



CAMPUS ELECTION ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

For the hyperlinked online version of this document, see campuselect.org/disinformation/

DO NOT BE DECEIVED: DETECTING DISINFORMATION

We're surrounded by information. But not all of it is accurate, and some is disinformation—intentionally false or misleading content, also called fake news. How we filter and analyze all this is key to how we understand the world around us—particularly when weighing immensely consequential choices, like voting to choose the President or a Congressperson.

Circulating false stories isn't new. There are examples [throughout history, going back to Roman times](#). But today's online disinformation campaigns achieve global reach with amazing speed. During the 2016 election, a 24-year-old Romanian man who'd never been to the US [created false stories](#) like "The Pope Endorses Donald Trump" that got more Facebook engagement than any of the largest real stories related to the election.

Disinformation can take many forms: supposed news stories that are completely made-up, or [hoaxes](#); sites that [look like trusted news sources](#) but are designed to fool readers; news items given sensationalized headlines, or clickbait, often IN ALL CAPS, that may distort the actual meaning of the story. Opinion is different from disinformation, but readers should also avoid confusing it with news.

DISINFORMATION LEADS TO DISTRUST

What is the purpose of these disinformation campaigns? Sometimes a campaign is specific, aimed at damaging the reputation of an organization or an individual, like a political opponent. Disinformation campaigns can also be trying to promote falsely positive stories, like implying that someone prominent supports a favored candidate, when they don't. Sometimes a campaign has a big picture goal, like breeding general distrust of elections, leading to a sense that voting is pointless.

As the global pandemic of COVID-19 has spread, false stories have proliferated, some urging conspiracy theories and

HOW TO SPOT FALSE CONTENT

- CONSIDER THE SOURCE**
Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.
- READ BEYOND**
Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?
- CHECK THE AUTHOR**
Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?
- SUPPORTING SOURCES?**
Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.
- CHECK THE DATE**
Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.
- IS IT A JOKE?**
If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.
- CHECK YOUR BIASES**
Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.
- ASK THE EXPERTS**
Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

IFLA International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

some promoting unsubstantiated prevention or detection techniques. Holding your breath for ten seconds will *not* determine whether you have a coronavirus infection. And nearly half of the Twitter accounts discussing reopening America [may be bots](#). You can double-check phony advice or reports at fact-checking sites that have been documenting a wide range of [false stories related to the pandemic](#).

Another far-reaching goal of disinformation is discrediting fact-based news sources. For example, the phrase “fake news” has become part of campaigns intended to call into question the credibility of journalists, both in the U.S. and abroad. In this way the concept of “fake news” has itself become a form of disinformation, sowing confusion about [what is real and what is not](#).

ZOOM OUT FOR CONTEXT

This landscape of questionable content can feel overwhelming, but you can do a lot to verify content you consume. A crucial starting point is putting things in context, which means zooming out to get a broader picture.

One of the most dangerous features of online disinformation campaigns is that they can be micro-targeted at individuals. You may see different pieces of information, or disinformation, than your neighbor, based on your online profile. You may receive false information attacking a particular candidate, but it will only go to a select set of readers, and that candidate will never have a chance to see the false attacks. Disinformation campaigns often play on fears or fantasies to hook you in and make their stories more clickable. One of your best defenses is simply to look for context, to question why you might be seeing a particular piece of content at a particular time.

