the professionally designed infographics that do so well on Instagram. Many of the infographics in this group, especially those appearing in the S&P and Enemy aesthetics, indeed make use of more sophisticated design tactics, such as well-staged and respectably-framed portraits, patterned backgrounds, filters, and formal design elements, like dividing lines and emphatic edit marks. However, unlike the left-leaning group, these sleek, right-leaning infographics do not possess the same advertisement appeal as do their left-leaning counterparts. Rather, they are laden with dark, ominous backgrounds, harsh fonts, and high-contrast color palettes, often to the point of abrasiveness. They do not present the type of cheery or even artistic aesthetic with which one might want to brand oneself on their Instagram profile. Aesthetically, they appear not as an advertisement, but rather as a warning. Their dark tone seems to instill urgency in the infographic, something to be seriously considered, not as art, but as necessary information. This is fitting for right-leaning rhetoric which has, in recent years, focused on fear and anxiety around issues of immigration and job loss in the US (Skonieczny, 2018; Mudde, 2017).

The right-leaning infographic's aesthetic emphasis on the relaying of necessary information is reinforced by its frequent inclusion of a human portrait. We have seen how the presence of the portrait is used strategically by the right to set a personal tone for the overall message of the infographic. In infographics which advocate for the depicted person, the portraits display their subjects head-on, gazing directly out at the viewer, bearing either an inviting smile or a business-like straight face. The emotion the viewer is meant to feel is made plainly obvious by the expression on the photographed subject's face. On the opposite end, in those infographics which oppose the political stance of the depicted person, the subject is shown in an unflattering light, often facing away from the camera's lens. This approach thus relies on the expected emotional response of the viewer to react negatively to an unpleasant

representation of a person. Both of these tactics draw upon what Bourdieu (1984) has called a taste for necessity, which favors functional aesthetics that present viewers with easily readable information, allowing them to understand and feel what is directly expressed by the artwork or medium. The right-leaning group's extensive use of human portraits to plainly convey emotion mimics a face-to-face interaction, abolishing critical distance and inviting the viewer directly into the illusory realm of the infographic.

The prevalence of the portrait in the right-leaning group also reveals another aesthetic function: the power of the icon. The portraits included in many of the right-leaning infographics pay reverence to a figure who they deem to be leaders of a conservative movement in the US, hence the use of a functional aesthetic, which points definitively towards central leaders. This affirms my expectation that the right-leaning group would heavily feature iconic portraits of right-leaning figures. Although, the Iconic/Reverent aesthetic category appears only four times in the right-leaning group (which is why it was not discussed at length in this analysis), the iconic portrait as an aesthetic feature transcends this category and appears quite frequently in the right-leaning group as a whole, particularly in the S&P and Patriotic aesthetic categories. One could suppose that the right's fondness for the iconic portrait is based in a tendency towards authoritarianism, wherein one powerful figure guides the masses. This is not out of step with the political history of the US right of late, which recently elected the populist Donald Trump to office. It is also supported by Adorno's conjecture that an authoritarian character prefers signification over modern, less representative aesthetic regimes (Schneider, 1985). I therefore suggest that the right-leaning group's widespread inclusion of reverent portraits in infographics appeals to their target demographic's desire for a strong, central leader in politics.

Another trend of the right-leaning group worth exploring is its pension for the Low Concept aesthetic, which stands in stark contrast to the professionalized, sleek appearance of most left-leaning infographics and even some right-leaning infographics. The relative success of the Low Concept aesthetic on the right does not seem to be linked to a consumer culture that seemingly thrives among left-leaning Instagram users. Rather, it seems to appeal to the notion that truly anyone can create an infographic and, in so doing, their chief mission is to convey necessary information. The Low Concept aesthetic, as a prime example, appears to require

almost no knowledge of design in order to succeed. The apparent low skill barrier and simple presentation of the Low Concept infographics may qualify them as a democratic form of media in the sense that anyone can participate. With participation in mind, we might recall Bishop's (2012) claim that *equality* is accomplished at the cost of *quality*. In contrast to the high-skill appearance of left-leaning infographics, which establish an aesthetic standard of Bourdieusian distinction and exclusion, the Low Concept infographics succeed precisely because they lack the markings of traditionally "good" graphic design. Referring back to Rancière (2011), I suggest that the Low Concept infographic's "bad" design conveys to its viewer what it truly is: a digital image made at home by an average but nonetheless dutiful citizen, or, we might say, a patriot. Even those infographics which lie outside of the Low Concept designation are often more basic and direct than those in the left-leaning group. They often take the simple form of text imposed over a photograph, rarely venturing into what one might call artistic territory. Of course, it may be the case that only the best trained designers are behind these infographics. Regardless of the credentials of their designers, I suggest that the generally non-artistic, often amateurish quality of many right-leaning infographics communicates a message of equality, implying that anyone can take creatorship into their own hands.

By contrast, the aesthetics of the left-leaning group of infographics emit an air of exclusivity, one that is based in an aesthetic regime of form-over-function, or *l'art pour l'art*. The issue is that, no matter how well-designed or even arty an infographic might appear, it is not *l'art pour l'art*. The compelling formal elements and artistic appearances of the most sophisticated infographics in fact serve as an advertisement technique. The advertisement is the aesthetic—be it arty, fun, or highly conceptual—that sells a commodity: the infographic itself. This commodity drapes itself in the aesthetics it knows to be attractive to its pre-existing consumer base and allows them to brand themselves not only as politically engaged, but also as having "good taste." Any political or even radical notion that may be expressed via text is, to borrow Marxist terminology, *subsumed* by the governing logics of capitalism (Holm, 2016), which is what allows Instagram to exist as a profitable business. Even those aesthetic categories which purport to be democratic, like DIY, in fact appear to require a formal knowledge of design aesthetics. To put it bluntly, the 'better' the design of an infographic, the more it appeals to a

tech-savvy, social-networking class of individuals and the more it conforms to the mechanisms of Instagram, which, we must recall, is a private company which generates its revenue from user interaction and advertisements. The left-leaning infographics are altogether well-suited for Instagram, which is again reflected in the left-leaning group's tendency to take full advantage of Instagram's multi-slide feature. This feature is not only an opportunity for Instagram to keep users longer engaged with the application, but also reflective of what Ranci re (2011) has described as a new order of image literacy, one which, in our image-saturated world, allows us to operationalize aesthetics as a means of making sense of a string of heterogeneous images. Overall, the left leaning group's use of professionalized design aesthetics, which I suggest hold great appeal for a younger, image-literate and perhaps even arts-educated audience, tells us that this group is adept at maneuvering the marketing techniques and fundamentally capitalist structures that power Instagram.

Let us compare, then, the overarching aesthetic effects of the two camps: on the left, we have a body of infographics which are often sleek in design, professional in their presentation as advertisements, and sometimes even derivative of formal artistic movements. On the right, we see infographics which are personal and direct in their inclusion of a human figure, loud in their use of dark and highly contrasted color palettes, sometimes sleek in their design, but often simple and to the point. What if the two were switched? Interestingly enough, analysis showed that this has already begun to happen. We have seen how the right-leaning group has begun to appropriate the Light & Bright aesthetic, capitalizing on this aesthetic's lighthearted look, polished finish, and ability to draw in a viewer or perhaps even inspire a repost. This has been met with success, as demonstrated by the popularity of the @yaas_america Instagram account, which seems to be the account spearheading this trend. This account's chief strategy appears to be to appeal to a young demographic, millennial or generation-Z, whom we know to be largely left-leaning in political alignment. This trend presents a potential strategy for future campaigners, organizers, and social media 'influencers' who wish to appeal to an audience beyond their already loyal followers.

