

MAKE AMERICA RESPONSIBLY INFORMED AGAIN

by

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Make America Responsibly Informed Again

It is 2018 and Donald Trump is President while Hillary Clinton serves no public role. Republicans control the Executive Branch, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. This thrills some people, some people feel like their world is ending, and others may not know what to think. That is okay, because as Mark Twain said *“It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”*¹

Conversations about the ignorant and uninformed American public have been debated since the Founding Fathers constructed the Electoral College. With today’s information, citizens are more opinionated and engaged with civic issues than ever before. The new problem facing 21st century politics is not whether citizens are uninformed, but whether they are misinformed. American citizens have access to vast resources for information including politicians, news outlet, the internet, and their peers. Are any one of these outlets to blame for providing bad information? Historically, politicians have spun facts to promote their own agenda while the ballot box and the free press served to provide checks and balances on political lies. However today’s political leaders, cable news networks, and social media users are less willing to stand up to lies and face facts if it risks their political power.

This behavior was not always prominent in the political environment. In 1974 when Republican President Nixon was facing impeachment from the Watergate scandal, his Republican allies stood for justice when faced with his lies: “There are only so many lies you can take, and now there has been one too many. Nixon should get his ass out of

¹ <http://marktwainstudies.com/the-apocryphal-twain-things-we-know-that-just-aint-so/>

the White House – today!” fumed Republican Senator Barry Goldwater (August 6th, 1974). ² Would these actions ever occur today when faced with betraying party lines in the name of presenting the truth?

The lies in our political system are more rampant than ever. Conservatives demand Hillary Clinton be locked up for her alleged history with political lies. Liberals demand President Trump be impeached for his alleged ties with Russia and their involvement in the 2016 presidential election. The only traits these demands have in common is the art of denial. People on both sides of the aisle are afraid to let down the barrier guarding their preexisting political values. Politicians fear the loss of power and have constructed a divisive wall between ideologies and media secured the divide. The wall has become so strong people are weary to listen to the other side and only listen to their preexisting political beliefs. This cycle has led to an American public that may be informed, but completely misinformed with incorrect information.

False and misleading information fed to the American public circulates within the limited range of media outlets that most individuals choose. This creates an “echo chamber” built to reinforce pre-existing beliefs and personal values. In an echo chamber, the ability to ingest new information and form other points of view becomes much less likely. Where have facts gone in political dialogue, why do we no longer value the truth, and how is this changing the way we listen to each other? *The dismissal of facts in political dialogue has widened the divide between ideologies so greatly that people have lost the ability to tolerate opposing opinions.* This paper will focus on how facts in

² <https://www.politico.com/story/2007/02/when-the-gop-torpedoed-nixon-002680>

political dialogue are distorted between the political elite and voters, between news outlets and social media platforms, and lastly among citizens themselves.

Political Distortions

Clip from Hugh Hewitt Interview with Donald Trump regarding President Barrack Obama:

“No I meant he’s the founder of ISIS,” replied Mr. Trump. “He was the most valuable player. I give him the most valuable player award. I give her, too, by the way, Hillary Clinton.”

“But he’s not sympathetic to them. He hates them. He’s trying to kill them,” he [Hugh Hewitt] pushed back.

“I don’t care. He was the founder. The way he got out of Iraq was, that, that was the founding of ISIS, OK?”³

Adversarial politics and self-interest have always clouded the use of facts in politics. It is important to remember that politics were not always as divided as they are today. In 1945, Truman entered office with an open Supreme Court seat and a Congress with many weary Republicans. Truman could have easily sided with his party and filled the court with all Democrats to make things easier on the liberal agenda and to appease Democratic voters. Instead, Truman sought a higher ground and made the diplomatic decision to nominate a Republican, Harold H. Burton, to the Supreme Court showing his counterparts that his administration would be willing to work together (Bipartisan)⁴. In 1986, Ronald Reagan was able to admit he was wrong when faced with facts about

³ <https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21706498-dishonesty-politics-nothing-new-manner-which-some-politicians-now-lie-and>

⁴ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/history-of-bipartisanship-2/>

having traded weapons for hostages with Iran (The Economist). He admits to the American people, “My heart and my best intention still tell me that’s true, but the facts and evidence tell me it is not” (March 4, 1987)⁵.

Comparatively, today’s politicians seldom admit wrongdoings and rarely extend olive branches to their opposing side. After Justice Scalia’s death in 2016, President Obama had the constitutional right of appointing a new justice to the Supreme Court. Senate Republicans refused to consider any of the Democrat’s nominees. These elected officials neglected their duty and held no meetings, no hearings, and no votes. In 2016 the Judicial Branch, built to be neutral from politics, brought extremely partisan dilemmas to the nation’s forefront. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell demanded a Supreme Court opening in an election year should be in the hands of the next elected president. McConnell argued that President Obama should “let the people decide” rather than pursuing “another campaign road show” (New York Times).⁶

Let’s look at the facts.

1. Republican Senators refused to meet with the President’s nominee even though it is their constitutional duty. Mitch McConnell stated “...our decision is based on constitutional principle and born of a necessity to protect the will of the American people, this Committee will not hold hearings on any Supreme Court nominee until after our next President is sworn in on January 20, 2017” (Fox).⁷

⁵ <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1987/030487h.htm>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/24/us/politics/supreme-court-nomination-obama.html>

⁷ <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/02/23/republicans-vow-no-vote-hearing-on-obama-supreme-court-pick.html>

Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution states, “He shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the Supreme Court, and all other offices of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by law: but the Congress may by law vest the appointment of such inferior officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the courts of law, or in the heads of departments” (National Archives)⁸.

In 1916, President Wilson faced a very similar predicament when two Supreme Court seats opened during an election year. After Justice Lamar passed away and the Chief Justice Hughes resigned to run for president, Wilson still managed to appoint two judges in the election year. The Senate has no precedent granting the ability to sit on an appointment. “Democracies are not just set on written rules but on a shared understanding of values. This was a rip in the social fabric of how we’ve done precedent,” (Paul Helmke).⁹

2. Members of the Republican Senate argue the American people should decide the new Supreme Court Justice after they elect a new President. “We believe the American people need to decide who is going to make this appointment rather than a lame-duck president,” said Texas Sen. John Cornyn (Fox).¹⁰

⁸ <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript#toc-section-2--2>

⁹ Thesis Advisor Paul Helmke, Personal Communication, February 6, 2018

¹⁰ <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/02/23/republicans-vow-no-vote-hearing-on-obama-supreme-court-pick.html>

According to the Federal Election Commission, Obama received 51.06% of the popular vote and 332 of the electoral votes. Since Romney had only 47.2% of the popular vote and 206 electoral votes, it seems the people had spoken and reelected Obama for four more full years. Therefore, President Obama had a right to Article II, Section 2. ¹¹

One of the most powerful leaders in Congress defended his actions based on constitutional principles and an apparent right for the American people. However, none of these claims are supported by fact. As seen above, it is both the duty and right of these elected officials to appoint and confirm Supreme Court nominations. Mitch McConnell's statements were greatly untrue and yet conservative media networks reported it proudly as truth and constituents listened. In retort, liberal media reported in an adversarial manner arguing that Republicans selfishly robbed President Obama of his nomination for personal gains. The blame is not all on Mitch McConnell. What would happen if the roles reversed? Would Democratic leaders preach false truths to gain a more powerful position? And why is the American public so willing to accept these lies without questioning their validity? At the end of the day, lies are fed from politicians and neither ideological high ground is immune.

It is almost impossible to discuss political lies without mentioning one of America's most villainized politicians: Hillary Clinton. Between campaign finance and the Benghazi mission, Clinton has been dubbed as one of the greatest liars who weakened America's trust in its own institutions. For example, during her 2008 presidential run Clinton gave a speech at the Democratic National Convention claiming that McCain "still

¹¹ <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/2012presgeresults.pdf>

thinks it's okay when women don't earn equal pay for equal work".¹² This blatantly contradicted statements McCain had made a few months earlier and, coincidentally, he had just missed the vote on a Lily Ledbetter Bill while he was away campaigning.¹³ Once looking at the facts, the truth reveals that Clinton's statements were an attempt to distance voters from conservative leaders. Historically, when facts are missing from the equation, it is easier to pit people against one another and to draw enemy lines. Similarly, when facts are missing it is easier to pin people with no credibility as heroes.

