

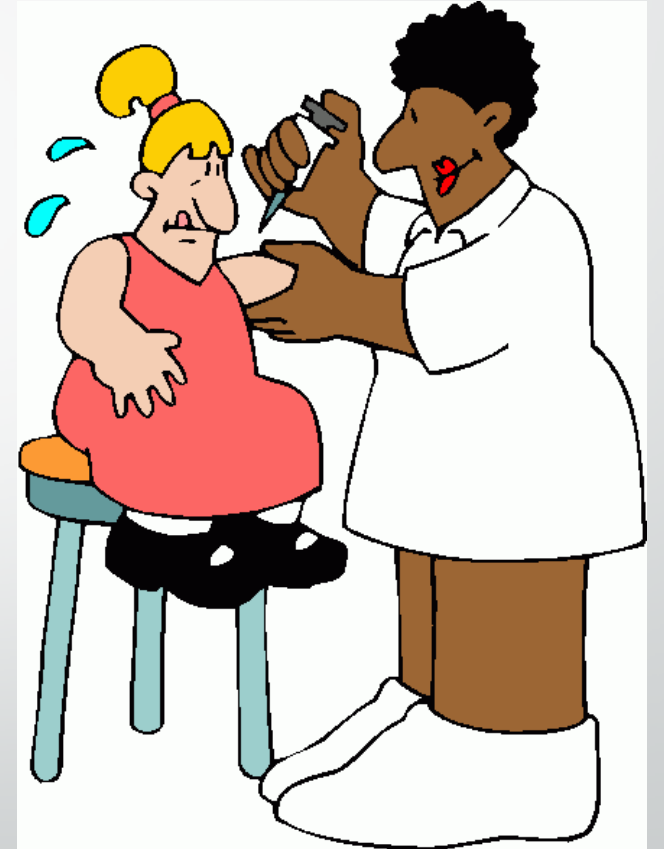


# Combating Election Disinformation

Presented by Andy Katell  
Oct. 6, 2020

# Agenda

- Welcome and Introduction
- The problem & why it's important
- Helpful tools
- Followup
- Q&A



*Inoculating against  
disinformation*



Since 1920, the League of Women Voters has encouraged informed participation in government -- increasing understanding of public policy issues through education and advocacy.

The League works to register and provide voters with election information through voter guides, candidate forums and debates. The League does not support or oppose candidates or political parties. The League is an activist, grassroots organization whose members believe that voters should play a critical role in their democracy.

Membership is open to anyone 16 years of age or older.

# Infodemic

“We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an **infodemic**. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous.”

--Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

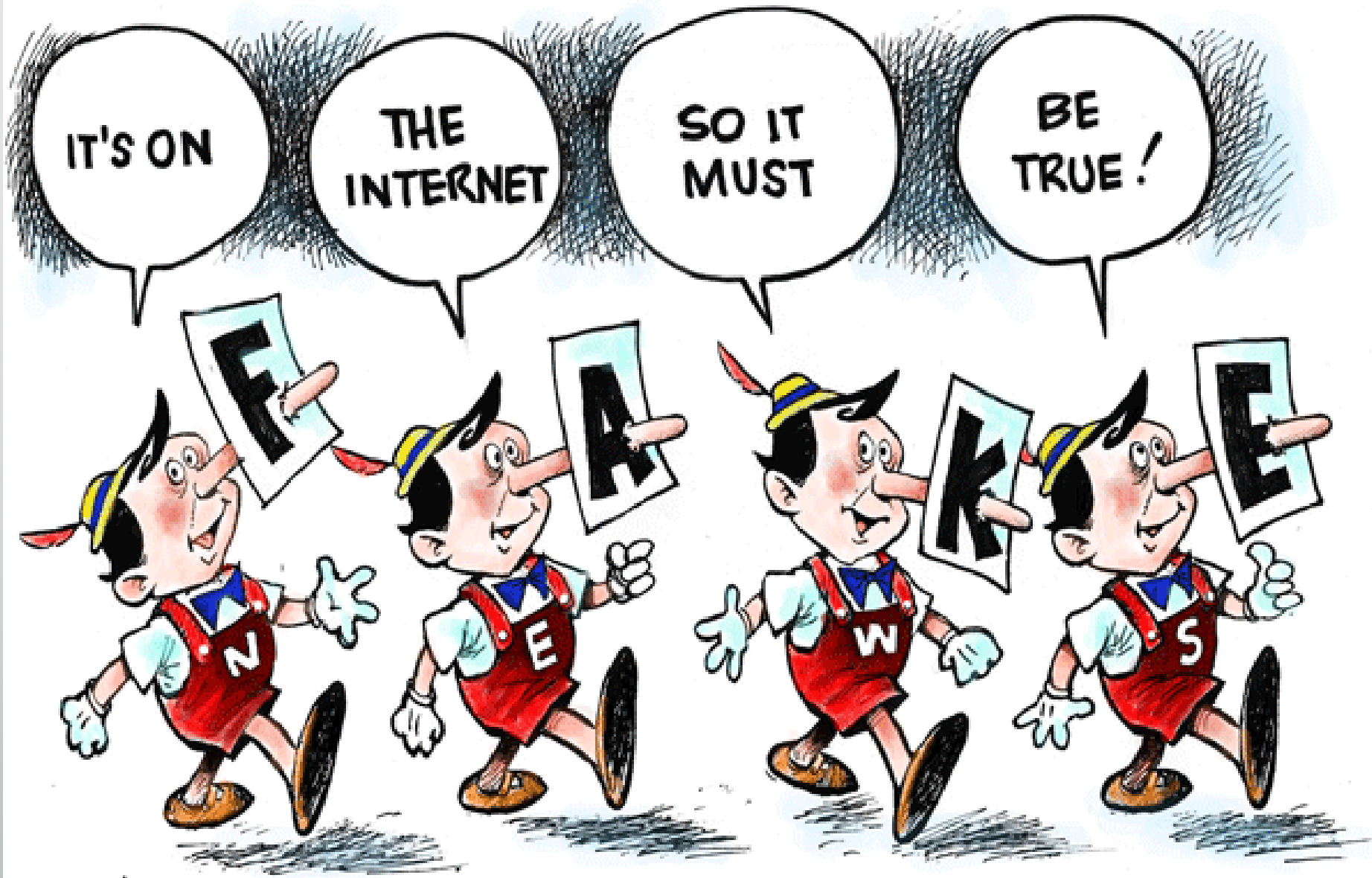
World Health Organization Director-General