This research therefore suggests that right wing infographics are appropriating left wing aesthetics, which I have argued to be well-suited to the profit model of Instagram. However, a

limitation of this study is that we do not know the intention of the makers of the infographics. By performing visual content analysis exclusively, this research was limited in its ability to definitively determine the motivations and skill levels of infographic creators and the exact preferences of their viewers. Future research on this topic would be enriched by conducting interviews with both infographic creators and their viewers, or people who have 'liked' a given post on Instagram. Furthermore, an underexplored aspect of this research is the pattern in the data which shows that left-leaning infographics are more evenly distributed among the aesthetic categories, while on the right, they are more concentrated in the top three categories. Analyzing this in terms of cultural omnivorousness could be pertinent for future research into the digital aesthetic taste profiles of the political left and right.

If it is the case that right-leaning designers deliberately use what they know to be leftist aesthetics, this would be highly significant. It would confirm the idea that aesthetics are used as a persuasion technique in political messaging, taking the debate around 'socially engaged art' further by questioning whether purely formal aesthetic elements such as color and form are just that, or if they carry a political meaning in and of themselves. Such a consideration of aesthetics could give rise to a radically new visual strategy for political campaigners. The left has great room to explore the strategic use of aesthetics that this research has determined to be successful among right-leaning political Instagram users. As it stands, their total rejection of the right's top three aesthetic categories shows a reluctance to embrace this strategy. However, in times of such great political divide in the US, such an approach could unlock an enormous potential for political reach, not only for the left, but for any political party or organization. This potential is rooted in the power of aesthetics, which this research has shown to be crucial for effective and even customizable political messaging.

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Appendix A: Overview of Sources

Left-Leaning Infographics Selected for Analysis

	# of Slides	Account	Likes	Date Posted	Link
L1	3	@goldhouseco	1,212	2/17/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLFFfxnURg/
L2	7	@intersectionalenvironmentalist	99,130	2/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLFFfxnURg/
L3	3	@blkpalate	4,448	2/2/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKxIAmQFrHb/
L4	5	@ohnaahnaah	13,092	7/24/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CDCg5UyJPfy/
L5	10	@the_female_lead	117,278	2/4/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CK382OdM-oW/
L6	2	@browngirl_green	2,311	1/27/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKiB4bYnxbT/
L7	3	@anarchist.environmentalist	2,357	1/25/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKebMdCFvGQ/
L8	10	@intersectionalenvironmentalist	134,932	1/18/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKMRTTr0nFlv/
L9	1	@sean.ohern_rva	2,087	1/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ-9aWpF87G/
L10	5	@antiracismdaiy	28,574	1/5/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJrl2MHnUN-/
L11	1	@thinkingabolition	26,658	1/1/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJgdzwTFOe8/
L12	5	@vrye	10,152	10/26/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGyaXpWArxF/
L13	10	@teachandtransform	8,972	2/20/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLfIJ-OBCms/
L14	1	@queerbirthworker	3,209	11/1/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHDRaO-Llod/
L15	5	@indigenouaction	13,841	10/25/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGvtIoUgws5/
L16	2	@checkthementality	18,906	10/12/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGQap9qFAiP/

L17	1	@riseindigenous	1,655	10/3/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CF3kHL_F0XO/
L18	10	@hasbezosdecided	1,045	10/6/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CF_94GxFvMe/
L19	4	@intersectionalenvironmentalist	39,070	10/5/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CF-Z57GHFCv/
L20	1	@danadrewdles	11,411	11/21/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CH2-Jb3A5kz/
L21	5	@danadrewdles	75,236	9/28/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFr2tGTA_EW/
L22	10	@soyouwanttotalkabout	130,161	9/25/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFjvXezn1Qq/
L23	3	@eduziggy	4,287	9/25/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFiTI8wBk5r/
L24	8	@vrye	54,799	9/23/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFfIH62gfLg/
L25	5	@vrye	10,932	9/8/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CE2noTqA7pu/
L26	10	@burqasandbeer	2,103	8/31/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CEj2DCqAlxQ/
L27	1	@checkthementality	1,755	9/24/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFgEJONlquW/
L28	7	@diversifyournarrative	15,128	9/24/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFgN9cynfRr/
L29	8	@aoifemcgowan	39,596	7/14/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CCoLA7LBiFB/
L30	6	@soyouwanttotalkabout	82,547	8/15/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CD6RqINHGjZ/
L31	9	@alokvmenon	134,403	2/1/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKw1UFiBhL-/
L32	1	@decolonialatlas	4,769	9/24/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFgJcDTqBkL/
L33	1	@phenomenal	177,785	9/19/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFVDI4ojlpU/
L34	1	@moemotivate	5,162	3/3/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL-lndrDQ_G/
L35	1	@theantoinettethomas	4,674	3/3/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL-FTAvFRG0/
L36	7	@iamlexchandra	10,181	3/1/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL4hgVXFg2x/
L37	8	@daylabornetwork	9,188	2/28/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLzZnwXgbQ_/

L38	1	@thefoxfisher	9,862	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMITuMijD09/
L39	7	@transboycomics	19,149	3/6/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMDry6qDTDI/
L40	5	@thefemaleactivists	10,431	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMKoDIwBkD4/
L41	1	@shityoushouldcareabout	100,257	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMK2EtYAwX4/
L42	1	@kerrywashington	77,579	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMKIYE-Hz6-/
L43	1	@folxhealth	6,552	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMKqTpOIPSE/
L44	9	@femalequotient	5,763	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMKaxydh78B/
L45	3	@decolonialatlas	4,763	3/2/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL68vXoA0-8/
L46	10	@femislay	2,759	3/5/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMAc9rBj_Az/
L47	7	@beyonkz	1,811	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMPmHHKIEaa/
L48	10	@daylabornetwork	4,067	3/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMUuiSiAqze/
L49	6	@chnge	172,202	3/14/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMZ8fDVgpew/
L50	10	@chnge	94,026	3/14/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMX_WMxg280/
L51	8	@vibesofablackgirl	7,119	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMMr-kMAk6c/
L52	5	@vibesofablackgirl	15,463	2/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLCC_F8h82o/
L53	7	@chnge	63,194	3/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMTvEkWAS7y/
L54	8	@chnge	24,408	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMMEPA5gNNn/
L55	7	@chicksforclimate	21,161	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMPPQo6HyLY/
L56	5	@chicksforclimate	5,401	2/16/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLXTi9unCPw/
L57	7	@chnge	7,764	3/17/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMh78ETAZ32/
L58	10	@antiracismdaily	4,775	3/16/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMf5QeohxKi/

L59	1	@shityoushouldcareabout	62,630	3/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMXuL5FApQi/
L60	4	@devthepineapple	1,231	2/26/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLwnAF3Amy_/
L61	4	@devthepineapple	1,448	2/2/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKy30PiA6p2/
L62	6	@everydayracism_	7,838	3/16/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMfOQvPliMS/
L63	7	@everydayracism_	49,360	3/3/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL-JAeDFx6z/
L64	1	@ourstreetsnow	13,489	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMP9zJOrQpA/
L65	4	@feminist	21,707	3/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMXe9u8syxO/
L66	6	@feminist	250,860	3/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMVWZ4Fs4m8/
L67	1	@feminist	28,479	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMLKhtNMca8/
L68	1	@feminist	24,340	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMK6dUpM2OU/
L69	10	@sophjbutler	8,908	3/7/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMHkrHbBEOP/
L70	5	@theslowfactory	16,828	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMNcTx7F86a/
L71	10	@theslowfactory	39,131	3/6/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMFOPiMFkjk/
L72	6	@theslowfactory	21,536	1/22/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKWgAYwFb5V/
L73	1	@feminist	18,434	3/5/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMCxfshliS/
L74	5	@feminist	77,761	2/24/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLsEsvLMKsv/
L75	5	@lishdrawslife	1,006	2/20/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLhEEIIByPy/
L76	1	@i_weigh	11,051	2/25/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLsb7tVHLdW/
L77	6	@i_weigh	60,274	12/20/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJBoePPHS-B/
L78	6	@i_weigh	77,469	11/14/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHIC9IrH8Tt/
L79	5	@feminismandotherthings	3,538	1/25/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CkeZK9WjoUG/