Truly, Clinton and Vice President Mike Pence could be friends with how accustomed they are to spinning facts. In an interview with George Stephanopoulos, Pence was questioned about Trump's false statements. He responded "...it's his right to express his opinion as president elect...it's refreshing because he tells you what's on his mind. I don't know if that's a false statement George and neither do you."¹⁴ Our elected officials should always pursue the truth in good faith in order to form a more perfect union. Accepting anything less is an insult to the American people. It's shameless rhetoric! That sounds familiar.

When Mike Pence was Governor of Indiana he signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which "prohibits a governmental entity from substantially burdening a person's exercise of religion."¹⁵ At first glance, this law sounds like its purpose to expand people's freedoms. In practice, this is not the case. The famous consequence of this bill questions whether an Indiana baker could legally refuse to make

¹² <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94003143>

¹³ <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2008/aug/27/hillary-clinton/no-hes-just-not-okay-with-one-bill/>

¹⁴ <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-vice-president-elect-mike-pence-gen/story?id=43952176>

¹⁵ <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2015/bills/senate/101#digest-heading>

a wedding cake for a gay couple. When questioned on the implications in an interview (also with George Stephanopoulos), Pence skillfully avoided yes or no discrimination question by making blank statements about the “misinformation” and “shameless rhetoric” that had been thrown around about Indiana’s RFRA.¹⁶ Stephanopoulos repeats his question asking whether Governor Pence believed it should be legal in the state of Indiana to discriminate against gays and lesbians – yes or no? Pence responds, “Come on George, Hoosiers don’t believe in discrimination.” Pence is a master of evasiveness and avoiding the whole truth by replacing facts with shameless rhetoric, all the while blaming misinformation and shameless rhetoric.

Truman’s success could be attributed to his powerful leadership skills or perhaps he was a leader in a less divided world. Today’s partisan divide is so severe, according to the Economist, that the United States exists in a ‘post truth’ political world where the truth is becoming obsolete as a tool to help solve society’s problems and politicians do not care if their words “bear any relation to reality” (The Economist).¹⁷ Creating adversaries and preying on the emotions of voters is valued more than scholarship and the mastery of problem solving on behalf of the American people. Without facts, politicians have a better platform to misinform the public for their own gain. Mostly, this tactic is used to create a dialogue against their opponents and the media is on board.

¹⁶ <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/gov-mike-pence-religious-freedom-law-29987447>

¹⁷ www.economist.com/news/briefing/21706498-dishonesty-politics-nothing-new-manner-which-some-politicians-now-lie-and

Media Positioning:

Media outlets once served as watchdogs for the political system. In depth journalism would bring truth to Washington even if Washington did not want it. Politicians were held to high levels of scrutiny when it came to the truth. In 2017, Oscar-nominated film “The Post” brought American viewers back to a time when members of the media worked ruthlessly to bring facts to their readers no matter the detriment it brought to government officials. Unfortunately, one of our own must trusted political watch dogs may need its own checks and balances. News outlets are competitive businesses in a capitalist society with the need to appease their audiences. Liberal and conservative media alike have developed into their viewership’s own echo chamber. The news now serves merely to please its viewers for capital gains and some “online publications such as National Report, Huzlers and the World News Daily Report have found a profitable niche pumping out hoaxes, often based on long-circulating rumors or prejudices in the hope that they will go viral and earn clicks.”¹⁸

Technological advancements bring great advancements for humans but they can also hinder society depending on how information is used. Every personal Internet search and click is valuable information fed into a database. This information can help businesses better understand their target audience’s interests, desires, and habits so they can best predict their customer’s future actions. Advertisers can use this information for homophilous sorting, meaning ads can be specifically tailored to one person with products that will validate one’s desires. Media, acting in a similar fashion, will provide

¹⁸ <https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21706498-dishonesty-politics-nothing-new-manner-which-some-politicians-now-lie-and>

news tailored to one person with information that will validate their already occurring beliefs. When no contradictory information is present, people are not given the chance to grow, learn, and expand their point of view. This trend promotes the idea that citizens know everything they need to know and are right, without fail. This mindset is an after effect of the realities of homophilous sorting and harms the ability to critically think.

To counter this phenomenon, Representative Devin Nunes has challenged mainstream media by creating his own news website. By visiting carepublican.com, viewers can reach a different type of media (a type that is sponsored by his campaign committee) to bring the reality missing in mainstream media. However, The Washington Post has adopted the phrase “Democracy Dies in Darkness” to advertise their commitment to honest news. In response Nunes argues that, “Democracy does die in darkness. The problem is, is the darkness is emanating from the mainstream media themselves. I mean, they refuse, they absolutely refuse to cover the truth. They don’t want to cover it” (Politico).¹⁹

The current generation holds more information than any generation living before. Yet somehow, bad information is trusted without question every day. When Hurricane Irma hit the United States, a random Facebook profile warned that the hurricane was the strongest yet, reaching a category six. This information reached over 750,000 people on Facebook and was shared over two million times.²⁰ Category six hurricanes do not exist and still, that information was so easily exposed to millions of people. Not only did viewers believe the information, they trusted it so much they were willing to “share” the

¹⁹ <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/11/devin-nunes-alternative-news-site-402097>

²⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-42487425>

news with their own Facebook network. This is a huge dilemma. Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia are examples of open outlets where anyone can contribute to the dialogue with no editing or fact checking. People take this dialogue seriously and will not take the time to determine fact from fiction. Controversial posts can lead to hundreds of thousands of comments consisting of arguing, hatred, and terrible communication where people enter their own echo chamber – not constructive dialogue. While this is good for Facebook, a company built to construct social networks not factual news stories, it is harmful for viewers who accept information without further questions. In a world where Facebook commenting has replaced the town hall meeting, American's are left to "he said, she said" bantering for news. The only winners may be the ones who do not engage, realizing these conversations are not conversations at all.

President Trump's first State of the Union took place January 31st of 2018. News outlets covering the same event depicted the story in varying perspectives. A few headlines:

"Newt Gingrich: Trump's State of the Union was very inclusive – No wonder it shook up Democrats" (Fox News).²¹

Immediately in this first headline, audiences are given an "us vs. them" adversarial headline that tells the audience how an entire demographic of the country felt. In the first paragraph alone, the author is "struck by how deeply the Democrats reject everything uttered by President Trump – even when it is something they believe in and support". The author's statement could be completely true, but there are still two big

²¹ <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/01/31/newt-gingrich-trumps-state-union-was-very-inclusive-no-wonder-it-shook-up-democrats.html>

problems here. One, this news outlet is more than happy to print this opinion article, which pats Republicans on the back and demoralizes their enemies. Mr. Gingrich is strengthening the idea that America is split in two, which will only lead to greater strife and a smaller chance of affective bipartisanship. Secondly, if his statement is true and Democrats will never listen to our current President, the author has no desire to offer solutions to build a partnership. There is almost a willing happiness to point out his opponents' flaws, simply, because it means he is winning. However, America is not.

As I keep reading, the trend remains as there is no desire to fix this problem and mend bridges. The whole article is merely an attack to build a wall between people and to give Trump's supporters another Facebook talking point. For example, the more Trump spoke about bipartisan goals "the more uncomfortable and unhappy House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi appeared." The grave reality is that the audience reading this piece may believe it whole heartily without questioning its whole truth. If bipartisanship is so important to Trump and the Republican Party, then why is the author writing this hateful article? Maybe Minority Leader Pelosi appeared to be so uncomfortable because Trump only talks of inclusiveness when, in reality, she has seen his administration's actions segregate and divide.

The article ends by listing several questions about what Democrats desire, including "How many Democrats want to vote against fighting the opioid crisis?". This article completely fails to build a full picture and allows one sector of the population to pat themselves on the back for what they already believe. If Newt Gingrich encourages this, who is to argue? This author has the right to freedom of speech and to state his opinion. It should be the responsibility of major news outlets to produce quality stories in

place of misleading news. The public already has Wikipedia, Facebook, and a myriad of self-publishing outlets to be swamped with one-sided opinions. Gingrich's story is only half a story and is part of the problem making America misinformed again.

“First Trump State of the Union Address Makes Appeal for Unity” (The New York Times).²²

This headline describes Trump's inclusive speech in a very different light; as an “appeal” for unity and signaling skepticism. The New York Times attracts all audiences but tends to be more liberal leaning. Let's see if their reporting lives up to Newt Gingrich's belief that Democrats will oppose Trump no matter what.