Munich Security Conference, February 15, 2020

# What is Disinformation?

False information deliberately and often covertly spread, to influence public opinion, obscure the truth, deceive



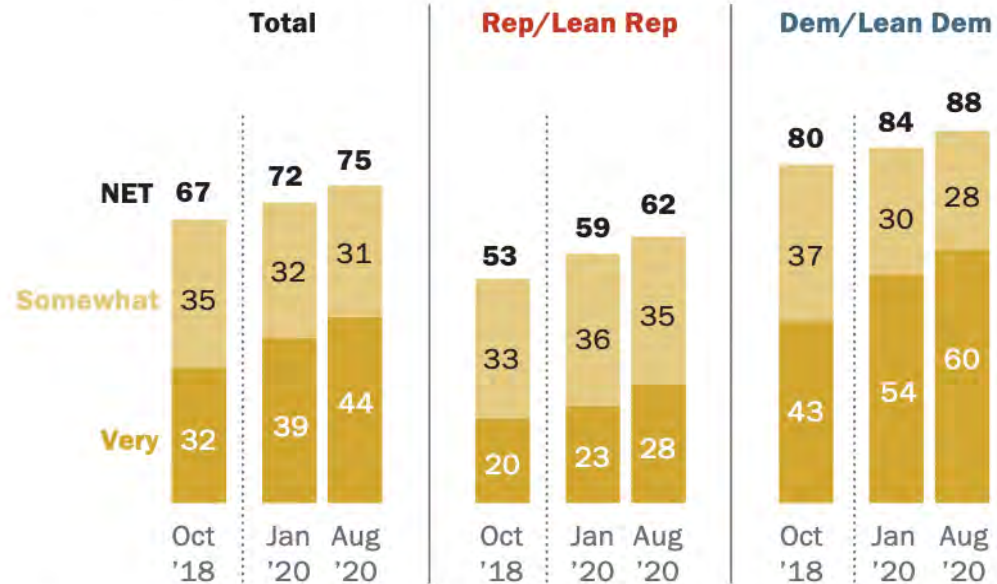


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# Foreign Interference in Elections

## Growing shares in both parties expect foreign governments to attempt to influence 2020 election

% who say it is \_\_\_ likely that Russia or other foreign governments will attempt to influence the U.S. presidential election this November