L80	3	@whatistoxicmasculinity	2,518	10/17/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGcN_ijjSzc/
L81	10	@diversifyournarrative	4,902	3/17/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMftaK3Llwg/?
L82	2	@chnge	26,229	3/17/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMiM0YLAr19/
L83	4	@futurafreedesign	57,411	6/26/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CB6Da31BQ2m/
L84	1	@futurafreedesign	256,558	6/22/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CBwCKocBqON/
L85	3	@chiara.acu	10,031	4/1/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNGWsmnBQiN/
L86	1	@iscreamcolor	23,362	3/31/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNF5SGhDbs0/
L87	10	@blackrose_rosanegra	6,939	10/4/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CF7iNG8glg5/
L88	1	@museummammy	38,057	3/29/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNAcRk_J9WB/
L89	4	@ireneshiangli	7,690	3/22/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMvQGpCMjkr/
L90	1	@sa.liine	34,377	1/11/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ6TMn0DI9T/
L91	10	@detestermagazine	5,297	3/18/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMijrewjF7O/
L92	8	@chnge	215,432	3/15/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMcJeWAAwZr/
L93	9	@wearyourvoice	10,048	4/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNnEPspgr2I/
L94	9	@chicksforclimate	32,966	4/6/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNUPo-YHG5p/
L95	6	@thevoiceofcolour	7,439	3/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMXJgUOBnac/
L96	10	@nowhitesaviors	7,096	11/12/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHffT9cBbrb/
L97	8	@impact	45,272	2/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLLPK73h4Sq/
L98	1	@impact	45,028	2/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLNSZ7-h6mo/
L99	3	@impact	29,841	2/16/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLXbQlpBHII/
L100	6	@futurafreedesign	216,209	7/7/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CCWWzo3Bxzk/

Right-Leaning Infographics Selected for Analysis

	# of Slides	Account	Likes	Date Posted	Link
R1	1	@yaas_america	6,292	2/19/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLetBlcgiFG/
R2	1	@prageru	39,178	2/11/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLJvDUHsvaH/
R3	1	@thepatrioticrepublicans	8,528	2/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLFPJDnAo_5PW55naG8wDGV-5i2rbmRNR0D600/
R4	1	@ap4liberty	1,763	2/7/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CK_poHzDIJM/
R5	1	@thepatrioticrepublicans	13,691	2/6/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CK9gT_aA5zUvn4rz54Km82hl4-nwYvhCPdYdic0/
R6	1	@yaf_	8,455	1/25/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKd9EeGg542/
R7	1	@ragingamericans	20,011	4/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNnOAYDgEp3UpCk44AT07_zxMsFcS1MRm81-RI0/
R8	1	@project_veritas	29,524	1/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ9UiksgDWb/
R9	2	@project_veritas	49,966	1/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ_4EtzA6i5/
R10	6	@yaas_america	3,116	9/16/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFNYghBAijx/
R11	1	@yaas_america	7,857	10/25/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGxT33mgbdy/
R12	6	@yaas_america	6,286	11/3/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHljB4FgSdF/
R13	7	@yaas_america	3,562	11/15/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHnt-yKgy8-/
R14	8	@yaas_america	4,401	11/19/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHWNFvpAxP8/
R15	1	@yaas_america	4,614	12/2/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CIT0JoagMbH/
R16	8	@yaas_america	4,445	12/4/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiYiF4IA__L/
R17	7	@yaas_america	2,805	12/8/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CIhFTq2ArIH/
R18	6	@yaas_america	4,268	12/10/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CIms-VPADkY/

R19	8	@yaas_america	2,557	12/11/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/ClqstuSA2S5/
R20	1	@godblessdjt	12,910	1/30/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKplEaSAgkl/
R21	7	@yaas_america	1,434	12/15/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CI05UvjgAO6/
R22	8	@yaas_america	1,246	12/16/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CI3ngOfg7-3/
R23	1	@yaas_america	12,314	12/28/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJUtfpjjg0VV/
R24	1	@yaas_america	5,189	1/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJyrIV8gBr8/
R25	1	@yaas_america	10,090	1/22/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKXL2pWAR17/
R26	1	@students4trump	44,043	1/28/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKmReeMlYva/
R27	1	@joyvilla	26,283	1/19/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CKNX8xEgE31/
R28	10	@alliebstuckey	20,515	10/9/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGGvTXnneoe/
R29	1	@kimberlyklacik	89,878	2/14/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLQECggwx2/
R30	1	@catalinalauf	1,865	1/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ10RKnjxu1/
R31	1	@jennaelisesq	20,960	2/24/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLqTpTngKYy/
R32	1	@judicialwatch	1,873	4-Mar	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMAJzI0sfVA/
R33	1	@americasgop	2,003	3/4/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMAaEi5gw3F/
R34	1	@project_veritas	4,293	3/4/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMAcIXAdWR/
R35	1	@dongino	20,568	3/3/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL9wzXlrMaQ/
R36	1	@act4america	3,259	3/3/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMALmRiKLOr/
R37	1	@act4america	3,023	3/4/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMAEl6fKZoe/
R38	1	@freedomworks	1,999	2/27/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLzr2jXjmaM/
R39	1	@freedomworks	1,206	2/28/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL2ONWaj0ra/

R40	1	@freedomworks	8,287	2/27/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLx-3U8jqST/
R41	1	@right.side.politics	2,451	2/28/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL0KxFdgwTu/
R42	1	@right.side.politics	1,004	2/16/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLXSTL_gQuK/
R43	1	@deplorable_patriot	4,273	2/23/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLnobYogm40/
R44	1	@deplorable_patriot	4,863	2/14/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLSxaVJg6v_/
R45	1	@deplorable_patriot	3,962	2/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLHRUS4g_7n/
R46	3	@theheritagefoundation	1,395	3/3/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CL929X1BTKo/
R47	1	@thehertiagefoundation	4,987	2/26/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLuvjV0B3jr/
R48	1	@heritagefoundation	2,704	2/23/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLn1xhthmYg/
R49	1	@heritagefoundation	1,276	2/13/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLP-mnwBun8/
R50	9	@heritagefoundation	4,639	1/11/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ6BYORhmb1/
R51	1	@yaas_america	2,002	3/7/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMIV1wxA_Ps/
R52	1	@students4trump	14,994	3/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMJJ70HIZD5/
R53	1	@act4america	9,134	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMLH27DKxOw/
R54	1	@right.side.politics	1,596	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMKffblg2bW/
R55	1	@right.side.politics	2,188	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMLXlasADoi/
R56	1	@waynedupreeshow	1,479	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMKI8SBAGDT/
R57	1	@students4trump	12,731	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMLandKIDo9/
R58	1	@alexbruesewitzdc	14,690	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMNQ-gIA0q5/
R59	1	@deplorable_patriot	4,394	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMM3eqFgDaE/
R60	1	@republicanville	9,978	1/7/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CJwISdmAkP1/

R61	1	@godblessdtj	16,156	2/17/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLZVXA_AN4C/
R62	1	@ragingamericans	29,001	2/17/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLaCQCIF0fa/
R63	1	@thecandaceowens	29,934	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMNTX2jHoim/
R64	1	@patriotic.u.s.a	2,039	3/6/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMCc7WhgoE2/
R65	1	@officialwarrenbuffets	3,529	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMMOAqgA7kT/
R66	1	@businessmoney.in	1,108	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMNRgEIAYrm/
R67	1	@conservativetribune	2,661	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMNIeHZL7Mb/
R68	1	@conservativetribune	13,508	6/12/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CBVuIH3oj-Q/
R69	1	@conservativetribune	15,516	7/29/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CDM6o85F_QO/
R70	1	@conservativetribune	1,870	11/18/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CHvt2s3nk8U/
R71	1	@godblessdtj	10,924	10/4/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CF6hLYUgObq/
R72	1	@judicialwatch	22,889	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMND0r1rEsN/
R73	1	@donaldtrump2024	39,408	3/7/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMGMIPTFxn0/
R74	1	@ryanafournier	57,925	3/5/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMA7m06Hmkq/
R75	10	@unwokenarrative	5,178	3/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMQpRazFOzf/
R76	8	@unwokenarrative	5,808	2/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLMzQ2HnTEe/
R77	6	@studentsforlife	4,804	3/11/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMQ_JoArS06/
R78	1	@godblessdjt	6,857	3/18/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMiRtsPlbwO/
R79	1	@students4trump	17,233	3/18/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMiI5DEBNkA/
R80	1	@poplitics	2,430	3/9/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMM1dFkACBy/
R81	1	@poplitics	3,604	3/26/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CM4gLPij8kl/