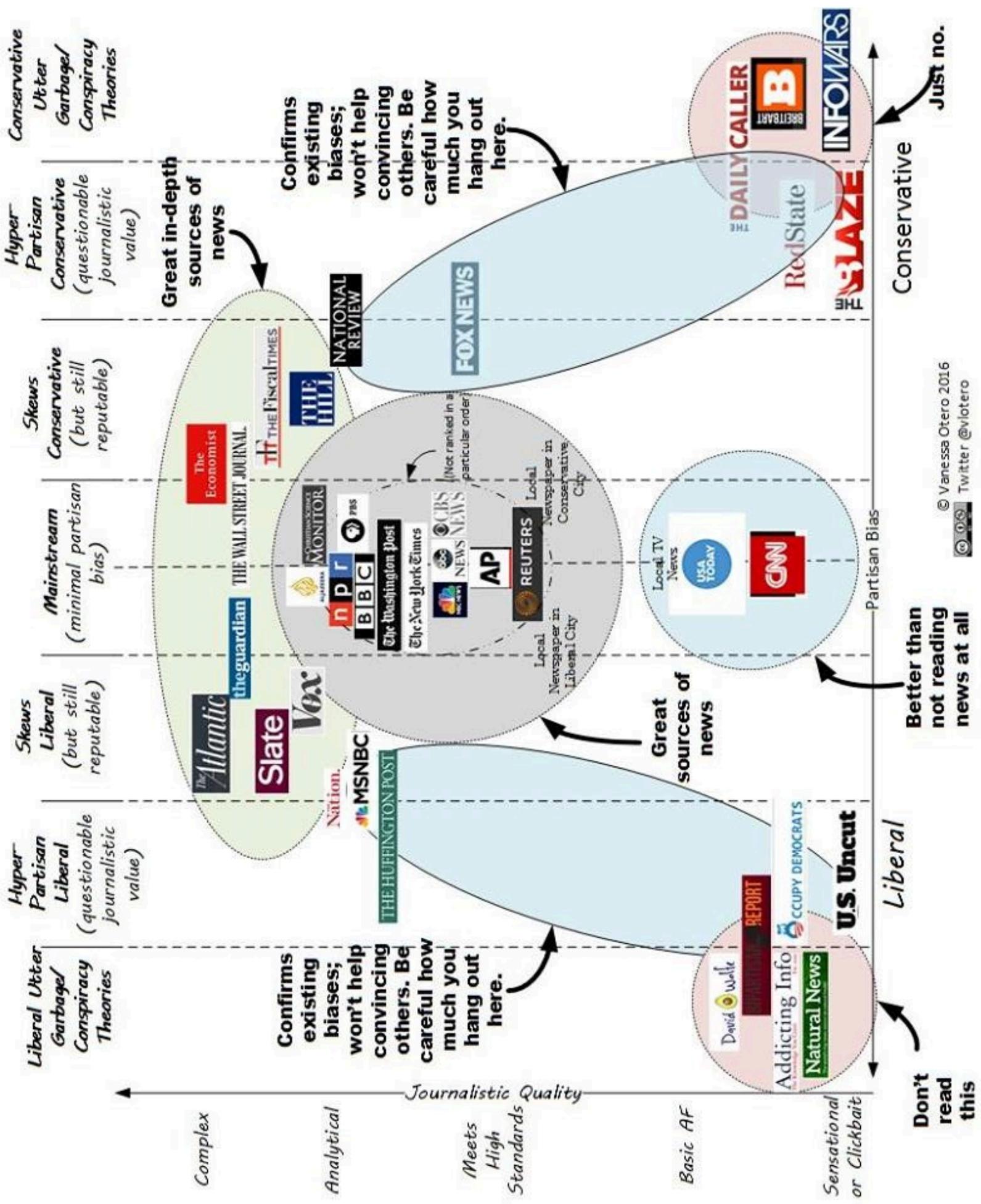
ADMIT MISTAKES AND LOOK FOR TRUSTED SOURCES

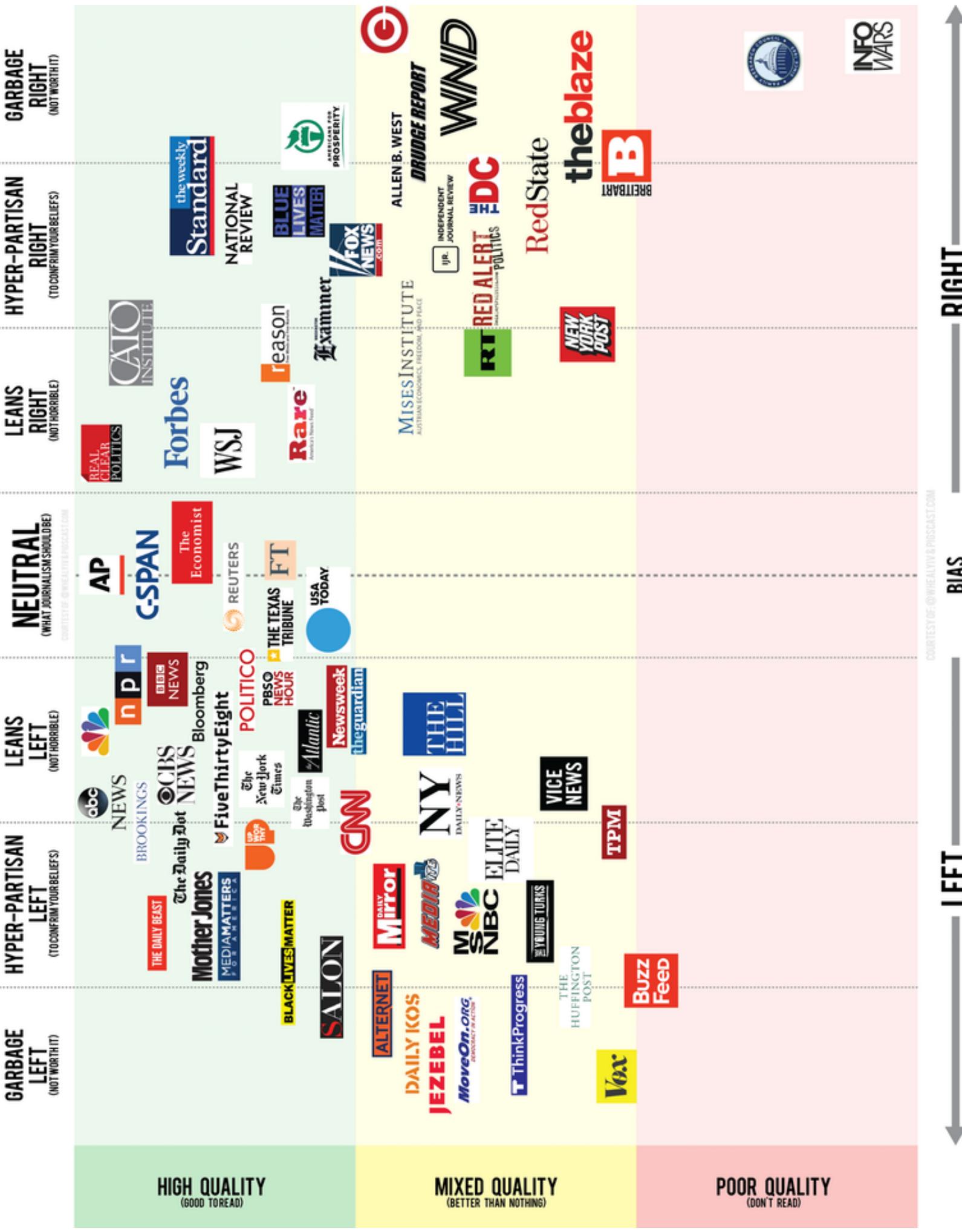
Don't worry if you get taken in by some piece of disinformation. It isn't easy to be constantly on your guard, figuring out what's true or false. It often makes sense to share content that others you trust already endorse. If you post a story that you later learn is false, then go public with your discovery. Your admission can help rebuild trust with your online community.

You can also prioritize reputable and trusted sources, as in the chart on the first page from the International Federations of Library Associations and Institutions. Know that social media is likely the least reliable source of information, and that information from more credible institutions, like your college or university, is far more so.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Poynter Institute's articles on [online fact-checking](#).
- [FactCheck.org's debunking of false stories](#) on Facebook and other platforms.
- Other credible professional fact-checking sites, such as [Politifact](#), [Snopes](#), and [TruthOrFiction.com](#).
- [Guides.vote](#), home of our [Campus Election Engagement Project's](#) nonpartisan candidate guides, researched and edited by veteran journalists to contrast actual candidate stands.
- California University of Pennsylvania's [comprehensive site on Fake News](#).
- Arizona State University's [tools to identify fake images and videos](#).
- The *Washington Post's* [guide to manipulated video](#).





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**“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion,
but not to his own facts.”**

— **Daniel Patrick Moynihan** (1927–2003)
American Sociologist
US Navy Officer, Senator & Ambassador
& advisor to four US presidents (D&R)

**“If people cannot write well,
they cannot think well,
And if they cannot think well,
others will do their thinking for them.”**

— **George Orwell** (1903-1950)
English novelist, essayist,
Journalist, and critic

“The moment we no longer have a free press,
anything can happen. What makes it possible
for a totalitarian or any other dictatorship to
rule is that people are not informed.”