In the first sentence there is a challenge to the unity Mr. Gingrich spoke so fondly of in that Trump “called Democrats to join him in overhauling immigration policies.” As a liberal news source, starting with immigration policies in the first sentence is an intentional tactic to denounce any sense that Trump's speech was inclusive. In the first few paragraphs, the wording implies distaste in what the President “hailed” and called his first year an “extraordinary success.” Without acknowledging any progress the president has made, this article immediately points out that he “steered clear of the nationalist rhetoric, political attacks and confrontational tone.” The State of the Union is not about petty or personal administration scandal, but it is a chance for the current administration to tell the American people what they have accomplished for this country and what they are working on in the future. It is a forum to discuss policy and law.

²² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/30/us/politics/sotu-trump.html>

The New York Times uses the exact same tactic as Newt Gingrich did for his Fox piece. The Times notes that Trump received “raucous applause from many Republicans, as Democratic leaders who have bitterly criticized his policies and messaging sat stone-faced in their seats.” While Gingrich used this tool to fuel conservative fire, the Times editorialized it to bring pride to Democratic dissent. Maybe they’re not so different after all? But again, this method of prose is not constructive. It seems that everybody could benefit from a trip back to preschool to learn how to communicate and resolve disputes with a playmate that steals toys.

Both articles strive to validate their audiences already strong feelings on certain people and issues. This is weak journalism. This is lazy journalism. When is mainstream media going to challenge Americans to look beyond their own beliefs and understand the importance of lessening the political divide? Being right is not getting us anywhere. Instead politicians and journalists need to focus on partnership, bipartisanship, and working together to solve America’s problems.

“FACT CHECK: Trump’s State of the Union Address” (NPR) .²³

This article, on the other hand, is very well written and comes from a source that stays unbelievably neutral. This is the reporting the United States need more of. Even though NPR’s viewership does tend to be more left leaning, this article differs from the first two by providing a need that has been universally missing in public discourse: facts. The opening paragraph simply reads, “In his first State of the Union address on Tuesday night, President Trump focused on jobs and the economy, infrastructure, immigration,

²³<https://www.npr.org/2018/01/30/580378279/trumps-state-of-the-union-address-annotated>

trade and national security. NPR journalists specializing in these areas and more have added context and analysis to his remarks”. The article contains no name-calling, no malice, no cynicism. The authors’ goals are to ensure their audience is fully informed on complicated issues, that are often simplified by political jargon, in hopes of building a meaningful perspective. From there, audiences can make their own informed opinions.

“Trump’s what-if presidency” (Politico).

“The president delivered a State of the Union that suggested an alternate political reality”.²⁴ This article immediately reminds their audience of scandal that has ensued during the president’s first year in office and questions whether the current US economic success is by accident or design. Half way through, the author reminds their reader of what President Trump promised and that it is “time to snap out of it”. While the authors acknowledge accomplishments of Trump’s presidency, it is not written without colorful language and snide remarks.

If while reading this article the audience thinks, “even though its biased, at least they are reporting the truth” –that is dismissive of the point. A reader will have preexisting perceptions before entering the article, whether they are true or not. The bigger picture is that journalists are allowed to use the facts they want, leave out the facts they do not want, or dismiss facts all together as long as it matches with their reader’s truth. Just as you may believe your truth is being told in one article, so does someone with opposing beliefs in another. Nothing is accomplished alone, which is why Congress needs a simple majority to pass a bill into law. Until America can truly learn to

²⁴ <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/01/31/trump-state-of-the-union-reality-380145>

understand one another, acknowledge each other's accomplishments and own failures, and work together –the truth remains obsolete.

“Trump’s State of the Union delivered more drama, passion, patriotism than his Hollywood critics have all year” (Fox News).²⁵

Headline: Extremely divisive. First sentence: “Hollywood, eat your hearts out” which leads the author to predict that Trump’s State of the Union Address will top ratings for both the Oscars and Grammys combined. The article gets stronger by objectively telling the reader that Trump, “asked for Congress to come together, to serve the people of the nation, but on his terms.” Sounds like a helpful analysis...until reading a bit further: “The sour faces of his critics suggested this: they fear his success”. There is a pattern of fear mongering with outlets on both sides. From this point of view, journalists are telling audiences that Democrats would be displeased with Trump no matter his actions. This is a skillful tactic that Trump’s campaign should praise. Not only does it confirm the political divide, it subconsciously builds a Pavlovian response whenever Democrats complain about Trump. Conservative audiences will be conditioned with an automatic defense of Trump any time opponents denounce his actions. It is an impulsive and emotional reaction that does not rely on intellectual means. There will be no time to consider whether or not Trump’s actions were actually good or bad. Sound communication is lost.

Both conservative authors mention the decreasing unemployment level among African-Americans since Trump took power, but this author mentioned how

²⁵ <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/01/31/trump-s-state-union-delivered-more-drama-passion-patriotism-than-his-hollywood-critics-have-all-year.html>

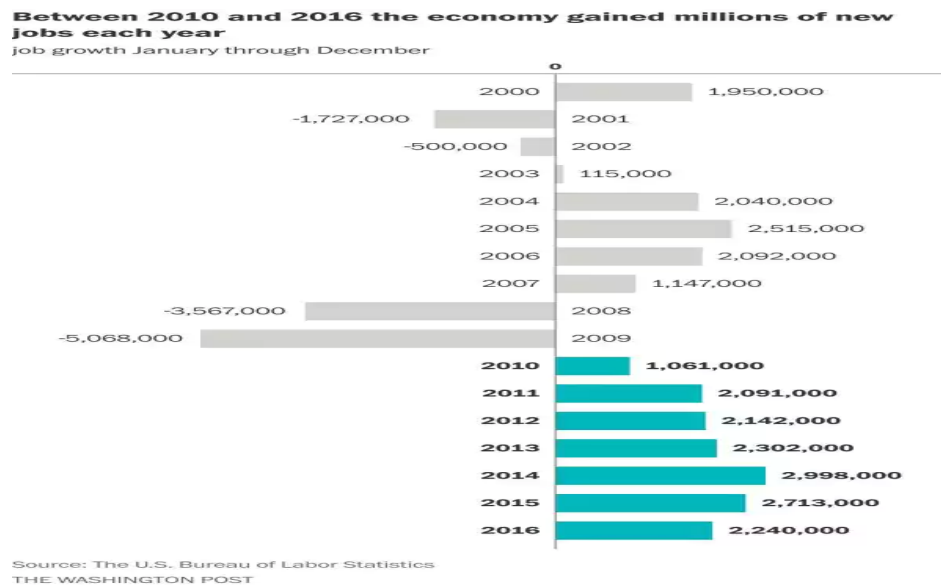
Congressional Black Caucus members did not stand to clap when Trump illustrated this point. “How foolish does that look?” she asks. On the surface level, this statement seems logical calling members of the Congressional Black Caucus “foolish”. Challenge the notion: is there truly not more to this story? Why would members of a Caucus whose sole purpose is to support the representation of the African American population NOT stand to learn unemployment levels for this demographic has decreased. Mainstream media is not challenging readers to critically think and sticks to name-calling.

Economists agree: Trump, not Obama, gets credit for economy (The Hill)²⁶

Lastly, this article addresses an issue that has been highly debated: whether the booming economy is a result of Trump’s policy changes or is a result over time from Obama’s administration. The author acknowledges that both Obama and Trump supporters are trying to take claim to the improvements but uses a study by the Wall Street Journal to prove President Trump deserves the credit. The study included 68 businesses, financial, and academic economists who agree, “Mr. Trump’s election deserves at least some credit”. Finally, we find the experts and they sound less confident than the author. How many people are willing to go through the search for the truth? Even then, the Wall Street Journal’s study clarifies that the 68 organizations surveyed were mostly businesses, not economic experts, who are more likely to favor Trump’s pro-business attitude and light regulation attitude. The link for the Wall Street Journal article from *The Hill* is no longer available. This level of information will have to suffice.

²⁶ <http://thehill.com/opinion/finance/368904-economists-agree-trump-not-obama-gets-credit-for-economy>

Behold, this is only one side of a complete picture. When Googling, “the economy is good because of Obama,” a simple statement that is clearly one sided, The Washington Post, Newsweek, and Market Economy are the first sites to pop up. Titles included, “Obama Deserves More Credit”, and “Comparing the Trump economy to the Obama economy,” and “It’s neither Obama’s or Trump’s economy”. Interestingly enough, these news sources are a mix of liberal and conservative media.²⁷ The Washington Post claims to make its report based on “facts” and argues that Trump takes too much credit for the booming economy. They claim that Trump did not create one million jobs in first six months as president and this is “part of a multiyear trend that started in 2010 while Obama was still in office.”²⁸ They share this image to show job growth in since 2010 to put President Trump’s claims in “context” and claim that Trump’s numbers look less impressive.