R82	1	@gunownersofamerica	23,747	6/16/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CBgCoYODYs9/
R83	1	@gunownersofamerica	11,557	7/13/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CCj7aEeD4m3/
R84	1	@gunownersofamerica	5,511	9/22/20	https://www.instagram.com/p/CFcjD-unxT4/
R85	1	@gunpolicy	6,034	3/16/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMfFSMxKDDV/
R86	1	@gunpolicy	3,945	3/22/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMufOyYKUcq/
R87	1	@gunpolicy	2,917	4/8/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNX691rqL7n/
R88	1	@atlassociety	1,748	3/18/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMk39ESHhXJ/
R89	1	@atlassociety	1,226	3/30/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNDjczDluAd/
R90	1	@atlassociety	1,255	4/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNdn6AGFzMv/
R91	1	@feeonline	2,129	3/27/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CM7V0gUjltN/
R92	1	@yaliberty	1,055	3/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CMVawPvLmqg/
R93	1	@yaliberty	2,208	4/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNdaJN7n7wu/
R94	1	@yaliberty	1,493	4/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNiIRSDldVM/
R95	1	@reasonmagazine	2,596	2/14/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLSj8f3AAJn/
R96	2	@reasonmagazine	1,290	2/20/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLh4mNeADpB/
R97	1	@catoinstitute	1,452	3/25/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CM18duFgGWP/
R98	1	@freedomeconomics	1,460	2/10/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLF6JsSAAHA/
R99	1	@brigitte_gabriel	13,535	2/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CLK3VQqqnzI/
R100	1	@poplitics	6,472	4/12/21	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNi_M98Mm2A/

Appendix B: Unit of Analysis / Codebooks

Unit of Analysis

Qualitative Visual Content Analysis

Coding Method

This research employed qualitative visual content analysis to analyze a selection of 200 infographics. Many infographics consisted of multiple slides, making for a total of 714 images analyzed. These images were taken from Instagram using a screen-capture function and uploaded into Atlas.ti software for analysis.

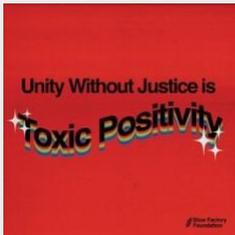
Several rounds of coding were conducted in line with a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). All coding was performed on both left and right infographics together in one large group. An initial round of open coding produced several hundred codes associated with all visual elements of the infographics. For infographics consisting of multiple slides, each code was only applied once to an aesthetic feature that appeared again in the slides following the title slides. Then, these codes were grouped into the following categories: text characteristics (including color, size, and style), position of text (centered, left-aligned, right-aligned), design marks (such as arrows and dividing lines), photograph filters, slide sequences, visual symbols and icons, background characteristics (such as patterned or solid), imported elements (such as photographs of people and screen-captures of news headlines), and color palette (see Appendix D). Next, a second round of coding allowed me to refine my codes and eliminate any that were deemed unnecessary. Then, a third round of coding allowed for the application of more abstract codes associated with the above identified codes, such as 'balanced composition' or 'cohesive color palette.'

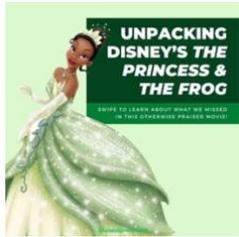
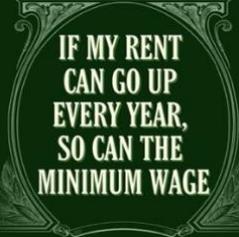
Next, it was deemed useful to produce aesthetic categories, so another 'open' style of coding was performed on the infographics in order to produce aesthetic categories associated with the initial visual impact of each infographic. Of the categories that resulted from this round of coding, each was assessed to select for its most prominent codes. Then, a more focused

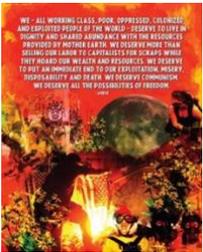
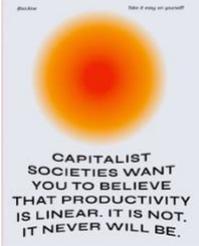
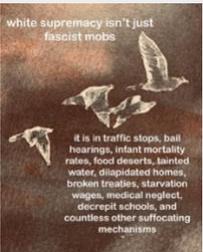
round of coding allowed each category to be carefully refined according to its evident defining codes. From this round, some adjustments were made to category assignments: some infographics were discovered to fit more cleanly in a category separate from the one they to which they were initially assigned and some were assigned to more than one category. Finally, a list of twenty aesthetic categories were confirmed. The data was then separated into left and right infographics respectively and analyzed according to which aesthetic categories were preferred by each side (see Appendix C Table 1). Bar graphs were generated to visualize this comparison (see Appendix C Tables 2-4).

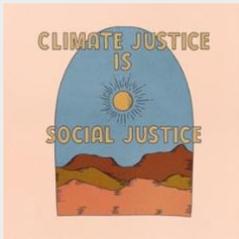
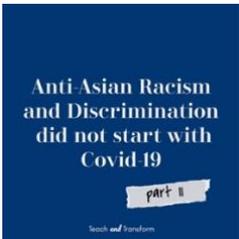
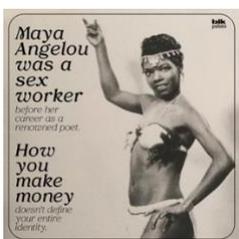
Codebooks

Codebook 1: Aesthetic Categories

Aesthetic Categories	Dominant Codes	Example
Art Zine	Colorful backgrounds, high design, random shape, big bold title, title slide	
Bold & Strong	All-caps text, big bold title, bold text, bright color palette, red background, solid background, white text	
Dark & Austere	All-caps text, dark color palette, dark filter, logo, photo background, photo of person, white text	

<p>DIY</p>	<p>Colorful text, flower, hand-illustrated, hand-written font, illustrated person, irregular text orientation</p>	
<p>Enemy</p>	<p>All-caps text, angled text, black background, photo of person, chest-up shot, crazy face, direct gaze, downward gaze, mid-speech, highlighted text, logo, photo background</p>	
<p>Fun & Youthful</p>	<p>Bright color palette, cloud motif, colorful text, green background, hand-written font, illustrated person</p>	
<p>Futuristic</p>	<p>Big bold title, colorful text, computer font, futuristic font, irregular text orientation</p>	
<p>Iconic/Reverent</p>	<p>All-caps text, photo of person, photo background, logo, straight face, title at top, title at bottom</p>	
<p>Ironic</p>	<p>Elegant font, retro font, pink background, computer function, gradient background, note card text frame, pastel color palette</p>	

<p>Light & Bright</p>	<p>Bright color palette, colorful text, pastel color palette, plain text, RWB color palette, title slide, solid background</p>	
<p>Low Concept</p>	<p>Low design, plain text, black text, white text, photo of person, unbalanced</p>	
<p>Maximal/Eclectic</p>	<p>3-D text, abstract background, bright color palette, photo of person, colorful text, drop shadow, multicolored background, random shape</p>	
<p>Minimalist</p>	<p>Black text, bold text, colorful text, plain text, solid background, text-only</p>	
<p>New Age</p>	<p>Pastel color palette, pink background, text frame, computer function, retro font, warm color palette, curved text path</p>	
<p>Painterly</p>	<p>Textured, warm color palette, abstract background, multicolored background</p>	