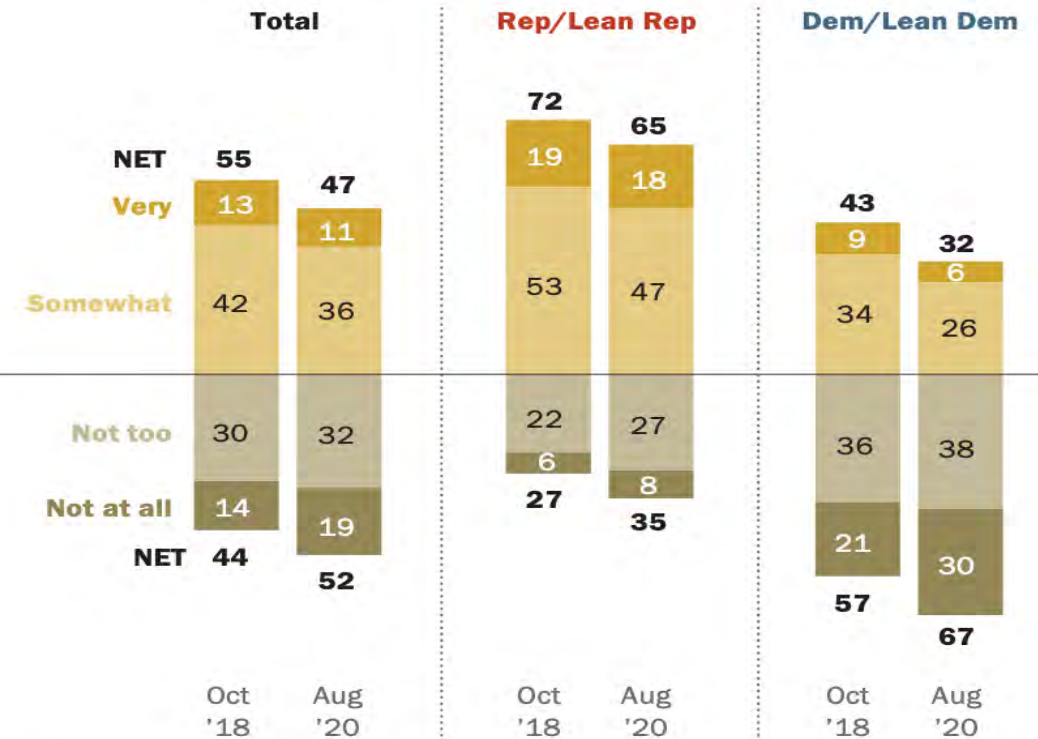
Note: In October 2018, question asked about the "U.S. elections in November."

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Only about half of Americans are confident the federal government is making 'serious efforts' to protect election systems from hacking and other threats

% who say they are \_\_\_ confident that the federal government is making serious efforts to protect election systems in the U.S. from hacking and other technological threats



Note: No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# The 4 D's of Propaganda

From analyst Ben Nimmo

## 1. DISMISS

IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT YOUR CRITICS SAY, INSULT THEM.



## 2. DISTORT

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE FACTS, TWIST THEM.



## 3. DISTRACT

IF YOU'RE ACCUSED OF SOMETHING, ACCUSE SOMEONE ELSE OF THE SAME THING.



## 4. DISMAY

IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT SOMEONE ELSE IS PLANNING, TRY TO SCARE THEM OFF.





# Foreign Threats - US National Counterintelligence & Security Center, Aug. 7, 2020

- **CHINA** prefers that President Trump – whom Beijing sees as unpredictable – does not win reelection. China has been expanding its influence efforts ahead of November 2020 to shape the policy environment in the US, pressure political figures it views as opposed to China's interests, and deflect/counter criticism.
- **RUSSIA** is using ... measures to primarily denigrate former VP Biden and ... an anti-Russia "establishment." This is consistent with Moscow's public criticism of him when he was VP for ... the Obama Administration's policies on Ukraine and its support for the anti-Putin opposition inside Russia... Kremlin-linked actors seek to boost President Trump's candidacy on social media and Russian TV.
- **IRAN** seeks to undermine US democratic institutions, President Trump, and to divide the country...driven by a perception that President Trump's reelection would result in a continuation of US pressure on Iran ... to foment regime change.

# Pen America's Truth on the Ballot Report

- **Russian agents of disinformation** ... focus is not merely on influencing American electoral processes, but on stoking political polarization and sowing distrust in democracy.
- **Increase in ... domestic disinformation**, with American political actors utilizing fraudulent news and disinformation against political opponents.
- **Danger that fraudulent news may become the new normal**: a distasteful, but not disqualifying political tactic.
- Technology companies have made significant efforts to reduce the spread of fraudulent news ... **many efforts remain insufficient, while others have caused new problems.**

# More from Pen America's Truth on the Ballot Report

- **Micro-targeting capabilities on the platforms have weaponized disinformation**, so that what might once have passed muster as simply a hard-edged campaign message in the public arena can now move with stealthy, laser-like efficiency to reach sub-segments of voters while remaining invisible to the wider public or opposing campaigns.
- **While both human and automated content review are subject to bias, some combination of the two is likely the most reasonable approach.**
- Fraudulent news and disinformation in the 2018 midterm election cycle tended to have one of a few objectives: **attacking individual candidates, dampening turnout or stoking distrust in the voting process, or amplifying a desired narrative about a particular political event.**
- **Empowered consumers of information are society's best defense against the scourge of fraudulent news** and attempts to undermine the role of truth.