²⁷ <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/>

²⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/12/14/comparing-the-trump-economy-to-the-obama-economy/?utm_term=.36424f13ce64

The Post article refutes several of Trump's claims with facts, statistics, and charts. On the other hand, Newsweek's articles claimed Obama deserves more credit for the state of the economy but when looking at the article, it is just public opinion. There are no facts presented on the economic affects of each administration's public policy decisions.

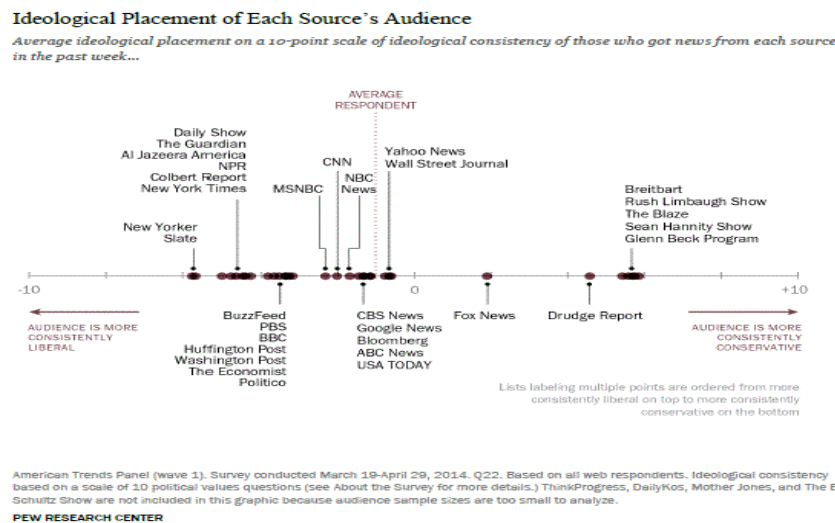
On the conservative side, Market Place acknowledges business and consumer confidence is up since President Trump has been elected and that the unemployment rate stands at 4.1%.²⁹ However the author says that neither the Democrat nor conservative side is right because who controls the economy is a trick question. The author answers, "it's the Ben Bernanke and Janet Yellen economy" referencing two former heads of the Federal Reserve. The author even calls out White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders for tweeting, "Can't make it up...At least we can all agree the economy is better under President Trump." Shouldn't Press Secretary Sanders be the first to know that everyone definitely does not agree about that statement? But sure, let us take a note from Mrs. Sanders. If you cannot make it up then who is right? There are reports and facts telling two different stories based on the audience. Members of the public trying to stay informed are given mixed information, so how are they distinguish facts from fiction?

These headlines are reporting on the same events, just with very different perspectives. So which audiences are viewing which tones? According to Pew Charitable Research Fund, 57% of Americans get their news from TV and 38% get their news online.³⁰ In the same study, while Americans are almost 50/50 on whether or not they are loyal to their news sources, behaviorally 76% of people are returning and reading the

²⁹ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/its-neither-obamas-nor-trumps-economy-2017-12-11>

³⁰ <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/>

same news sources. The chart below shows the expected following of different media platforms. Conservative leaning audiences tend to consume Fox News, the Drudge Report, and Rush Limbaugh while liberal leaning audiences are loyal to the New York Times, NPR, and the Washington Post.



One solution is the Pulitzer Prize winning website *PolitiFact.com*. This website reviews quotes by politicians on both sides of the aisle and aims to tell a more complete story. They offer a Truth-O-Meter rating for statements made for politicians, bloggers, news outlets, and even statements made by companies like Starbucks. They rate statements on a scale that ranges from: True, Mostly True, Half True, Mostly False, False, and the most fun – Pants on Fire!³¹ *PolitiFact* journalists analyze bigger news stories and break down the commentary step by step. For example, one story was titled “Fact-checking Donald Trump’s tweet storm on Mueller, Russia³².” Before the Trump Era, *PolitiFact* covered quotes and media coverage for Barrack Obama, Hillary Clinton,

³¹ <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/>

³² <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/mar/19/fact-checking-donald-trumps-tweetstorm-mueller-rus/>

John McCain, and other prominent figures. Although Obama is no longer in office, it is important to recall he has several statements that are filed under the “Pants on Fire!” category³³. Trump did not create the post-truth political era; he is merely perfecting the art to use toward his greatest advantage (or disadvantage depending on your beliefs).

Politifact believes “fact-checking journalism is the heart”³⁴ of what they do. In a world where it is so easy to make the claim that the economy has never been better or that unemployment rates for African Americans have never been lower, it is vital to have reliable organizations keeping politicians and news outlets in check. Of course, there are several organizations and think tanks, like the Brookings Institute, committed to neutral research reporting facts. *Politifact* allows U.S. citizens to stay current on the facts their politicians and news outlets are making claims about today. They keep people informed as quickly as media moves. *Politifact* is owned by the Poynter Institute, a nonprofit journalist school, and their public financial disclosure form is posted for anyone to see.³⁵ They are almost completely self-funded by online advertising, grants, and individual donors who have no right to review or edit content.³⁶

At the end of the day, maybe facts are no longer valued in political dialogue. People believe what they believe and it is hard to change the ideals instilled through nurturing. How hard should the media be fighting to stay in neutral and to tell one story instead of giving into their biased audience? At one point in *The Hill* article the author begs us to, “Imagine the nation polling negative on a tax cut for an estimated 90 percent

³³ <http://www.politifact.com/personalities/barack-obama/statements/byruling/pants-fire/>

³⁴ <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/feb/12/principles-truth-o-meter-politifact-methodology-i/>

³⁵ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3911834-Poynter-2015-990.html>

³⁶ <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/blog/2011/oct/06/who-pays-for-politifact/>

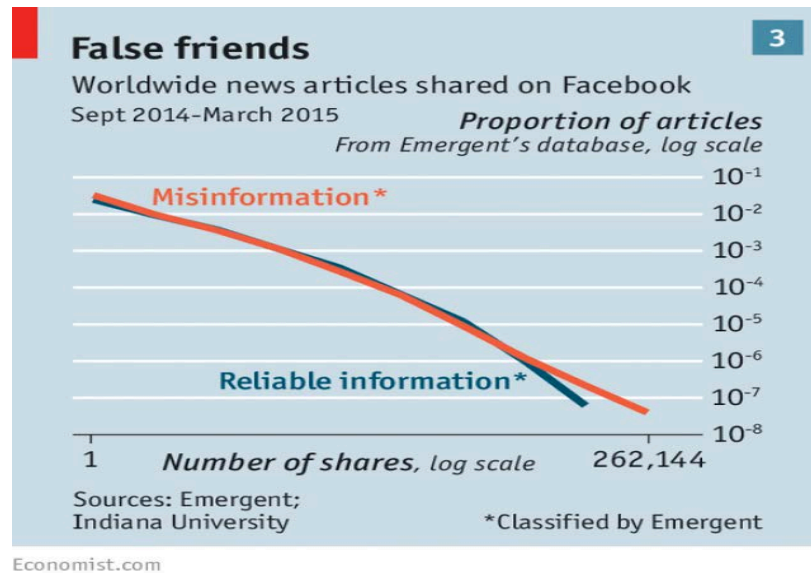
of the workers. That takes genius.” What takes genius is spinning a news story that is so partisan and one sided that your audience, the American people doing the best they can, will not know any better.