<p>Patriotic</p>	<p>American flag, logo, photo background, highlighted text, RWB color palette, direct gaze, smile</p>	
<p>Soft & Gentle</p>	<p>Background pattern, elegant font, textured, hand-illustrated, skin tone color palette, warm color palette</p>	
<p>Standard/Educational</p>	<p>All-caps text, photo of person, dividing lines, logo, plain text, text frame, same-slide-different-color, solid background, text heavy, title slide</p>	
<p>Straightforward & Personal</p>	<p>All-caps text, photo of person, chest-up shot, direct gaze, smile, decorative quotation mark, highlighted text, logo, plain text, patriotic</p>	
<p>Vintage</p>	<p>Off-white background, plain text, retro font, round text frame, solid background, white text</p>	

Codebook 2: Overarching Concepts

Overarching Concepts	Description
Reverent depiction of person	Person is shown with a respectable straight face or a smile. They look directly out at the viewer and they are shown in full-body or chest-up perspective. The photo is well cropped.
Unflattering depiction of person	Person bears a crazy expression, is in the middle of speech, often gazes downwards or to the side, and is often shown from a downwards angle. The photo is also often cropped awkwardly or another element of the infographic is obstructing a full view of the face.
Cohesive color palette	Combination of colors in accordance with common color theory (complementary, analogous, complementary, secondary, etc.), or in accordance with a theme (black & white, earth tones, skin color, etc.)
Non-cohesive color palette	Does not meet any of the qualifications of the cohesive color palette, appears to pair colors at random
Balanced composition	Spatial balance amongst graphic elements, graphic features are counterbalanced by other graphic features
Unbalanced composition	Composition is over-crowded in one portion of the infographic area, no spatial balance
High design/artistry	There is an evident mastery of the medium (illustration/design software) and technical ability. There is a cohesive color palette and balance in composition, indicating a theoretical knowledge of design. Unique, inventive font and other decorative elements are often employed. Syntactic density (brushstrokes, other traces of medium)

Low design/artistry	It appears that there was little thought put into the design of these infographics. It appears either that a generic template was used or text was simply pasted over a photograph. Often, the compositions are unbalanced and a non-standard color palette is employed.
Complex	Abundance of aesthetic components, usually paired together in a cohesive manner. Many visual elements, such as design marks and symbols, in combination with text. Linked to high design/artistry.

Appendix C: Frequencies of Aesthetic Categories

	Left-Leaning Infographics	Right-Leaning Infographics
Art Zine	7	0
Bold & Strong	8	7
Dark & Austere	1	11
DIY	8	0
Enemy	0	11
Fun & Youthful	8	3
Futuristic	3	3
Ironic	4	1
Light & Bright	14	9
Low-Concept	2	8
Maximalist / Eclectic	5	4
Minimalist	12	4
New Age	12	0
Painterly	5	0
Patriotic	0	14
Reverent/Iconic	1	4
Soft & Gentle	3	0
Standard Educational	6	9
Straightforward & Personal	0	21
Vintage	4	3

Table 1 Absolute frequency of aesthetic categories by left- and right-leaning groups