# What Are Disinformers Trying to Achieve?

- Bombard the audience with falsehoods, repeatedly
- Fool/Trick us
- Complicate the issue
- Create chaos and confusion
- Sow doubt
- Disrupt



*"I don't care anymore."*

*"Whatever."*

*"I'm moving on."*

# Issues Rife with Disinformation

- Mail-in voting - Of 13.4 million mentions on social media; news on TV print and online; blogs and online forums January-September, ~1/4 most likely were misinformation, media insights firm Zignal Labs said
- COVID-19
- Immigration
- Guns
- Racism/police brutality
- Climate change
- Abortion

**Everything has become politicized**



# Our Challenges

## Challenge 1

Information overload

## Challenge 2

Speed vs. accuracy

## Challenge 3

The blurring of the lines

## Challenge 4

Overcoming our own bias

# The First Amendment Empowers **YOU!**





# YOU

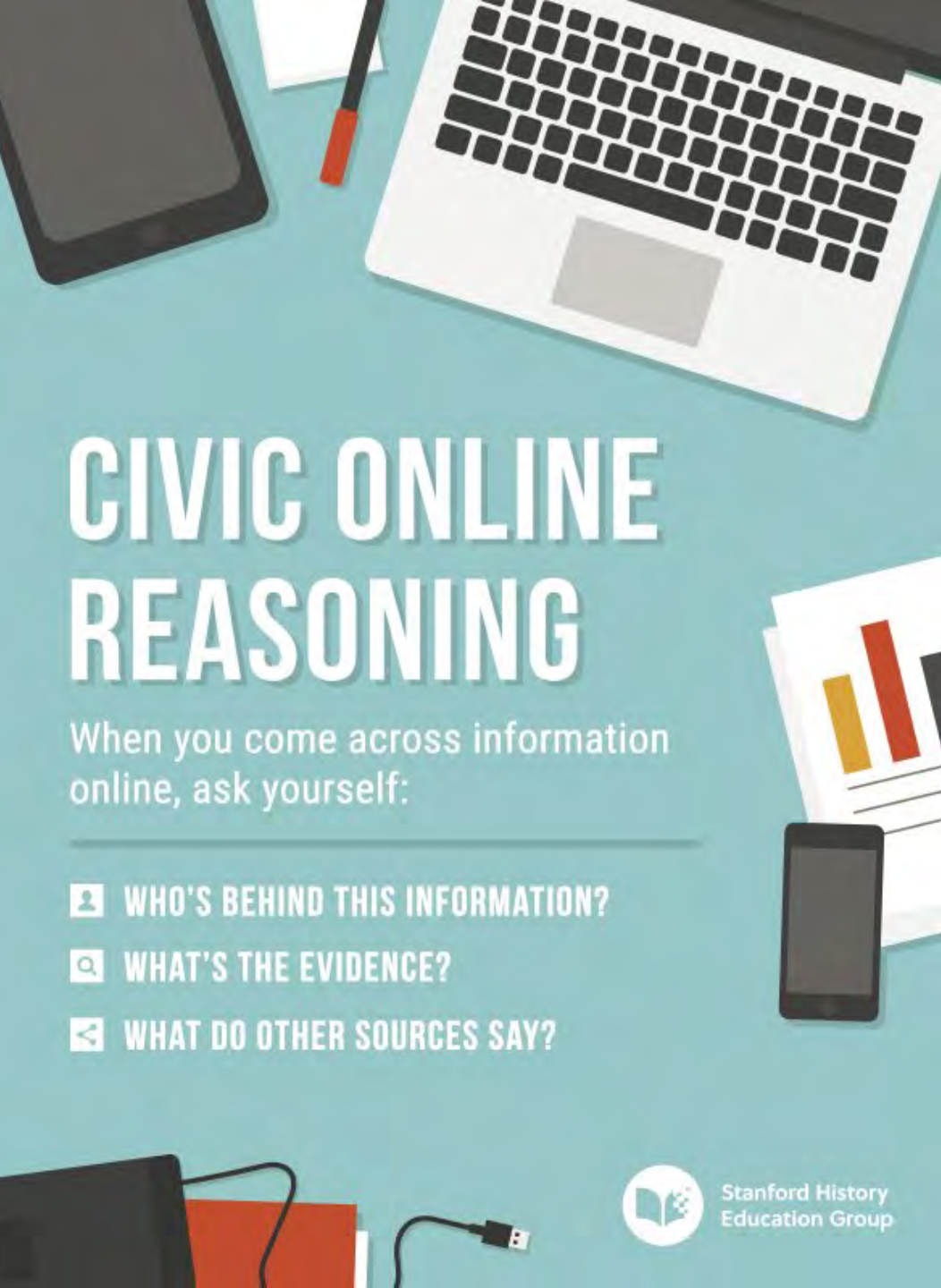
are in charge of determining what's reliable.