Public Citizens Converse

Journalists used to be the gatekeepers to the truth in contrast to untrustworthy politicians. Now that media is less reliable and the “experts” spitting out facts are clearly biased, politicians and media outlets can point fingers at each other to blame for the deceptive behavior. Part of this dilemma is based on how “we the people” spread knowledge. Citizens have the ability to become their own economic, climate change, and political “expert” on their own social media pages. According to a study by Pew Research Center, 67% of Americans get at least some of their news on social media. Seventy eight percent of people under 50 get news from social media sites and for the first time in the center’s surveys, more than half of Americans over 50 get news on social media sites.³⁷ Indiana University used data to test if there was a difference in popularity among reliable articles shared on Facebook and misinformed articles shared on Facebook. The chart below shows result of the data and that the distribution of the articles was almost the same. According to Indiana University Professor Filippo Menczer, “there is no advantage in being correct”.³⁸

³⁷ <http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/>

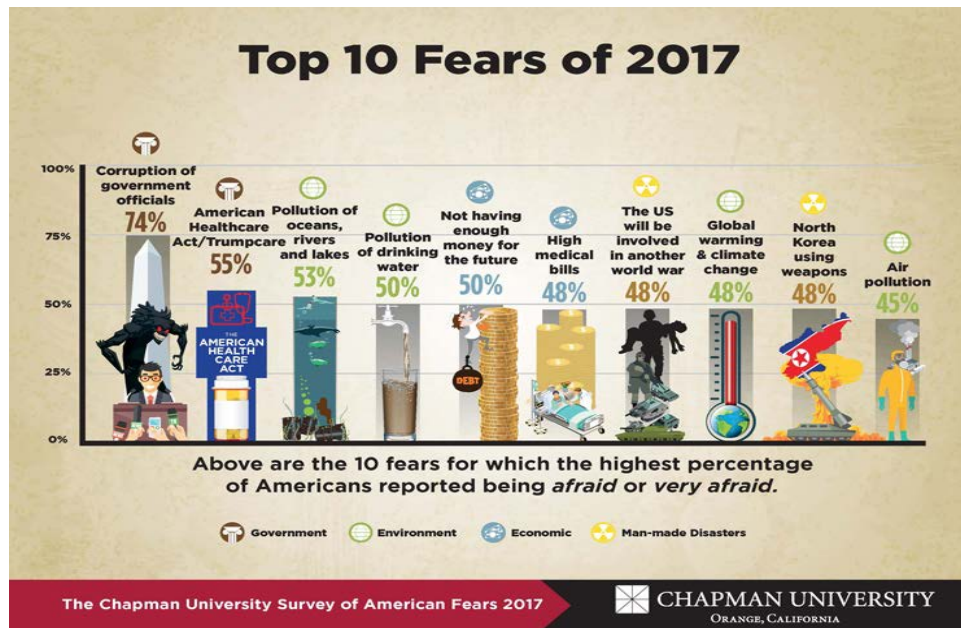
³⁸ <https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21706498-dishonesty-politics-nothing-new-manner-which-some-politicians-now-lie-and>



If people are not willing to listen to facts alone, are politicians and news outlets actually the ones to blame for the lack of data? One factor behind the lies of every player (politicians, news outlets, and citizens) is fear. Our own president said it simply enough in his New Jersey victory speech: “People are scared”.³⁹ Chapman University conducted its annual Survey of American Fears by asking a random sample of 1,207 adults what their greatest fears are. Below is a chart of the top ten fears reported in 2017 where Americans reported either being “afraid” or “very afraid”.⁴⁰

³⁹ <http://time.com/4360872/donald-trump-new-jersey-victory-speech-transcript/>

⁴⁰ <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2017/10/11/americas-top-fears-2017/>



This list greatly reflects domestic political unrest when compared to 2016's list where two of the top five fears had something to do with international terrorist attacks. In one year, this country's greatest fears switched from external threats to internal threats. The black lives matter movement, student rallies, and gun control protests have had the power to shut down major cities. While these protests are done out of courage, fear is still a very powerful aspect that can move mountains and politicians are masters of exploiting it.

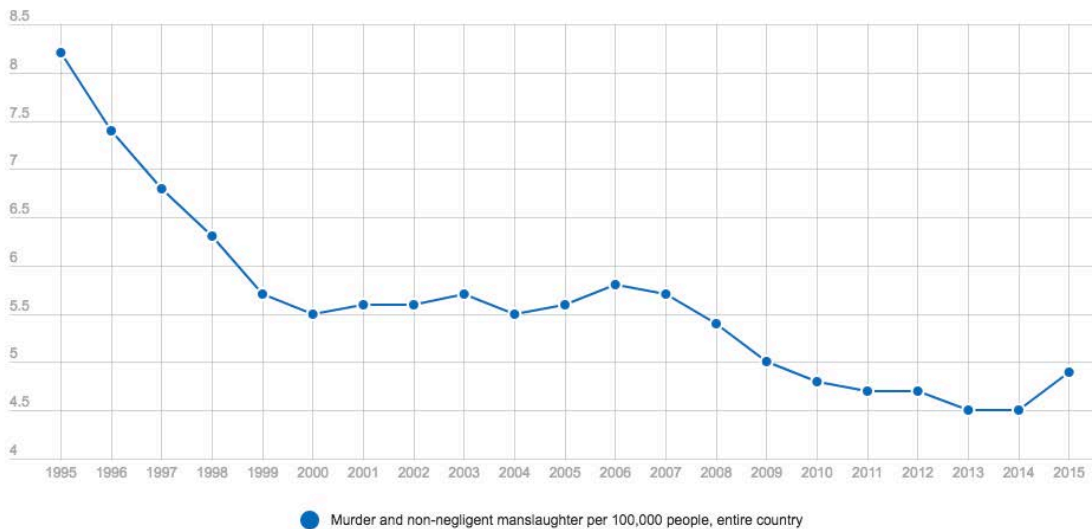
Politicians fearmonger to change public sentiment towards policy issues and to pose their opponents in a negative light. Time magazine reported that "no president has spread fear like Donald Trump".⁴¹ In September of 2016, Trump gave an immigration speech that focused on crime, safety, and terrorism.⁴² His speeches use accusatory

⁴¹ <http://time.com/4665755/donald-trump-fear/>

⁴² <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-immigration-speech-shocking-2016-9>

language including: “They’re bringing drugs they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists” (Business Insider) and that the U.S. murder rate “is the highest it’s been in 47 years” (Time). Former Los Angeles Mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, made a contradictory statement claiming undocumented immigrants commit less crime than the native born. The reality, according to *Politifact*, paints a different picture. Villaraigosa’s statement rates “mostly true”⁴³ and an article was dedicated to Trump’s claim on murder rates, which was rated as “false”.⁴⁴ The graph below shows the U.S. murder rate from 1995-2015.

United States murder rate, 1995-2015



There was a spike in the murder rate from 2014 to 2015 and the number rose again in 2016 by 8.6%.⁴⁵ However these numbers are nowhere near the murder rate peaks that

⁴³ <http://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2017/aug/03/antonio-villaraigosa/mostly-true-undocumented-immigrants-less-likely-co/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2017/feb/08/donald-trump/donald-trump-wrong-murder-rate-highest-47-years/>

⁴⁵ <https://qz.com/1086403/fbi-crime-statistics-us-murders-were-up-in-2016-and-chicago-had-a-lot-to-do-with-it/>

occurred in the 1990s even though the president stated, “The murder rate is the highest it’s been in, I guess, from 45 to 47 years (Politifact).” This political fearmongering preys on people’s deeper emotional concerns and emotion does not always search for reason. People are afraid for their health, their safety, their livelihood, and their families. Desperation and fear-driven citizens may be quicker to become more hostile when faced with views that oppose their inherent beliefs when they are not in search for facts. People become more willing to enter the unfamiliar in search for comfort and Donald Trump helped provide people with that comfort in his campaigns: “You’re not going to be scared anymore. They’re going to be scared.”⁴⁶

According to the Public Religion Research Institute, 65% of Trump supporters fear being victims of terrorism.⁴⁷ Left-wing Americans follow the same trend and become more conservative when presented with fear, danger, and economic anxiety.⁴⁸ Fear mongering is not something new Donald Trump created, and he is far from the first politician to use it (let us not forget Lyndon B. Johnson’s daisy ad), but he has used it as one of his main unifying tools. Subsequently, when he enters into a “tweet storm,” all eyes are watching. The media will jump on the chance to cover the president’s tweets, even when they make the most outrageous claims, and count it as legitimate news. We have created a cycle of validating scare tactics. Between a scared population, a Commander and Chief whose words often lack a true sense of reality, and media willing to write anything to get more hits -- facts in politics have become scarce.

⁴⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/donald-trump-and-the-politics-of-fear/498116/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.ppri.org/research/ppri-brookings-poll-immigration-economy-trade-terrorism-presidential-race/>

⁴⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222824388_Threat_causes_liberals_to_think_like_conservatives

One theory for this is based around the backfire effect concept. Most simply, the backfire effect occurs when “corrections actually increase misperceptions.”⁴⁹ The backfire effect can be triggered when someone who holds fierce values is told contradicting information to their current beliefs. Hearing this contradictory information only works to build a defense mechanism and strengthens current beliefs. When the backfire affect occurs in debate, adding facts to the discussion actually hinders the ability to change someone’s mind or to have someone see a new perspective.