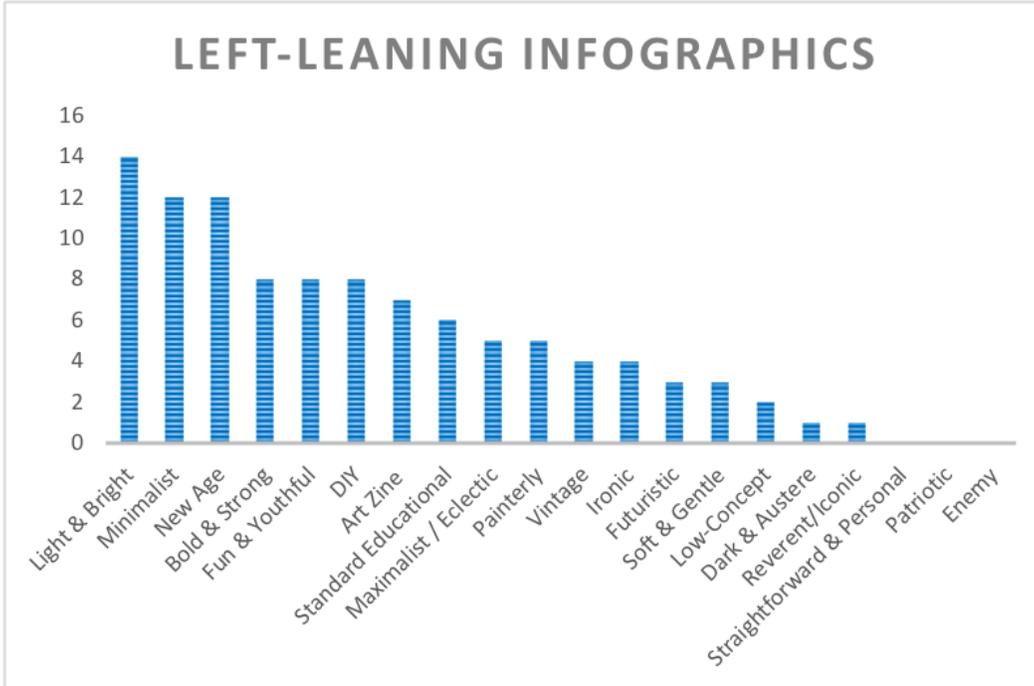


Figure 1 Distribution of left-leaning infographics by aesthetic category

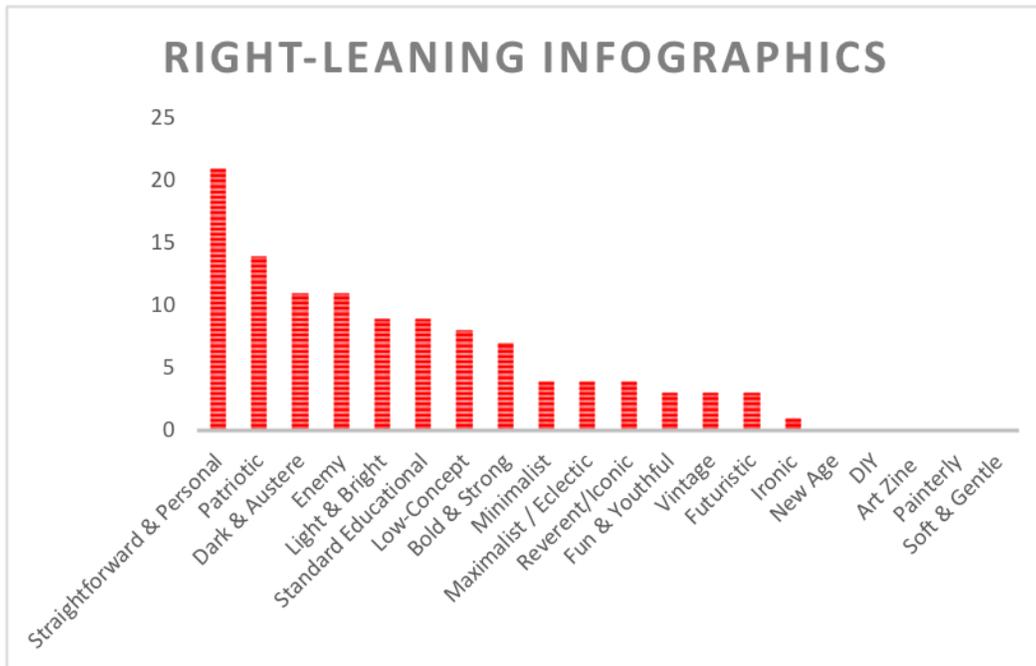


Figure 2 Distribution of right-leaning infographics by aesthetic category

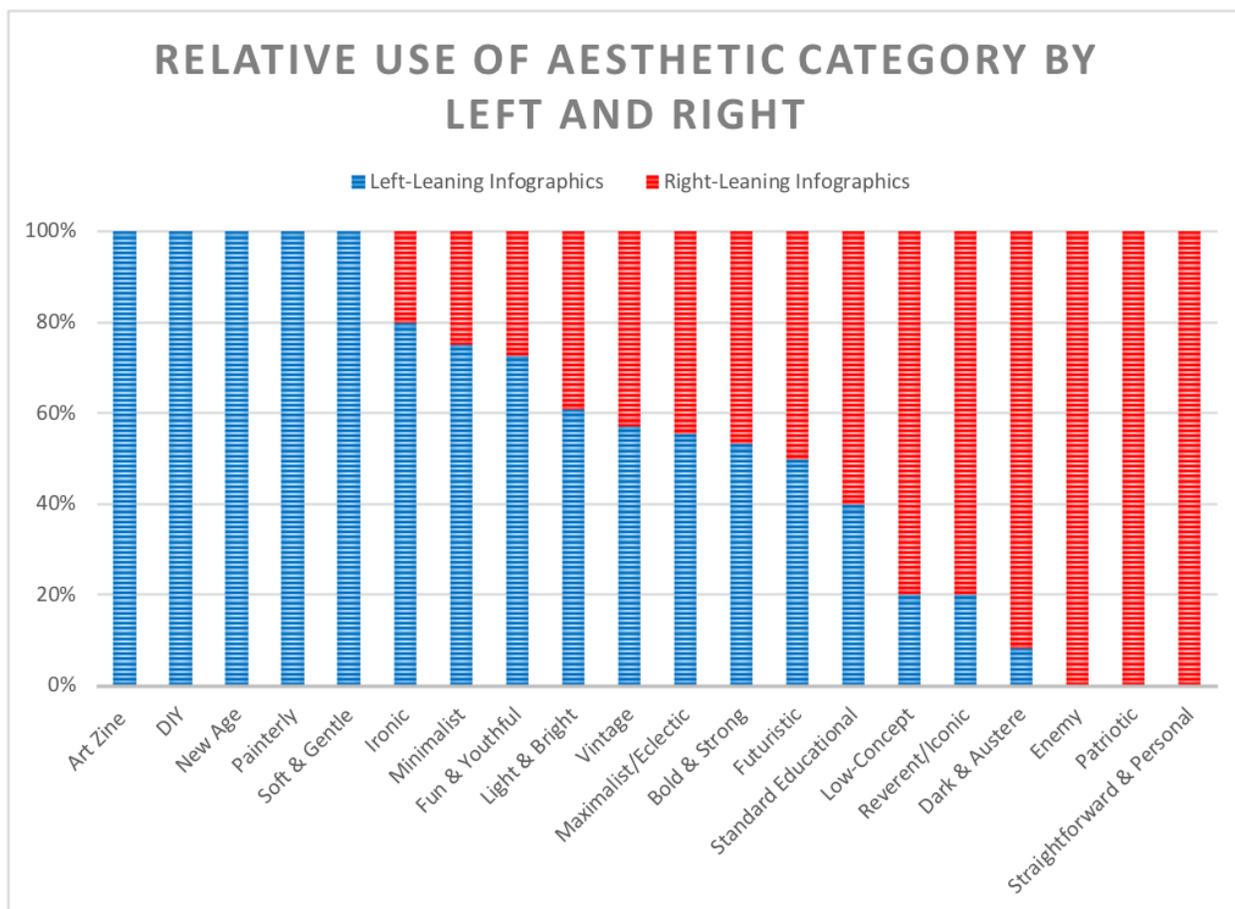
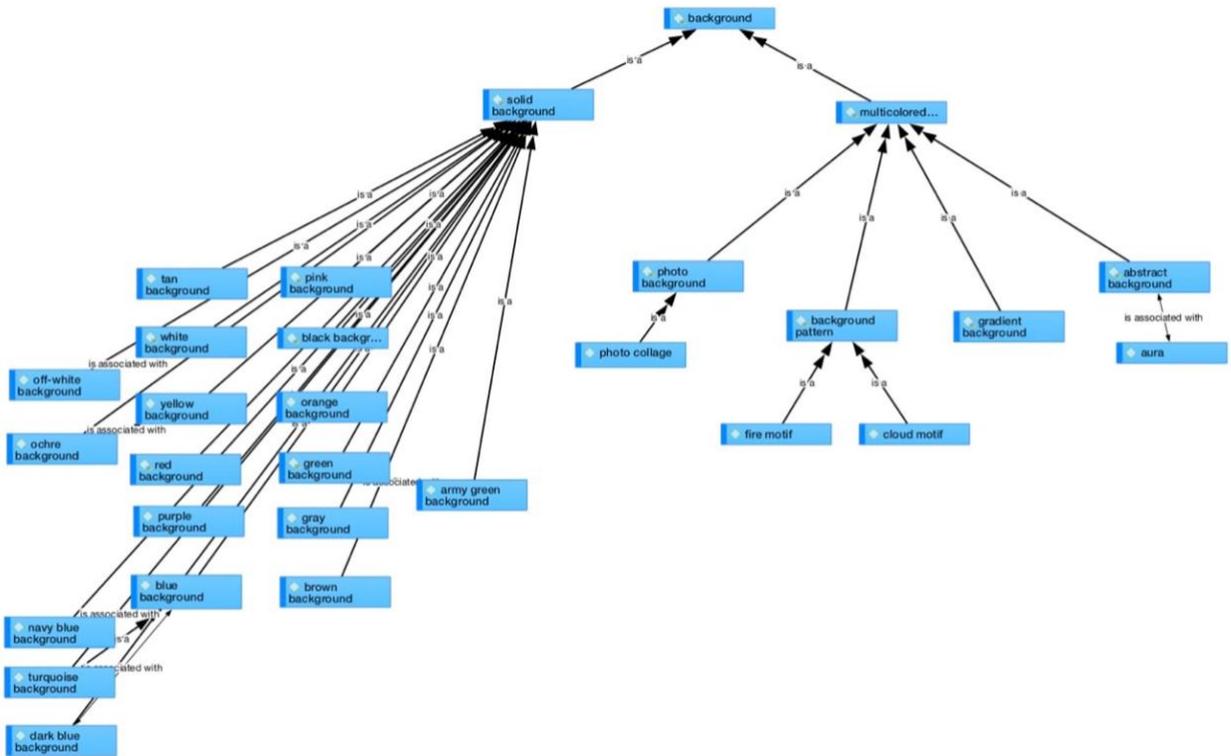