— **Hannah Arendt** (1906-1975)
German-American philosopher and political theorist

**“The liberty of the press is essential to the security
of freedom in a state: it ought not, therefore, to be
restrained in this commonwealth.”**

— John Adams, Samuel Adams, James Bowdoin (1780)

“Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.” —Thomas Jefferson (1786)

“Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.” —Thomas Jefferson (1787)

“Without debate, without criticism, no Administration and no country can succeed — and no republic can survive. And that is why our press was protected by the First Amendment — the only business in America specifically protected by the Constitution — not primarily to amuse and entertain, not to emphasize the trivial and the sentimental, not to simply ‘give the public what it wants’ — but to inform, to arouse, to reflect, to state our dangers and our opportunities, to indicate our crises and our choices, to lead, mold, educate and sometimes even anger public opinion.” —John F Kennedy (1961)

“A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy.” —Nelson Mandela

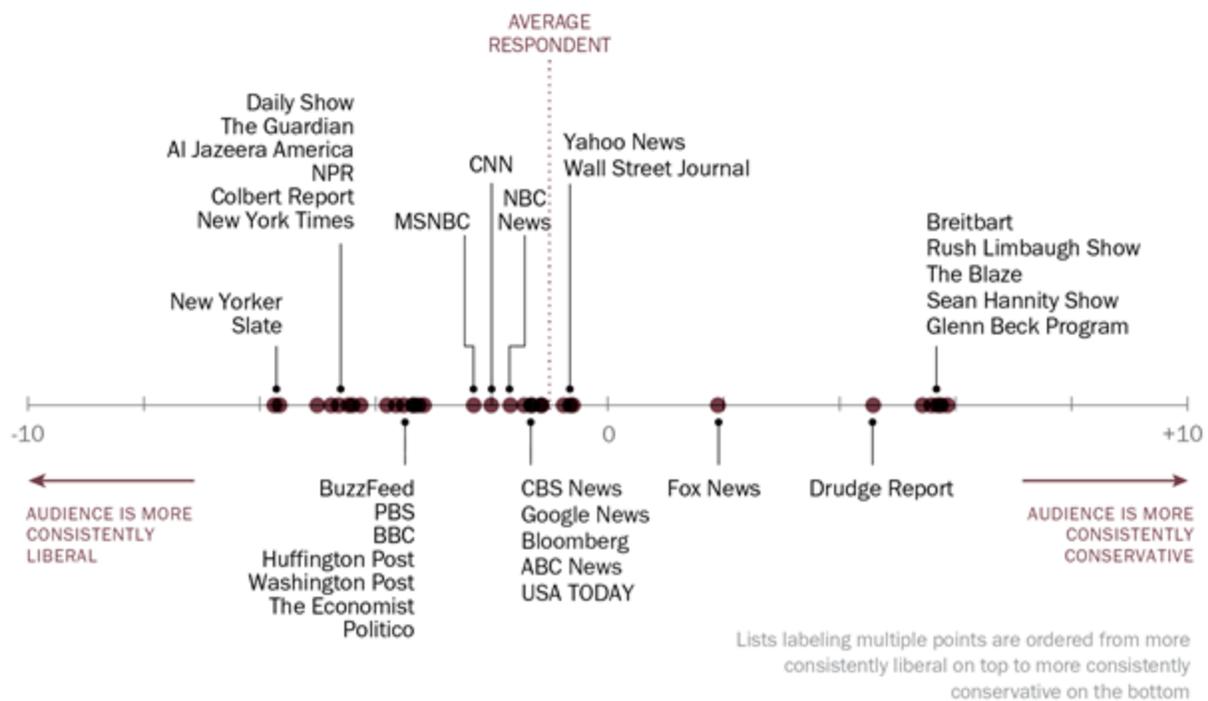
“We need a free press. We must have it. It's vital. If you want to preserve democracy as we know it, you have to have a free and many times adversarial press. And without it, we would lose so much of our individual liberties over time.” — John McCain

“Power can be very addictive. And it can be corrosive. And it's important for the media to call to account people who abuse their power.” — George W. Bush (2017)

“A central lesson of science is that to understand complex issues (or even simple ones), we must try to free our minds of dogma and to guarantee the freedom to publish, to contradict, and to experiment. Arguments from authority are unacceptable.” — Carl Sagan (1997)

Ideological Placement of Each Source's Audience

Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22. Based on all web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see About the Survey for more details.) ThinkProgress, DailyKos, Mother Jones, and The Ed Schultz Show are not included in this graphic because audience sample sizes are too small to analyze.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The CRAAP Test Worksheet

Use the following list to help you evaluate sources. Answer the questions as appropriate, and then rank each of the 5 parts from 1 to 10 (1 = unreliable, 10 = excellent). Add up the scores to give you an idea of whether you should use the resource (and whether your instructor would want you to!).

