Politics Has Gone Viral

You laughed. You shared. But did you check?

Pick a side

1. What makes you stop scrolling?
2. Have you remembered an advert but forgotten its product?
3. Which persuades you most: jokes, stories or numbers?

Get the story

A short clip appears between a dance video and a football highlight. It is funny, memorable and designed to make you feel something. Then you realise it is a political advert. People who would never watch a long speech may watch it twice. Does that make the message powerful, or just entertaining?

When beef prices rose in Mississippi, Republican Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith suggested that people struggling to pay for beef could choose another source of protein. The advice seemed practical to some people, but others thought it showed too little understanding of their worries.

Her Democratic opponent, Scott Colom, made a short campaign advert about the remark. Several local people react with surprise and make a joke: rather than choosing different meat, they would prefer a different senator. The advert connects a simple slogan with the real cost of shopping.

The video spread widely on social media. According to Colom, the idea came from people in Mississippi and the advert was made cheaply by local creatives, not a large Washington advertising company. That local voice might explain why some viewers found it natural and memorable.

Spanish students will recognize part of the argument. Beef has a strong place in food culture, and shoppers notice rising prices. However, cattle farmers also pay for feed, diesel, transport and other costs. Food can become more expensive for a family while farmers still struggle to make a fair profit.

Get the story / continued

The story also had an unexpected election ending. On November 11, Colom's narrow victory was reported. He became Mississippi's first Black US senator since Reconstruction, a period after the American Civil War. Most observers had expected the Republican candidate to win. That historical background is the subject of Lesson 4.

But it would be a mistake to say that the advert won the election by itself. Voters could have been influenced by prices, the candidates' records, local campaigns and several other issues. Millions of views do not tell us how many people changed their vote.

Another 2026 candidate, Abdul El-Sayed, used a different style of online humor in Michigan. He made a parody of Love Island, a popular dating reality show, to introduce his healthcare ideas. Some viewers enjoyed the joke; others thought the format was too silly for politics.

Both examples raise an interesting question: are political adverts most useful when they make people laugh, or when they give people enough information to make an informed decision?

The same questions help with influencer adverts. Who made it, who paid, what evidence is offered and what is missing? A joke may be clearly fictional while its main claim still needs checking. Before sharing, describe the message in one plain sentence. Is it still convincing without the music, editing and punchline?

Word power

cost of living - how much people pay for everyday needs

campaign - activities intended to win an election

slogan - a short memorable phrase

reaction - what someone says or does after something happens

viral - shared rapidly by many people online

local - connected to a particular area

afford - have enough money to pay for something

feed - food for farm animals

profit - money left after costs are paid

persuasive - able to change or influence someone's thinking

Prove it

1. What was Hyde-Smith's suggestion?

A. Buy a different protein

B. Buy only beef

C. Stop eating dinner

2. What phrase gives the advert its joke?

A. Pick another supermarket

B. Choose another senator instead

C. A vote for chicken

3. Why might the advert seem authentic?

A. Local people created it

B. It had expensive Hollywood effects

C. It avoided local concerns

4. What does the Spain comparison illustrate?

A. High supermarket prices always mean farmers are rich

B. Consumers and farmers can face different financial pressure

C. Spain has no beef farms

5. What cannot be concluded from the video's popularity?

A. It reached viewers

B. It used humor

C. It single-handedly caused the election result

Quick mission: Viral claim check

Write a fictional ten-word viral caption about a school issue. Swap captions and mark the factual claim, the emotional hook and one missing piece of evidence.

This or that?

Choose a side. Give a reason. Respond to a different view. Opinions earn points for reasons, not agreement.

1. Funny message or serious explanation?
2. Share now or check first?
3. A million views or a strong source?
4. Reply or avoid boosting a misleading clip?
5. A personal story or a useful statistic?
6. Delete a mistake or publish a correction?

Watch / notice / question

Use the optional short video linked on your student page, or use the article as a report. Identify a main claim, supporting evidence and an unanswered question.

Student page: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/politics-goes-viral/

Have something to say

1. Why share content you disagree with?
2. Can humour make weak claims stronger?
3. What should political adverts explain?
4. Do a million views mean a million supporters?
5. How does music change a message?
6. Should paid political promotion always be labelled?
7. What disappears when clips are shortened?
8. Can replying spread the original message?
9. How can you check a surprising claim?
10. Would a serious message work better without jokes?
11. Should brands and politicians follow the same advertising rules?
12. When would you correct something you shared?

Make your case

Storyboard a fictional 20-second campaign about reducing school litter. Include a hook, one supportable claim and an action. Swap with another group to identify techniques and missing evidence.

Plot twist: No shocking images, insults or invented statistics. Keep the campaign interesting.

Final outcome: Present three frames, evidence for the claim and one honest limitation. No filming or public posting is required.

Useful language

I would choose ... because ...

One advantage is ..., but ...

I see your point. However, ...

What evidence supports that?

Could we agree on ...?

I used to think ..., but now ...

One more idea

Rewrite an invented slogan in plain English. Add the question a careful viewer should ask next.

Exit ticket: one useful word, one idea you questioned and one question you still have.

Source links, optional media and the interactive game:
https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/politics-goes-viral/