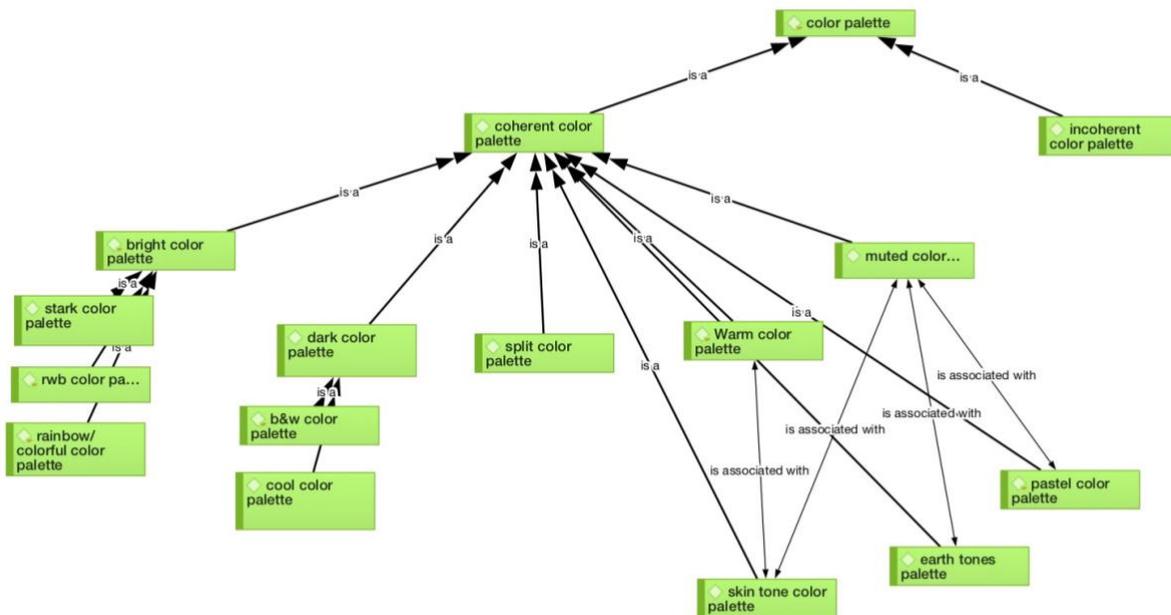
Figure 3 Relative use of aesthetic category by left and right