Currency: *the timeliness of the information*.....

- When was the information published or posted? _____
- Has the information been revised or updated? _____
- Is the information current or out-of-date for your topic? _____
- Are the links functional? _____

Relevance: *the importance of the information for your needs*.....

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question? _____
- Who is the intended audience? _____
- Is the information at an appropriate level? _____
- Have you looked at a variety of sources before choosing this one? _____
- Would you be comfortable using this source for a research paper? _____

Authority: *the source of the information*.....

- Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor? _____
- Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given? _____
- What are the author's credentials/organizational affiliations if given? _____
- What are the author's qualifications to write on the topic? _____
- Is there contact information, such as a publisher or e-mail address? _____
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? _____

Accuracy: *the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content*.....

- Where does the information come from? _____
- Is the information supported by evidence? _____
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed? _____
- Can you verify any of the information in another source? _____
- Does the language or tone seem biased and free of emotion? _____
- Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors? _____

Purpose: *the reason the information exists*.....

- What is the purpose of the information? _____
- Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear? _____
- Is the information fact? opinion? propaganda? _____
- Does the point of view appear objective and impartial? _____
- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases? _____

45 - 50 Excellent 40 - 44 Good 35 - 39 Average 30 - 34 Borderline Acceptable Below 30 - Unacceptable
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Total:

Adapted from Juniata College for use at South Central College

media navigation & information literacy

⚠ This is a preview of the published version of the quiz

Started: Mar 12 at 10:54am

Quiz Instructions

[Read the packet distributed in class](#) on Monday and complete this multiple-choice quiz **before our Wednesday class meeting.**

Question 1

1 pts

According to the Campus Election Engagement Project guide to detecting disinformation, the circulation of false news stories can be traced back at least as far as

- the Pleistocene
- the ancient Sumerians
- Imperial Rome
- the Tang Dynasty
- Pizzagate

Question 2

1 pts

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions do NOT list the following among their eight approaches to evaluating the reliability of sources

- Investigate sources listed (or linked) to see whether they actually support claims made in the article.

- Google the author listed to see whether they are credible, or even real.
- Trust your gut; if the article sounds "truthy" by confirming your biases, it's probably legit.
- Read past sensational headlines to study article content more closely.
- Carefully consider whether the content is actually satire, or some other kind of joke.

Question 3**1 pts**

According to the Campus Election Engagement Project, "disinformation campaigns often play on

- fears or fantasies [ad populum] to hook you in and make their stories more clickable."
- circular arguments [tautologies] to hook you in and make their stories more clickable."
- hasty generalizations to hook you in and make their stories more clickable."
- diversionary tactics [red herrings] to hook you in and make their stories more clickable."
- oversimplified [straw man] arguments to hook you in and make their stories more clickable."

Question 4**1 pts**

The Campus Election Engagement Project guide to detecting disinformation suggests that "If you post a story that you later learn is false, then

- try to distract people's attention from your mistake by bloviating at length, or by immediately posting something even more outrageous."
- go public with your discovery. Your admission can help rebuild trust with your online community."
- insult, slander, and smear careful, painstakingly researched journalism and other sound, fact-checked sources in the mainstream media as 'fake news.'"

- double down and accuse those who correct your error as being 'losers' out to get you on a 'witch hunt, very unfair.'"

- remove the post and deny ever having said or written it."

- do your best to identify some personal flaw among those who would hold you accountable. Try to discredit them as conspirators in some elaborate 'hoax' against you."

Question 5**1 pts**

Your packet includes two different charts proposing ways of plotting prominent news media/sources along two axis of quality/sophistication/reliability (y axis) and (perceived) partisan political bias (x axis). Which two sources appear in **roughly similar positions on both charts?**

- The Hill

- CNN

- USA Today

- Wall Street Journal and The Economist

Question 6**1 pts**

Your packet includes two different charts proposing ways of plotting prominent news media/sources along two axes of quality/sophistication/reliability (y axis) and (perceived) partisan political bias (x axis). Which source appears in a **significantly different position from one chart to the other?**

- Info Wars

- AP (Associated Press)

- The Hill

- BBC (British Broadcasting Company)

Question 7**1 pts**

According to the German-American Jewish political philosopher quoted in your packet, if we lose our _____, we create the circumstances that would allow totalitarianism or other forms of dictatorship to take power.