Therefore when it comes to backfire, what matters is not whether a person is informed but whether they are misinformed or allow misperceptions. A Dartmouth study, performed by Professors Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, tested this theory to see if it was possible to correct pre-existing misperceptions.⁵⁰ Participants of the study were given articles with false and misleading statements. Some of the articles had corrective information following the false statement and some did not. For example, the first experiment gave participants a fake news article, which falsely claimed Saddam Hussein did in fact have weapons of mass destruction when the U.S. invaded Iraq. When the invasion took place, it was discovered that Iraq actually did not have weapons and yet, people who read the article could not let go of this belief. The false information remained in the political hemisphere. When the tests were completed, participants were asked if they agreed with this statement: “Immediately before the U.S. invasion, Iraq had an active weapons of mass destruction program, the ability to produce these weapons, and large stockpiles of WMDs.” The results support their correction backfire hypothesis

⁴⁹ <https://daily.jstor.org/the-backfire-effect/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nyhan-reifler.pdf>.

stating: “In some cases, the interaction between corrections and ideology will be so strong that misperceptions will increase for the ideological subgroup in question” (Dartmouth, 11).

To test if facts are really less valued and if the backfire affect exists, an original survey was used to test how facts are used in everyday conversations among citizens. The survey was taken by 125, mostly by college-aged students in the United States.

Responders answered four questions:

- 1) On a scale of 1-5, how politically engaged are you? (One being highly engaged in politics, Five being not engaged in politics)
- 2) Do you think it’s possible to change someone’s opinion on a political issue based solely on facts? (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)
- 3) Please describe what you would consider a successful political conversation with someone who has different beliefs would look like to you. (Open ended)
- 4) On a scale of 1-5, how often does this type of success occur?

Responding to question #1, twenty percent polled described themselves as “highly engaged in politics.” Of the people surveyed, 75.2% answered either level 1, 2, or 3 meaning they are at least moderately engaged in politics. Only 16.8% answered level 4 and only 8% answered level 5, meaning they do not engage in politics.

For question #2, only 4.84% of people answered a level 5, meaning they believe facts greatly have an effect on changing someone’s mind on a political issue. The majority of people (39.52%) were in the middle, answering at level 3, about whether facts will change people’s minds. The next biggest response was a level 2 (33.06%) meaning

people surveyed thought it would be very unlikely for facts to have an influence to change people's mind. Of the responses, 6.45% believe facts will not make a difference at all.

Responders were then asked in question #3 to consider what a successful political conversation with someone who has different beliefs from their own would look like. The responses can be found in the appendix (pg. 38). Posted below is a collage of words responders used the most frequently.



Lastly, question #4 asked on a scale of 1-5, how often does this type of success occur (One being never, Five being frequently)? Only 1.6% of responders said successful political conversations with someone who has different beliefs from their own happen frequently. The majority of responders answered either a 2 (48.8%), closer to never successful, or a 3 (29.6%).

To better understand the variable relationships between the survey responses, the data was entered into a regression using the R program.⁵¹ The calculations below show the relationship between questions #1 and # 2.

- Question #1: On a scale of 1-5, how politically engaged are you? (One being highly engaged in politics, Five being not engaged in politics)
- Question #2: Do you think it's possible to change someone's opinion on a political issue based solely on facts? (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)

```
Call:
lm(formula = ho$Likelihood ~ ho$Engagement, data = ho)

Residuals:
    Min       1Q   Median       3Q      Max
-1.8397 -0.8114  0.1745  0.2028  2.2170

Coefficients:
            Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)   2.85386    0.21291   13.404  <2e-16 ***
ho$Engagement -0.01417    0.07270   -0.195    0.846
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 0.9742 on 123 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared:  0.0003087, Adjusted R-squared:  -0.007819
F-statistic: 0.03798 on 1 and 123 DF,  p-value: 0.8458
```

Is there a significant relationship between a person's level of political engagement and their belief in the ability to change someone's opinion on a political issue based solely on facts? This experiment is testing if people, on average, think that the more engaged they are then the more likely they are to change someone's mind based on facts. This regression shows no correlation between the variables. Generally, people who are more engaged in politics have more facts and information to follow. However, this regression shows it is irrelevant whether a person is engaged or not engaged. Both sides of the spectrum do not believe you can change someone's mind based on facts. Therefore, the

⁵¹ Partnered with Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) MPA student, Anushka Mansukhani, to perform statistical analysis

likelihood of this correlation persists irrespective of people's engagement level. If even the engaged citizens do not think facts have an impact, then it is less likely people will be weary of receiving misinformation. With these results, the level of facts in political dialogue would be irrelevant to successful discourse.⁵²

The calculations below shows the relationship between questions #1 and #4.

- Question #1: On a scale of 1-5, how politically engaged are you? (One being highly engaged in politics, Five being not engaged in politics)
- Question #4: On a scale of 1-5, how often does this type of success occur (One being never, Five being frequently)

This success was described in answer to Question #3: Please describe what you would consider a successful political conversation with someone who has different beliefs would like to you.

⁵² This is a bad model using statistical software R, because multiple r-squared is 0.031%. This means the variation in engagement does not explain the variation in likelihood. At the 0.5 significance level we accept the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between (the two questions).

```

Residuals:
    Min       1Q   Median       3Q      Max
-1.6093 -0.5414 -0.4722  0.4821  2.5501

Coefficients:
              Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)   2.36901    0.29440   8.047 6.89e-13 ***
ho$Engagement  0.01174    0.06464   0.182   0.856
ho$Likelihood  0.04572    0.08041   0.569   0.571
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 0.8582 on 120 degrees of freedom
(2 observations deleted due to missingness)
Multiple R-squared:  0.002963, Adjusted R-squared:  -0.01365
F-statistic: 0.1783 on 2 and 120 DF, p-value: 0.8369

```

Is there a significant relationship between a person's level of political engagement and the frequency of success they have in a political conversation with someone who has different beliefs than their own? In other words, are you more likely to have a positive outcome if you are more engaged? This regression shows no correlation between the variables.

The stars on the side of each variable note the statistical significance. While the intercept has three stars, the engagement and likelihood variables have no stars. Once again, the likelihood of the correlation persists irrespective of people's engagement level. The level of engagement in politics does not affect the success of having a political conversation among people with differing ideologies. If neither the politically engaged and unengaged believe in the success of conversing across political lines, then it is less meaningful to have factually based conversations.

A smaller experiment, with 26 responses, was conducted to see if partisan politics affects the work environment of people who have worked in Washington D.C.

Participants were asked five questions:

- 1) Have you worked primarily in the private, public, non-profit sector, or other?

- 2) On a scale of 1-5, did you feel like partisan politics affected your everyday work environment or the work environment of someone you know (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)
- 3) Did you ever hear about staff members, coworkers, or even members of Congress discussing political opinions in a personal negative manner? For example:
Personal attacks, imputing motives, or snide remarks that go beyond work place relations.
- 4) On a scale of 1-5, is it still possible to have constructive problem solving dialogue on political issues with people who have different political beliefs? (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)
- 5) What years did you work in Washington D.C.?

Responding to question #1, the 26 people surveyed reported mostly working in the public sector:

ANSWER CHOICES ▼	RESPONSES
▼ Private sector	19.23%
▼ Public sector	57.69%
▼ Non-Profit sector	19.23%
▼ Other	3.85%

For question #2, the largest responses were tied at 26.92% between levels 4 and 5 (where 5 means “greatly so”). This means that 53.84% of people surveyed felt that the partisan politics greatly affected their work environment. Only 7.69% of people answered level 1, meaning partisan politics did not affect their work place at all.

In question #3, 50% of the people surveyed said they heard about staff members, coworkers, or even members of Congress discussing political opinions in a personally negative manner. Examples given included personal attacks, imputing motives, or snide remarks that go beyond work place relations. Of the people surveyed, 38.46% responded no and 11.54% chose not to answer. An optional comment section was provided if people wished to share the specifics of their experiences related to question #3. A compilation of responses can be found in the appendix on page 38.

Question #4 asked on a scale of 1-5, is it still possible to have constructive problem-solving dialogue on political issues with people who have different political beliefs? The greatest response (42.31%) answered a level 5, meaning “greatly so”.