# News Literacy



Educate yourself and think critically to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports



# CIVIC ONLINE REASONING

When you come across information online, ask yourself:

- 1. WHO'S BEHIND THIS INFORMATION?
- 2. WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?
- 3. WHAT DO OTHER SOURCES SAY?

## Three Questions

1. Who's behind the information?
2. What evidence?
3. What do other outlets say?



# Fighting Back

Tools to Differentiate Factual from Fake News

# How to Tell: *Fact or Fake?*



- **Pause** before sharing
- **Question** content always, especially info that appeals to fear, anger or partisan extremes on either side
- **Check** website address
  - Beware of .com extensions, e.g. .co, .ru, .cn
- **Read** beyond headline, to full story, before liking or sharing
- **Beware of** politically framed content

# How to Tell: *Fact or Fake*

- **Research** whether other media outlets are reporting this
- **Pay attention** to people mentioned & quoted
- **Inspect** images and logos
- **Verify content and accounts** by checking sources, authors & identities
- **Read** “About Us” section



# Election Interference Techniques

- Leak hacked/stolen material
- Manipulate, e.g. put words in people's mouths, literally
- Create fictitious groups, people, "news" organizations and events
- Infiltrate existing communities and groups
- Create click-bait, for financial gain
- Penetrate registration and election systems
- Create/spread conspiracy theories

# Social Media Trickery



- Few posts, many followers
- Many followers, few likes & comments
- Following unusually high No. of accounts

# Social Media Disinformation Techniques

- **Sock Puppet:** Fake accounts posing as people to influence, disrupt or push news
- **Troll:** Person posing as identity, or sock puppet
- **Troll Farm:** Group of trolls
- **Bot:** Software automating likes, shares & comments
- **Botnet:** Network of bots, often thousands
- **Microtargeting:** Customized, precisely directed messages





# What are Tech Companies Doing?

- **Facebook** links elected officials' and candidates' posts to voting info from [usa.gov/voting](https://www.usa.gov/voting).
- **Facebook** to prohibit new political ads 7 days before election, remove content that might suppress voting and label posts suggesting that casting a ballot risks contracting covid-19. Labels on victory claims before final results will direct users to authoritative info.
- **YouTube** will provide info from third-party fact-checkers atop some search results, and videos on voting by mail will direct viewers to the Bipartisan Policy Center's "[Voting by Mail Counts](#)."
- **Twitter** warns about "synthetic and manipulated media" and labels or removes "false or misleading information intended to undermine public confidence in an election."



**Twitter Safety** ✓  
@TwitterSafety



We placed a public interest notice on this Tweet for violating our Civic Integrity Policy for making misleading health claims that could potentially dissuade people from participation in voting.



**Donald J. Trump** ✓ @realDonaldTrump

So now the Democrats are using Mail Drop Boxes, which are a voter security disaster. Among other things, they make it possible for a person to vote multiple times. Also, who controls them, are they placed in Republican or Democrat areas? They are not Covid sanitized. A big fraud!

12:44 PM · Aug 23, 2020



5.4K




See the latest COVID-19 information on Twitter

# Disinformation Video & Images



Fake news can also come in the form of edited and manipulated videos and still images, for example video clips taken out of context.

# Trump Video Taken Out of Context



Altered Video

Independent fact-checkers say this video could mislead people.

