Rumors, Truths, and Reality: Political Misinformation in the Modern Day

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Do You Believe that Barack Obama was Born in the United States of America?

- Yes: 55%
- No: 27%
- Not Sure: 19%
REPORT: THREE MILLION VOTES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAST BY ILLEGAL ALIENS

Trump may have won popular vote

Paul Joseph Watson | Infowars.com - NOVEMBER 14, 2016

Three million votes in the U.S. presidential election were cast by illegal aliens, according to Greg Phillips of the VoteFraud.org organization.

If true, this would mean that Donald Trump still won the contest despite the popular vote showing Hillary Clinton as the victor.
Two central questions:

• How is it that reasonable people can come to believe bizarre stories about our political system and the politicians who run it?
• How can we correct false information?
Why Do People Endorse Rumors?

- Do people really believe rumors?
- The structure of false beliefs
  - General tendency for conspiratorial thinking
  - The power of partisanship
Are These Fringe Beliefs?

Acceptance

Not Sure

Mean=1.8

Mean=1.7
Rumors are sticky

Direct contradiction?
- Intuitive: Fiction vs. fact
- But doesn’t always work
- Corrections fade over time

Source credibility
- “Non-political” isn’t the most effective
- In a partisan time, is anything non-political?

Accuracy Nudges
The Lies that Bind: Elite Cues and Moral Approval of Political Misinformation

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An Era of Post-Truth Politics?

Welcome to the post-truth presidency

Oxford English Dictionary Names ‘Post-Truth’ Word of the Year

The importance of fact-checking in a post-truth world

The Age of Post-Truth Politics

Facts are futile in an era of post-truth politics

No, We’re Not Living in a Post-Fact World
The Rise of Fact-Checking

Source: Duke Reporters’ Lab (2020)
What are the consequences of living in a world where political misinformation – and corrections of this misinformation – are prevalent?
Experimental Design

Donald Trump's PolitiFact scorecard

Fact-Checking Record: Sen. Wilson (Republican)
Perceived Message Quality
Moral Approval of Elite Misinformation

![Graph showing moral approval of elite misinformation](image)

- **Measure of Moral Approval of Elite Misinformation**
  - **Condition**: Control, Opposing Partisan
  - **Five-Item Ethicality Scale**
  - **Standalone Measure**
The Healthy Elections Initiative

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Explore the Healthy Elections Project through our major focus areas and newest updates:

**Healthy Polling Places**
New: Using human-centered design to make the elections safer and more accessible

**Designing Healthy Polling and Voting**
Using human-centered design to make the elections safer and more accessible for voters and election administrators.

**Data**
New: Map visualization for election data
## Activities

### Student-Led Research
- State research
- Substantive topics
- Modelling assistance

### Support of Partners
- Center for Inclusive Democracy (USC)
- URI Votes
- Yale + Columbia Universities
- Bipartisan Policy Center
- Center for Election Innovation and Research
- Center for Technology & Civic Life
- Democracy Works
- The Elections Group, LLC

### Opinion Leadership
- Op-eds
- Media appearances
- Public engagements
- Cooperation with other fact-based players
What’s Next for Healthy Elections?

+ Focus now is on the unfolding election
  - Monitoring mail ballots (student-led research)
  - Monitoring poll worker recruitment (partner work)
  - Updating state-centered reports

+ Preparing for the counting process
  - Assembling data and expertise for counting period
  - Standing up an “election science boiler room” to share information across universities on Election Day and beyond

+ Going out of business once the victor is declared
+ Then MEDSL takes over