	1 (CIVILITY NOT POSSIBLE)	2	3	4	5 (CIVILITY POSSIBLE)
(no	0.00%	7.69%	26.92%	23.08%	42.31%

Of all those surveyed, 0% believed civility is not possible. As a result, people who have lived and worked in Washington D.C. believe that partisan politics do affect the work place, but that it is still possible to have a civil political conversation across the aisle. The fourth question was different, in contrast, to the questions #2 in the first survey because this set of questions did not focus on facts. When facts were discussed in the first survey, there were largely pessimistic views about the ability for civility in conversation.

Lastly the survey asked responders when they lived and worked in Washington D.C. The responses were anywhere between 2014-2017.

Conclusion:

The way we speak to one another and the language we use is very powerful. This paper has explored how fear, power, and defense can make people say things that stray from the truth. While freedom of speech is one of the greatest rights given to the United State and its citizens, it is also a double-edged sword. When abused, freedom of speech can be used to trick people and cause misperceptions that are difficult to correct. So often, these words are coming from the mouths of the country's greatest leaders and from news sources people have learned to trust. Many of today's political leaders have decided to forgo the truth to strengthen their own agenda and to build a divide between parties. Creating adversaries and preying on the emotions of voters has become more important than problem solving for the American people.

Preexisting misperceptions are very difficult to combat and can even become stronger when faced with contradiction. Preexisting misperceptions have not led to an informed public, but a misinformed public where facts are easily dismissed. The concept of "fake news" has become so common place that people cannot easily distinguish one from the other. News sources recycle rhetoric that their audiences have grown to expect, further strengthening misperceptions. The news articles analyzed in previous sections show that even when journalists report with facts, they only report half the truth of a whole story. Without the full picture, readers are not truly informed. When viewers receive no contradictory information to their beliefs, they are not challenged to learn something new or to understand a new perspective. Many journalists instead rely on colorful rhetoric, name calling, malice, and cynicism to build a divide and demoralize their opponents. While this tactic may strengthen viewership and internet "hits", it only

strengthens the concept that this country is split in two. Strengthening the divide in this country instead of attempting to find common ground is a useless waste of time and an insult to this country. No one accomplishes anything alone and this nation was founded on unity. Americans in all sectors and demographics need to regain the desire to compromise and work together for a better future.

As the news is fed to the public, citizens are equipped with headlines and sentiments, whether they be based in fact or not. People are validated for sharing this information and as studies show, popularity is not based on facts. When citizens share articles and comment on posts through social media, they are mostly creating an echo chamber of their preexisting thoughts and beliefs. This is changing the way we listen to each other because, really, people are only listening to themselves. Social media platforms and bloggers do not encourage constructive dialogue and empower normal citizens to become their own experts.

All in all, people have lost the ability to tolerate opposing opinions and it is time to start listening to each other once again. Before we can solve problems, we have to better understand our neighbors and what it is like to walk in someone else's shoes. It is the responsibility of our publicly elected officials, their staff members, professional journalists, and citizens themselves to look for the facts and to consider challenges to our own misperceptions. America is a great place but it has accepted the weak path of ignorance where information is obsolete. Let us choose a different path and Make America Responsibly Informed Again.

APPENDIX

SURVEY # 1

On a scale of 1-5, how politically engaged are you? (1 being highly engaged in politics, 5 being not engaged in politics)

Answered: 125 Skipped: 0



	1 (HIGHLY ENGAGED IN POLITICS)	2	3 (MODERATELY ENGAGED IN POLITICS)	4	5 (DO NOT ENGAGE IN POLITICS)	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	20.00% 25	25.60% 32	29.60% 37	16.80% 21	8.00% 10	125	2.67

Do you think it's possible to change someone's opinion on a political issue based solely on facts? (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)

Answered: 124 Skipped: 1



	1 (NOT AT ALL)	2	3	4	5 (GREATLY SO)	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	6.45% 8	33.06% 41	39.52% 49	16.13% 20	4.84% 6	124	2.80

Q3

Export ▼

Please describe what you would consider a successful political conversation with someone who has different beliefs would look like to you

- Expose the other person to another point of view.
- A conversation in which both individuals came away with at least one question that they haven't considered before with respect to their views and political opinions
- both listening and hearing each other's opinions, calm, both backing up everything with facts
- You both express your opinions and listen to the other side without argument...After walking away from the conversation you leave with a broadened perspective
- A situation where someone is immersed into the realities of someone else's life that is drastically different than their own
- Learning why they believe what they believe. Either being convinced by their arguments that they're right, or gaining a better understand of why I'm right.
- Understanding, both must be rational.
- Tolerance
- Not heated, but where each gets a chance to explain their position and the other person actively listens. And facts are used as appropriate and available.

- Not an aggressive screaming match
- Making someone think about an issue in a new way
- Non judge mental; a sharing of thoughts regardless their side
- Agreeing to disagree, but listening to both sides
- No one getting angry
- They understand or question there thought
- Being respectful, learning something new
- Talking about the point of abortion being not a choice between life or death but between control of a persons body - personally I could not decide to have an abortion, but who am I to make that call for someone else in an entirely different situation?
- Disproving claims and arguments with facts
- We would both come away from the conversation learning things from each other.
- Both learning. Taking turn should to listen and share. Walking away thinking differently, whether the conversation sharpened my perspective or gave me something new to consider
- A conversation where we can both talk about what we believe objectively and without getting emotional. While we may disagree, we have a mutual respect for the other person's opinion.
- No one's voice becomes heated or aggressive, and each side is able to give their view without being interrupted or cut off
- Respectful debate where both parties are listening to each other and discussing their viewpoints.
- One in which both parties can listen to each other's opinions and understand the thought process behind it, even if they don't agree with it. Being able to respect the other person for having a well thought out opinion and obvious attention to current political issues. Recognizing that there is common ground between our different beliefs.
- The first time I actually took time to understand the IPCC's work changed my mind by the way they logically layout facts and cite their own counter arguments. It looks at the facts as a nonpartisan issue, which makes it more aligned to positioned negotiations; it removes the emotions in order to make conclusions clearer.
- An understanding and respect of each other's opinion.
- A conversation where listening is as important as talking and where someone can disagree and agree on the smaller aspects of the subject, and not make blanket statements. Where FACTS are part of the conversation and where someone can see that we don't all walk in the same shoes!
- A successful political conversation between two individuals with different beliefs should take place in a non hostile way. In today's polarized government arguments presented from both sides spiral into yelling and slander. Beliefs, supported with facts should be presented from both sides to strengthen their arguments. Even if One may not agree with the other, one important thing to remember is that everyone is entitled to their own opinion. The ideal political

conversation, to me, is seeing two individuals walking away from the debate with intelligence gained and a willingness to consider the other's claim.

- People don't walk away angry
- One in which both parties talk about the merits of their respective sides and the why there are differences in opinion
- Everyone stating their beliefs and reasons for the beliefs then openly discussing the arguments for both sides.
- Ending the conversation with both sides at least understanding where the other is coming from without animosity towards the individual
- You give them facts, they say they're fake news
- At a minimum, to agree to disagree. Ideally, for both sides to gain a new perspective.
- A two way conversation with open minded-people
- I believe that a successful political conversation stems from a decision to understand the thoughts and opinions of others. I think the conversation is successful if both people leave feeling understood, even when they disagree. I think this conversation should include asking questions, not being afraid to be honest, and should never include insults.
- More discussion based rather argumentation, find common ground and differing points, no partisan shit-throwing but rather clash of ideas
- No one getting angry
- A conversation where we don't try to convince each other of anything, just understanding each other.
- Civil conversation on a political topic without either side getting offended.
- Them saying their reasons why and I listen and then I say my reasons why and they listen. We discuss our views as to why and we don't bash the other, we make sure the other knows that these are personal opinions and to not attack the other side.
- Mutual agreement on facts
- Give them your opinions first and then facts to back them up. Then listen to their side and give new facts after all the while being respectful and polite
- Play to emotions, validate their opinions
- "I see where you're coming from though."
- if they are able to see that i have a valid point even if in the end we agree to disagree
- We both state our beliefs and hopefully one person would bring something new to the table
- Rarely a successful conversation
- Factual discourse, accompanied by why one values and holds beliefs different than yours. A calm, open discourse, without fear of looking unintelligent or any other discouraging factor.
- Respect
- The opposite party understanding/respecting my point of view