See Why

See Post

justice4lols • Follow

justice4lols I am... speechless. 21h

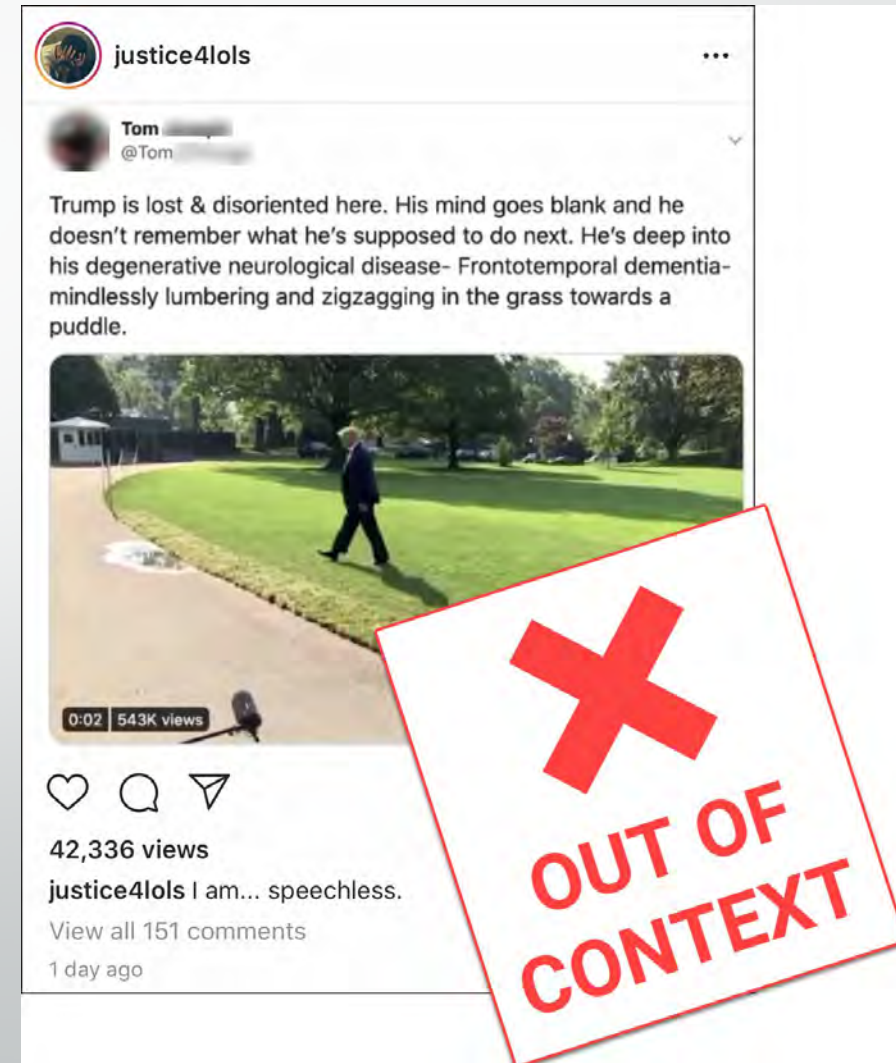
kylebastien What does it say about America that he has a better than 50% chance to get reelected and at what point do you need to stop calling yourselves the "gReAtEsT cOuNtRy On eArTh"? 21h 82 likes Reply

Hide replies

ic0lby @kylebastien to be

41,993 views 21 HOURS AGO


Add a comment... Post



justice4lols

Tom @Tom

Trump is lost & disoriented here. His mind goes blank and he doesn't remember what he's supposed to do next. He's deep into his degenerative neurological disease- Frontotemporal dementia- mindlessly lumbering and zigzagging in the grass towards a puddle.



0:02 543K views

42,336 views


justice4lols I am... speechless.

View all 151 comments

1 day ago

**OUT OF CONTEXT**

# Twitter Flagging Out-of-Context Video



The image shows a screenshot of a video player. The main video frame displays Joe Biden speaking at a podium. Behind him are four American flags. The podium has a blue sign with the text "Text UNITED to 30330" and "BIDEN HARRIS" in large white letters. In the top right corner of the video frame, the "BIDEN HARRIS" logo is visible. A small inset video in the bottom right corner shows a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a black shirt, gesturing with his hands as if speaking. At the bottom of the video player, there is a dark blue banner with the text "JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN TEXT UNITED TO 30330" repeated five times.

# RNC Video Allegedly Showing Rioters In “Biden’s America”

- Watch video at 4:08  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2glnyGI5y8&feature=youtu.be&t=241>
- Copy screenshot below, captured from video, onto clipboard and paste into reverse image search box on next slide