Appendix D: Code Trees

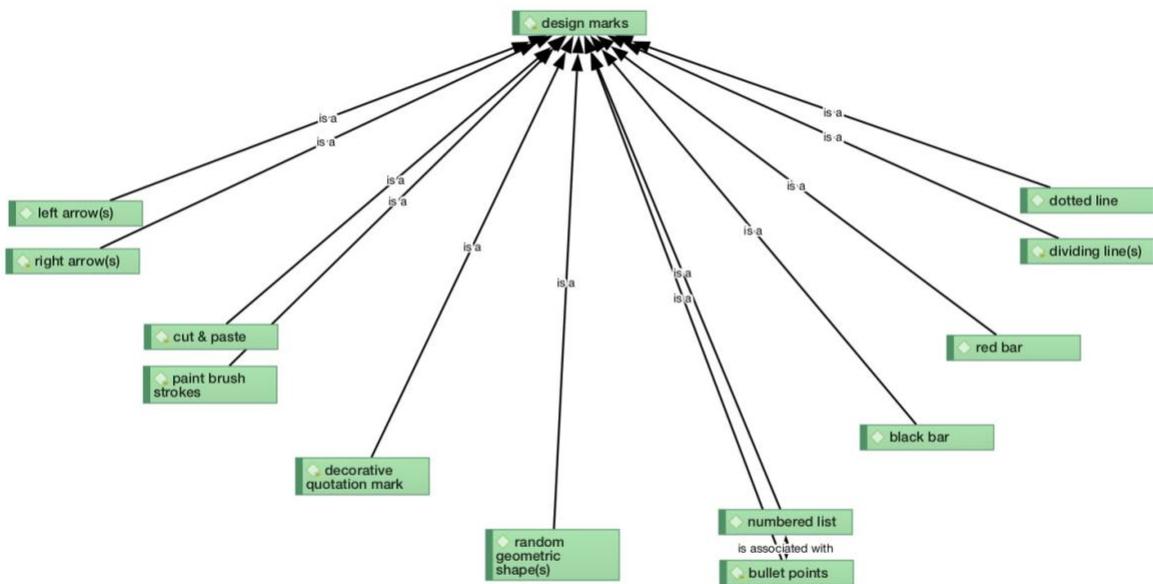
1. Background Code Tree



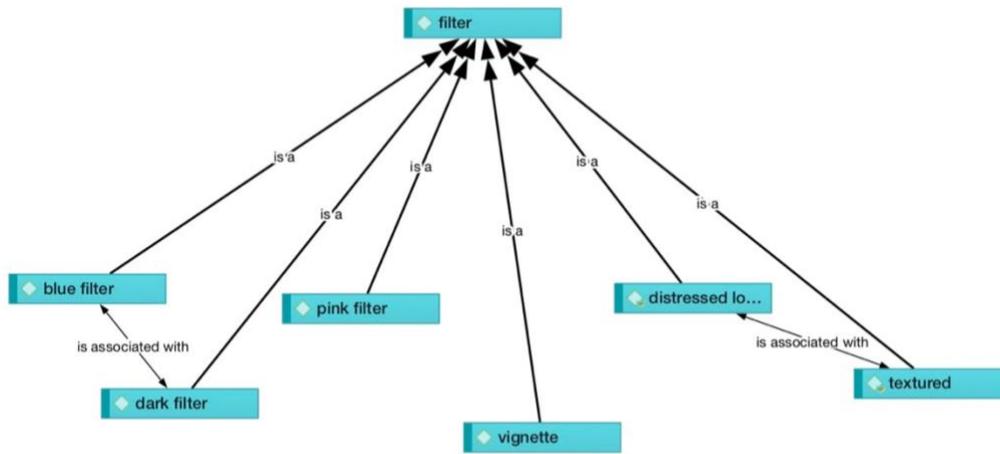
2. Color Palette Code Tree



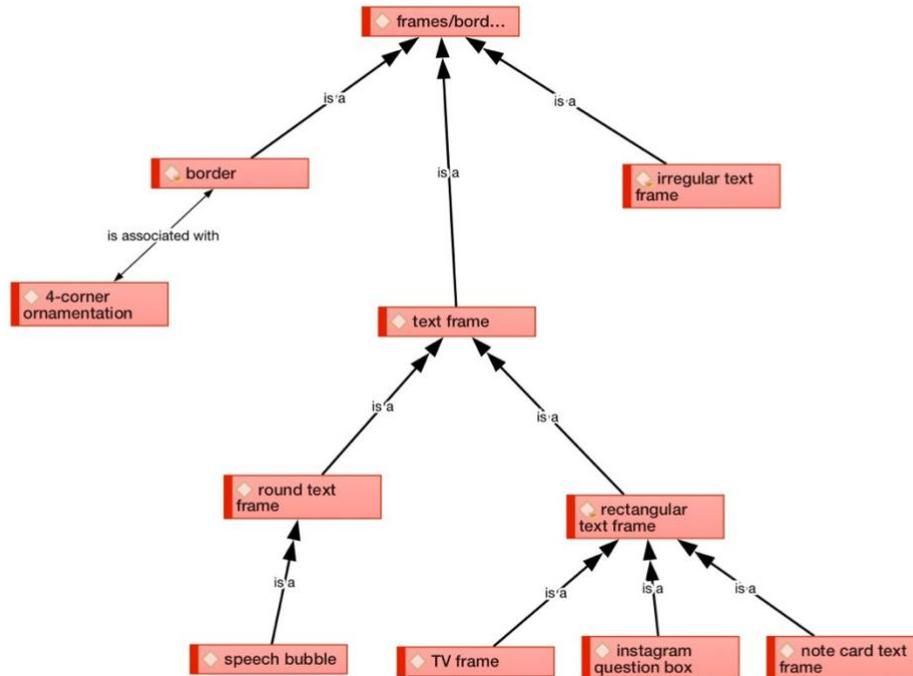
3. Design Marks Code Tree



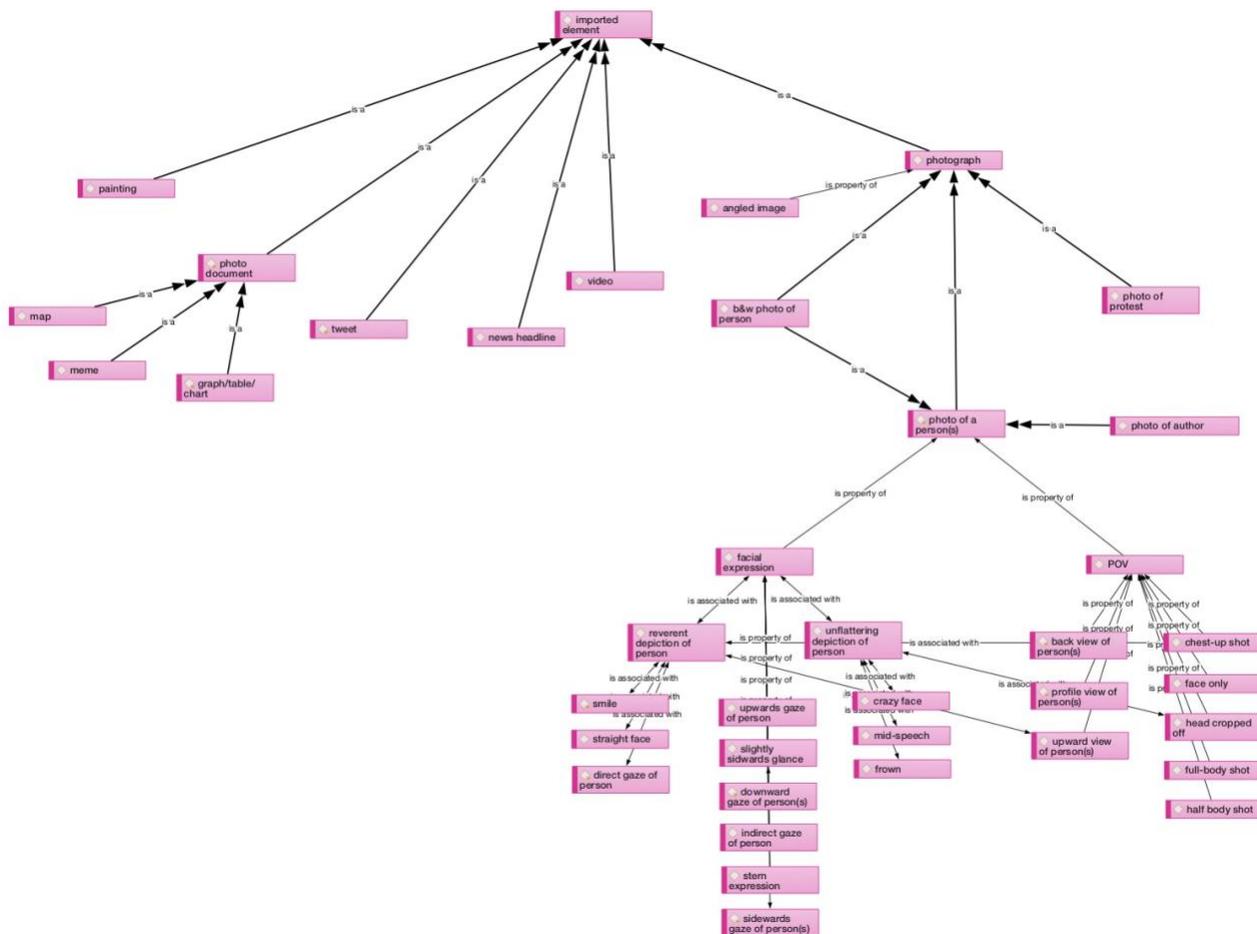
4. Filter Code Tree



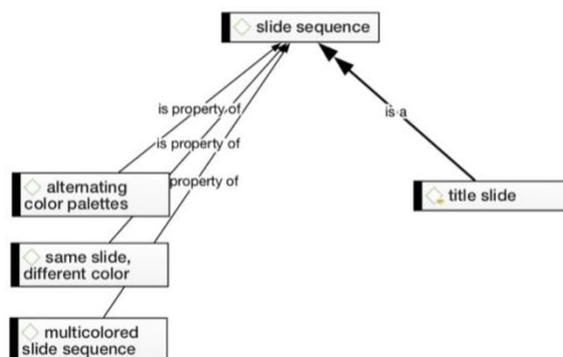
5. Frames / Borders Code Tree



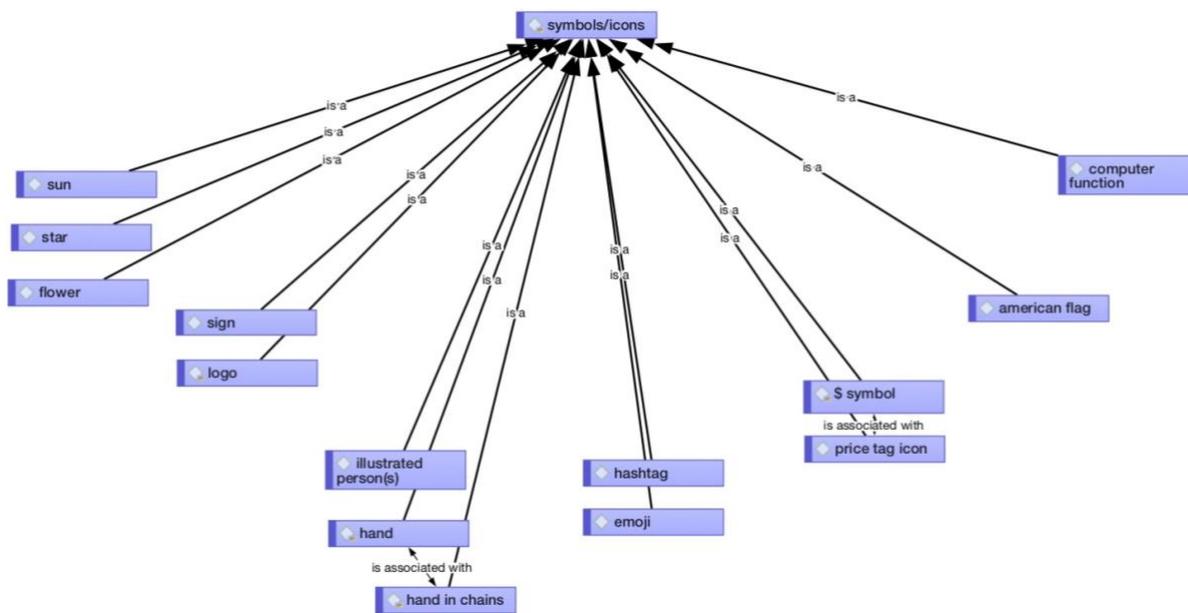
6. Imported Element Code Tree



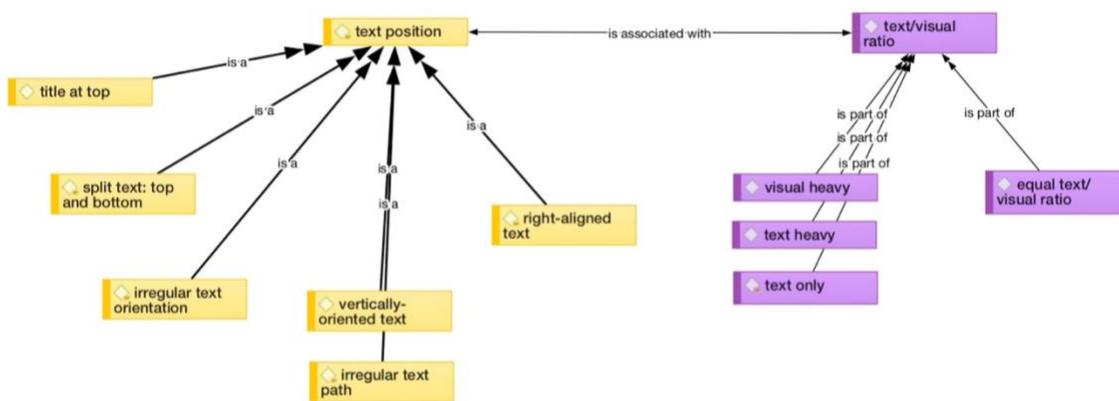
7. Slide Sequence Code Tree



8. Symbols / Icons Code Tree



9. Text Position / Ratio Code Tree



10. Text Characteristics Code Tree