- A successful conversation would include thoughtful listening and responses, arguments based on facts, a lack of anger or hate, as well as people willing to partake in the conversation
- People are so entrenched in their beliefs they will ignore, if not completely deny, anyone's opposing viewpoints
- A conversation that remains respectful, calm and most importantly, based on logic and facts (as oppose to emotions and falsehoods)
- convincing someone not to defund planned parenthood based solely on abortion
- Both parties discuss their beliefs and why without any interruption on the second party and have a calm debate with open and understanding minds
- A conversation in which both sides appreciate and respect the facts and arguments from the other side and engage in civil debate. You can have a "successful" political conversation with someone without changing their opinion on a subject.
- Listening to their points, addressing them specifically, describing how you see the same situation differently. Acknowledge that often times we have different methods for achieving similar goals. Be passionate and specific about your desired changes.
- Starting on things we agree on and then learn about how they develop their views
- I think a successful conversation is one that does not end in an argument. In today's society, people are so quick to judge and are not opened minded, or even considerate enough to consider different people have different opinions and beliefs.
- To understand my perspective but doesn't have to agree with me.
- When you are able to come to an agreement on facts, even if you disagree on how you view them being positive or negative
- Non accusatory, peaceful, respectful
- Inclusion of facts is helpful but the human element of that conversation cannot be ignored. Individuals may respond to correct facts substantially differently dependent on how the fact is communicated to the individual.
- asking for the reasons on why they think differently than you
- Not ending up in a screaming match with them
- One where we come to some sort of give and take agreement and acknowledge each other's positions with respect.
- Neither side being defensive. Both parties gaining a better perspective of the other side.
- Explaining the differences between opinions and then backing up your thoughts with facts and statistics. However, some people do not respond to simple facts, and may need to see the implications of policy decisions firsthand.
- If we both agreed to disagree or if they were able to slightly compromise
- Just having someone see the other side not necessarily agree with it but understand it and maybe have them question their own thoughts
- To understand another side of an issue and at least respect why people see it that way.

- No fighting. Just a genuine debate with knowledgeable points
- Thoughtful and engaging. Explaining each other's beliefs and moving forward more educated on the others political opinion
- Engaged listening on both sides, doesn't necessarily end in agreement but maybe understanding
- Expands areas of agreement and commonality
- One in which tempers don't flare and mutual respect serves as the foundation of the conversation. This isn't to say the conversation can not, at times, heat up. Rather, when it does both parties should always approach these types of conversations with an understanding that neither yelling nor personal attacks are going to yield any productive results, in turn fostering a respectful environment where opposing thoughts can be shared honestly.
- To me, a successful political conversation would be one where we could talk in a civilized manner and learn something from one another. Neither person has to change their minds, but must be open to hearing the thoughts of the other person and either politely disagreeing or seeing the other person's point of view without fighting it just because they're on the opposite side of the spectrum.
- Basing the entire conversation around facts, and requiring the other person to also use facts, not emotions
- Discussion of a specific topic that talks about shared values and common solutions while also respecting each other's differences.
- A conversation that we are both open to learning and growing from one another.
- Mutual understanding of the facts of the situation and how the other person approaches it
- Not changing each others view points but having them understand yours
- Willingness to hear each other out, openness to agree to disagree, not letting it turn into an argument
- A back and forth conversation where both people are open to listen to each other's ideas and opinions. It is good to be open and listening because you could learn more about politics
- Open minded conversation
- Not an argument or any form of yelling. Just a calm and rational discussion of each side

On a scale of 1-5, how often does this type of success occur (One being never, Five being frequently)

Answered: 125 Skipped: 0



	1 (NEVER SUCCESSFUL)	2	3	4	5 (FREQUENTLY)	N/A	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	6.40% 8	48.80% 61	29.60% 37	12.00% 15	1.60% 2	1.60% 2	125	2.53

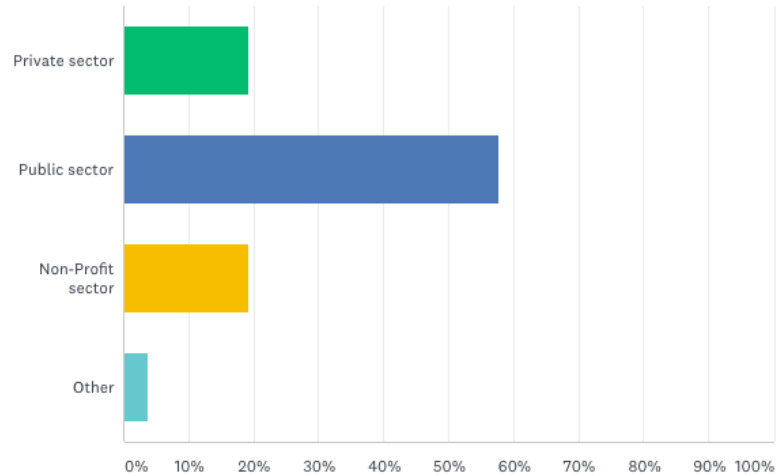
Survey #2

Q1

Customize

Have you worked primarily in the

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Private sector	19.23%
▼ Public sector	57.69%
▼ Non-Profit sector	19.23%
▼ Other	3.85%

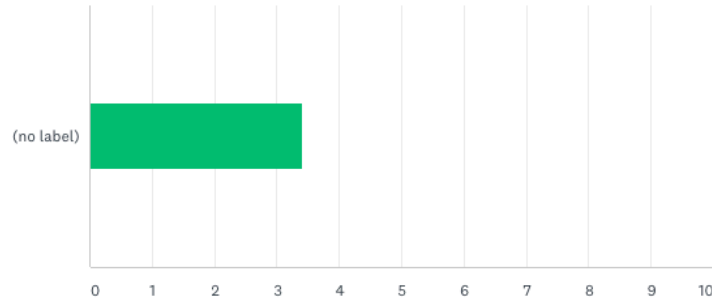
Q2

Customize

Export ▼

On a scale of 1-5, did you feel like partisan politics affected your everyday work environment or the work environment of someone you know? (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	7.69% 2	23.08% 6	15.38% 4	26.92% 7	26.92% 7	26	3.42

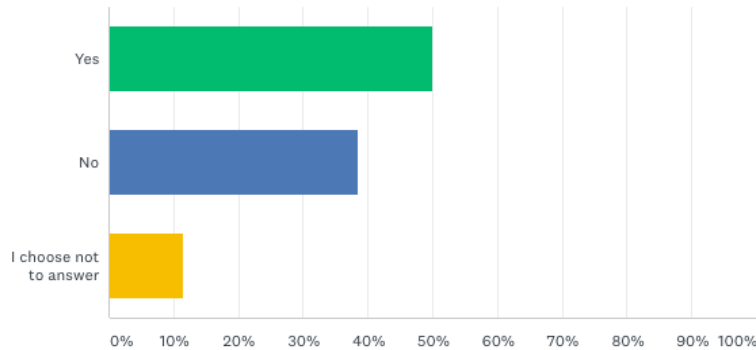
Q3

Customize

Exp

Did you ever hear about staff members, coworkers, or even members of Congress discussing political opinions in a personal negative manner? For example: Personal attacks, imputing motives, or snide remarks that go beyond work place relations.

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	50.00%
No	38.46%
I choose not to answer	11.54%

Optional Responses to elaborate on question #3:

Friends working in the legislative branch speaking negatively about the current administration and how it affected their work.

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[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add Tags](#) ▼

talking about presidential debates and talking about candidates negatively

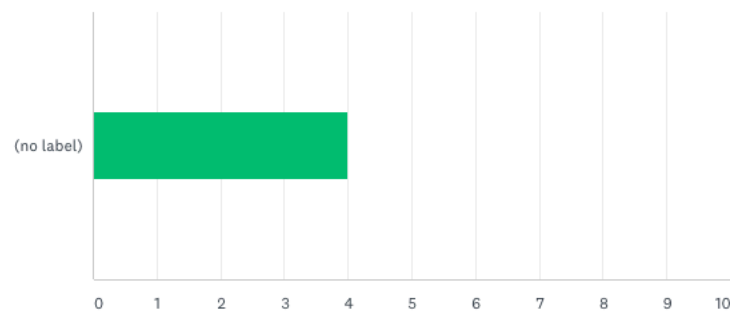
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On a scale of 1-5, is it still possible to have constructive problem solving dialogue on political issues with people who have different political beliefs? (One being not at all, Five being greatly so)

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



	1 (CIVILITY NOT POSSIBLE)	2	3	4	5 (CIVILITY POSSIBLE)	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	0.00%	7.69%	26.92%	23.08%	42.31%		

Question #5 optional and will remain anonymous.

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