# Reverse Image Search

<https://tineye.com>

Search by image and find where that image appears online

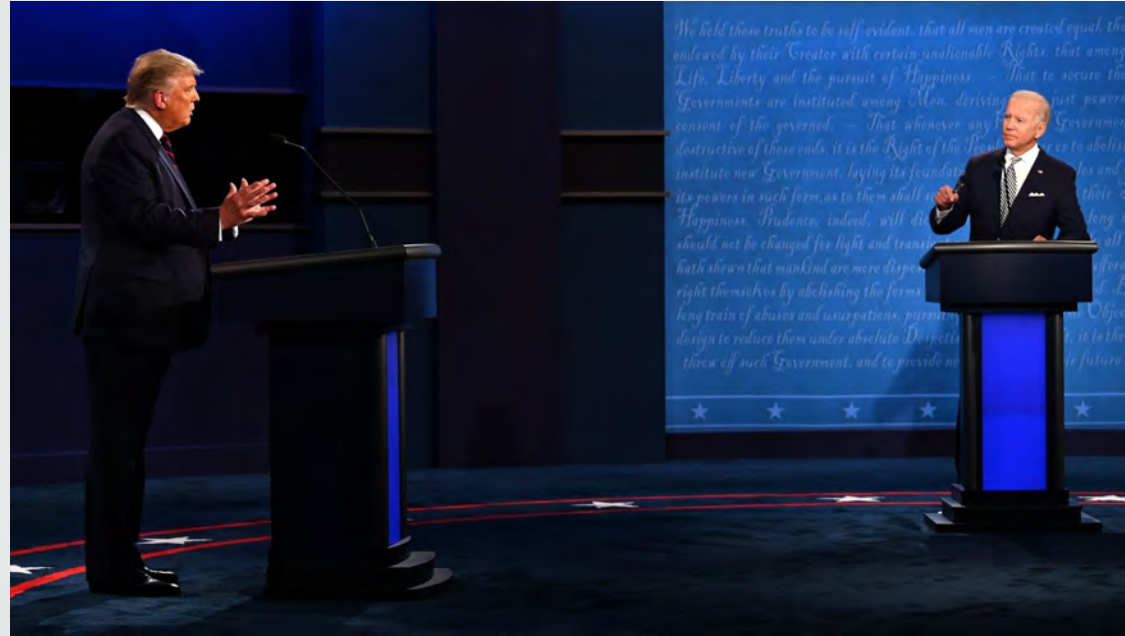


Upload, paste or enter Image URL



# Presidential Debate Fact-Checking

## Cleveland, Sept. 29, 2020



**POLITIFACT**

The Poynter Institute

**AP**

# What Can You Do?

- Stay positive – focus on policy proposals more than criticism
- Limit your fear/anger
- Take and maintain control
- Think critically
- Maintain a healthy news diet
- Don't pay *too* much attention – “info distancing”