- power grid
- ever-loving minds
- automatic assault rifles
- Amazon prime benefits
- free press (1st amendment)

Question 8**1 pts**

According to the author of the Declaration of Independence and our third US president quoted in your packet, quality newspapers are more critical to sustaining the integrity of a civil society than

- a commitment to excellence is.
- the ability to compete in a global economy is.
- highways and railroads are.
- an actual government is.

Question 9**1 pts**

As quoted in the packet, our thirty-fifth US president recognizes _____ as "the only business in America specifically protected by the Constitution."

- for-profit universities
- meat packing
- Wall Street trading
- the press
- Hollywood

Question 10**1 pts**

As quoted in the packet, both our forty-third US president and US Republican Senator and Vietnam War veteran emphasize the vital role of the media in

- serving the our elected officials in confirming and accommodating the positions they take.
- entertaining and amusing the public.
- unconditionally supporting those in power.
- accurately and consistently representing the views and opinions of their advertisers other sponsors.
- holding those in power accountable for their claims and actions.

Quiz saved at 10:56am

Submit Quiz



This is a graded discussion: 5 points possible

due Oct 28, 2020



media literacy--conspiracy theories! (true or false?)

60

[English Brooks](#)

For this week's discussion, you have an opportunity to explore conspiracy theories. (w00t!)

Below you will find 18 different conspiracies, some of which are simply alleged and unfounded (false), and some of which are actually true. (Remember, a conspiracy is, by definition, "a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful." This, of course, happens all the time. But it is critical to be able to discern between *actual* conspiracies, and those *alleged* in order to propagate *disinformation*.) **Chose just one** of the proposed conspiracies listed below and respond with the following in your discussion post:

- 1.) Which conspiracy are you responding to (list letter and reference details)
- 2.) Is it **true** (actually true, documented) or **false** (unfounded, baseless, or disproven)?
- 3.) **What source(s)** are you relying on to validate your answer? (Include a link or two.) Also, **if the conspiracy theory is false, where did it come from?** (Who originated and/or has propagated it?)

In order to assure even coverage of the below options, **start by choosing a conspiracy(/theory) that hasn't yet been taken/responded to by others. Once the entire list of 18 options has been covered**, students may *then* choose to any of them and **respond substantively** to and/or elaborate on one of the previous posts. (Providing additional sources, information, that may have been missing from previous posts, etc.) This means, before posting, at least skimming through responses students have already posted, in order to see what's been covered so far.

- A)** Coronavirus was created in a laboratory in Wuhan, China.
- B)** The Chinese government invented climate change as an expensive hoax in order to make US manufacturing less competitive.
- C)** Chinese authorities are detaining hundreds of thousands of ethnic and religious minority communities (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic Muslims and Christians) in secretive internment camps which are located throughout the Xinjiang region of western China.
- D)** The tobacco industry deliberately and successfully deceived the American public for fifty years about known causal connections between smoking and cancer. The fossil fuel industry then hired

many of the same fringe scientists and advertising and marketing professionals to promote a false, manufactured notion of uncertainty among the American public about the known causal relationships between fossil fuels and climate change.

E) Barack Obama was not born in the US. (He was probably born in Kenya?)

F) In 2012 an unarmed African American boy/young man (17 years old) was pursued and then shot dead by a man named George Zimmerman. The media conspired in 2012 against George Zimmerman by using outdated photographs documenting Trayvon Martin (the victim) as younger and smaller than he actually was at the time.

G) In 1965, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) secretly planned large-scale violent demonstrations to coincide with the LDS Church's General Conference event.*

H) Beginning in 2017, the Trump administration scrubbed/removed references to climate change and clean energy from multiple U.S. government websites, including those of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Energy Department, and the State Department.*

*A quick addendum here on both G & H (above), as these weren't picked for response by anyone below:

G is absolutely false. Although many local newspapers at the time circulated and amplified this rumor, there was never any evidence for this as a planned event, which never happened. As the sources linked below discuss, it was later discovered that the rumor was started by members of the John Birch Society, whose intention it was to spread fear through the region.

<https://radiowest.kuer.org/post/riots-race-and-rumors-utah-1965>

(<https://radiowest.kuer.org/post/riots-race-and-rumors-utah-1965>)

<https://history.utah.gov/race-riot-fears-in-salt-lake-city-september-1965/>

(<https://history.utah.gov/race-riot-fears-in-salt-lake-city-september-1965/>)

H is true, as detailed in the following sources:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/two-government-websites-climate-change-survive-trump-era-n891806> (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/two-government-websites-climate-change-survive-trump-era-n891806>)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/climate/climate-change-trump.html>

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/climate/climate-change-trump.html>)

<https://time.com/5075265/epa-website-climate-change-censorship/>

(<https://time.com/5075265/epa-website-climate-change-censorship/>)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/> (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/>)

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/climate-web-pages-erased-and-obscured-under-trump/> (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/climate-web-pages-erased-and-obscured-under-trump/>)

I) Sharia (traditional Islamic religious law) is being officially established by government across several US cities and states.

- J)** In what is referred to as "redlining," from the 1930's to the 1970's, major cities across the US systematically denied various federal government services (mortgages, insurance, health care, etc.), to minority (especially urban black) neighborhood communities.
- K)** The 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting (and other mass shootings in the US) have been manufactured (coordinated, staged, and/or are not real) events with the intent of promoting gun control.
- L)** In 2016, the Obama administration wiretapped/bugged then presidential candidate Donald Trump's phones in Trump Tower.
- M)** In the 1960s, the FBI bugged Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s phones, conspiring to blackmail him.
- N)** Russia sabotaged the 2016 US presidential election by fabricating articles and other disinformation from Russian government-controlled media, and by creating thousands of false social media accounts that purported to be Americans supporting radical political groups, planning or promoting pro-Trump events, and eventually reaching millions of social media users.
- O)** The US has intervened and undermined (in many instances, through direct military action, coups d'état, etc.) democratically-elected civil governments, often then installing pro-US authoritarian ones in their place, across Latin America over the past 50+ years.
- P)** The US postal service renders our electoral process vulnerable to widespread mail-in voter fraud and is an unreliable means for voting.
- Q)** A group of Satan-worshiping pedophiles (including Oprah, Tom Hanks, Bill Clinton, Bill Gates and Ellen DeGeneres) is running a global child sex-trafficking ring. (QAnon)
- R)** Osama Bin Laden is still alive. (The man killed in the 2011 Navy Seal raid wasn't him but was actually a body double.)

As you investigate your chosen option, remember the resources discussed in the [disinformation packet distributed in class](#) last week:

- [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org/) [\(https://www.factcheck.org/\)](https://www.factcheck.org/)'s [debunking of false stories](https://www.factcheck.org/fake-news/) [\(https://www.factcheck.org/fake-news/\)](https://www.factcheck.org/fake-news/) on Facebook and other platforms.
- Other credible professional fact-checking sites, such as [Politifact](https://www.politifact.com/) [\(https://www.politifact.com/\)](https://www.politifact.com/), [Snopes](https://www.snopes.com/) [\(https://www.snopes.com/\)](https://www.snopes.com/), and [Truthorfiction.com](http://truthorfiction.com/) [\(http://truthorfiction.com/\)](http://truthorfiction.com/).
- California University of Pennsylvania's [comprehensive site on Fake News](https://library.calu.edu/fakenews/define/) [\(https://library.calu.edu/fakenews/define/\)](https://library.calu.edu/fakenews/define/).
- Arizona State University's [tools to identify fake images and videos](https://newscollab.org/2019/02/04/9-tools-to-identify-fake-images-and-videos/) [\(https://newscollab.org/2019/02/04/9-tools-to-identify-fake-images-and-videos/\)](https://newscollab.org/2019/02/04/9-tools-to-identify-fake-images-and-videos/).

- The *Washington Post*'s [guide to manipulated video](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/politics/fact-checker/manipulated-video-guide/?itid=lk_inline_manual_8&itid=lk_inline_manual_5&noredirect=on) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/politics/fact-checker/manipulated-video-guide/?itid=lk_inline_manual_8&itid=lk_inline_manual_5&noredirect=on).
- The Poynter Institute's articles on [online fact-checking](https://www.poynter.org/media-news/fact-checking/) (<https://www.poynter.org/media-news/fact-checking/>).
- <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/> (<https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/>).
- <https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news> (<https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news>).

Of course, you're welcome to use other **reliable sources** to support your answers here, even including Wikipedia, but be sure to apply the CRAAP test from the handout we discussed in class last week. (Of course, you don't need to do all the math/counting listed there, just be sure your source passes basic standards of relevance and legitimacy.)