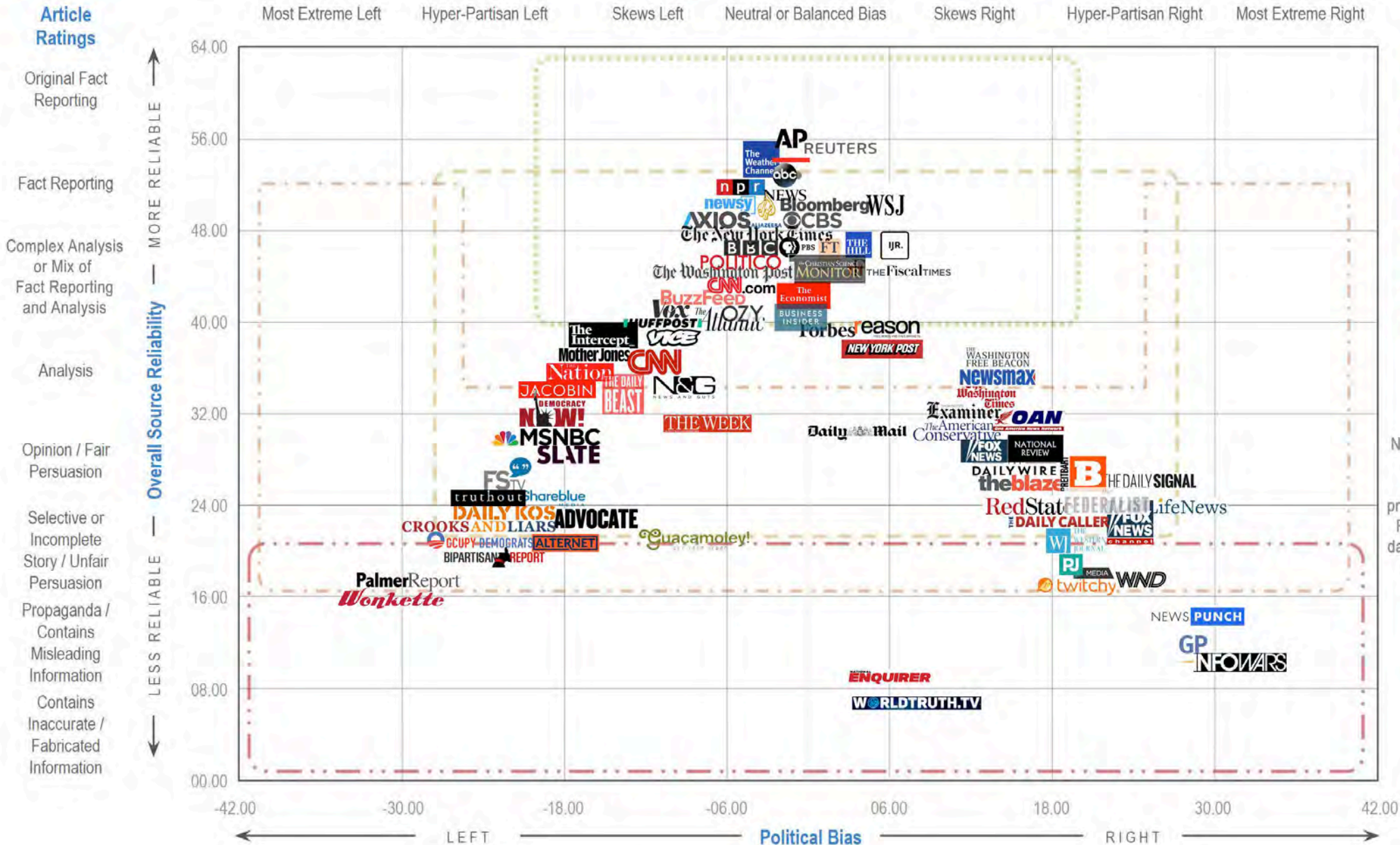


# Digital Fact-Checking Resources

- **PolitiFact.com – Truth-O-Meter:** <http://www.politifact.com>
- **Snopes.com:** <https://www.snopes.com/news>
- **FactCheck.org:** <https://www.factcheck.org>
- **Washington Post Fact Checker:**  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/?utm\\_term=.d06f7354ff5b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/?utm_term=.d06f7354ff5b)
- **Tin Eye reverse image checker:** <https://tineye.com/>
- **Media Bias/Fact Check News:** <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com>

# The Media Bias Chart

Version 5.1

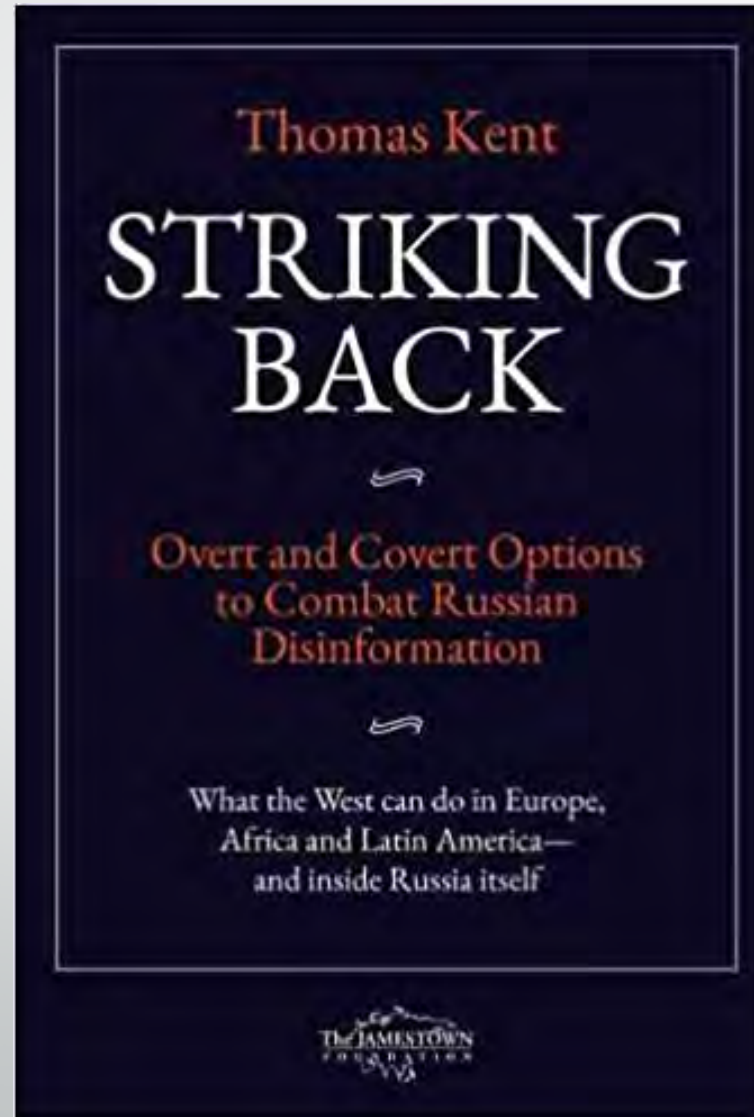


## Type Key

- Most Reliable for News
- Reliable for news, but high in analysis / opinion content
- Some reliability issues and / or extremism
- Serious reliability issues and / or extremism

Note: Some sources moved up to +/- 4 scoring units in relation to their precise scores for viewability. For precise scores, article data, and more sources, see the interactive version at [adfontesmedia.com](http://adfontesmedia.com)

# Buy-Read This New Book



# Presidential, Congressional, State and Local Election November 3 - Deadlines

DATE	ACTIONS
<b>October 9</b>	Last day to postmark voter registration form
<b>October 9</b>	Last day to register to vote in person at Westchester Board of Elections office
<b>October 27</b>	Last day to postmark application for absentee ballot by mail
<b>November 2</b>	Last day to apply in person for absentee ballot
<b>November 3</b>	Last day to postmark absentee ballot
<b>November 3</b>	Last day to deliver absentee ballot in person at Westchester Board of Elections

# League of Women Voters – Followup

- Stay current on issues
- Share your views with elected officials
- Vote in **EVERY ELECTION**
- Join the League
- Find this presentation, other materials & schedule of virtual workshops on voter registration and ways to vote at:  
[www.lwww.org](http://www.lwww.org)





Find this presentation, other materials & schedule of additional webinars at: [www.lwww.org](http://www.lwww.org)