THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISINFORMATION: A SYMPOSIUM ON MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Washington, D.C.
Thursday, May 31, 2017

Welcome Remarks:

E.J. DIONNE JR.
W. Averell Harriman Chair and Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

JASON RHODY
Program Director, Media & Democracy, Social Science Research Council

Status of Facts/The Persistence Of Misinformation

MARK STENCEL, Moderator
Co-Director, Duke's Reporters' Lab, Duke University

JOHN BULLOCK
Associate Professor, Northwestern University

LORI ROBERTSON
Managing Editor, FactCheck.org

MATTHEW JORDAN
Associate Professor, Pennsylvania State University

The Spread of Misinformation

JOHN SIDES, Moderator
Associate Professor of Political Science, George Washington University

PABLO BARBERA
Assistant Professor,
London School of Economics

AMBER BOYDSTUN
Associate Professor, University of California Davis

ROB FARIS
Research Director, Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University

Correcting (Or Managing) Misinformation

MEREDITH BROUSSARD, Moderator
Assistant Professor, New York University

ALEXANDER COPPOCK
Assistant Professor, Yale University

MAGDALENA WOJCIESZAK
Associate Professor, University of California Davis

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RHODY: Good morning, everyone. I'm very pleased to welcome you, and those who will be watching on C-SPAN to this morning's symposium.

My name is Jason Rhody, and I'm a program director at the Social Science Research Council. I direct the Digital Culture Program, the Social Data Initiative. And co-direct with Kris-Stella Trump, who is in the audience here, the Media & Democracy Program, which is the program sponsoring this morning's activities.

We are privileged to be joining our friends and collaborators here at the Brookings Institution to host this event, “The Consequences of Misinformation,” a symposium on the history circulation and management of misinformation, which are untruths circulated without the intent to deceive, and disinformation which are untruths circulated intended to deceive.

We are grateful to two members of the SSRC Media & Democracy Advisory Board, who helped us shaped today's event and are active participants in it.

E.J. Dionne, a senior fellow in Governance Studies here at the Brookings Institution, and of course a regular columnist with The Washington Post, and he also serves as

co-director of the Media & Democracy Advisory Board.

And John Sides, who is associate professor of political science at George Washington University, and founder and contributor to the Monkey Cage, also part of The Washington Post.

We are also grateful to the SSRC and Brookings Institution Staff who helped to put this event together, and E.J. will be naming them later in his remarks.

And finally, we are grateful, always, to the funders who help make all of this possible. To John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

So there maybe some of you who are less familiar with Social Science Research Council, we are an independent, non-profit international organization founded in 1923, our mission is to foster innovative social science research, nurture new generations of social scientists. We've supported several thousand fellows in our 95-year history, and through our work with universities, policymakers, foundations and think tanks, we seek to mobilize social science on important critical issues for the public good.

These issues include our work in the 1930s, for example, and forming the Development of Social Security under the Roosevelt administration, and now, at this moment, when technology has influenced core institutions and practices, in media and democracy.

So in 2017 the SSRC created this Media & Democracy Program to encourage academic research, practitioner reflection and public debate on all aspects, and the close relationship between media, technology and democracy.

Just last month we organized a conference at Stanford University on the topic of social media and democracy, assessing the state of the field and identifying unexplored questions, and the report from that meeting which aim to scope out a future research agenda, will be made public in the coming weeks. We encourage you to look at it.

We also just launched a new website called the Media and Democracy Network, which aggregates and curates academic research, news, opinion and events all

around on these topics, and I encourage you to visit at mdn.ssrc.org. It will help you get a handle on the wide scope of conversation around this topic.

So, investigating the causes, the sources and the spread of mis- and disinformation has been essential to all of this work, and led us to put together this symposium today.

The spread of false information has historical roots of course in sensational journalism, state propaganda, political disagreement, foreign espionage, and partisan debates, a collection of approaches far richer than suggested by the currently popular phrase "fake news".

This symposium is informed by social scientific and journalistic perspectives, on the most effective means of understanding, encountering false information even as it explores the challenges in doing so.

What is the historical context of mis- and disinformation? How is it exploited by political actors both within and outside of a state? How do existing divisions and increased polarization create the conditions for mis- and disinformation to be more effective? In what ways do technologies incentivize or disrupt the spread of mis- and disinformation?

Now, often we might open a symposium like this with questions like: why this topic, or why now, but we really only need to look at the latest headlines (laughter) to see that we have a cultural problem with mis- and disinformation, made ever more complicated by a changing media environment, distorted economic incentives, and challenges like increased political polarization.

And the role of social media technology companies and the platforms they provide are essential agents, whether willingly or unwillingly in the modern spread of mis- and disinformation. You may have seen the consortium of bipartisan foundations as partnering with the Social Science Research Council to structure and manage the process, through which scholars and researchers will gain access to Facebook data, social data collected by Facebook.

And one of these areas of anticipated research is in disinformation. You could find out more this social data initiative, our role and our perspective at our website at SSRC.org.

So the integrity of knowledge, its circulation and use is also at the center of another SSRC initiative, a taskforce created last year called To Secure Knowledge, which is co-chaired by Bernadette Gray-Little, Chancellor Emerita of University of Kansas; and Ira Katznelson, the Professor of Political Science and History at Columbia University, and Past President of SSRC.

The taskforce was inspired by our conviction that both science and democracy depend on open systems to pursue knowledge or norms that foster confidence and trust. The taskforce has looked at a number of these aspects regarding securing knowledge, and we anticipate releasing findings in mid-September.

So, these are just a few of the reasons that we were eager to bring together the wonderful speakers for this morning's event, who will share their insights and prompt us all to reflect on histories, context and solutions to the spread of mis- and disinformation, with an ambition that such knowledge will help us edge toward a more just and democratic society.

So, following this, E.J. Dionne will offer his own opening remarks, and some contextual framing, and thanking, again, people who help put this together.

Then we have three sessions, one hour each, in which three participants will offer a snapshot based on their research and background knowledge on the session theme, about seven or nine minutes each. From any, who are watching this in the future from afar, please visit the Brookings or SSRC websites for an agenda and biographical information.

But quickly to summarize, the three panels are: The Status of Facts and the Persistence of Information, The Spread of Misinformation, and Correcting or Managing Misinformation.

For each session we also have a respondent who will give a few words, and then quickly turn to questions to offer to the panel so that they might reflect on those. And finally we'll open up each panel to the audience for questions. We do ask that you keep your

questions brief, and we have people with microphones all around, so that you can speak, and the folks who are watching from afar can hear you, and what you're saying.

And just to move quickly and efficiently, we'll only begin each session by just identify panelists by their name and affiliation. And as I said, the full biographies are available online.

So, welcome. Thank you to Brookings. We are eager to get started. And E.J.?

MR. DIONNE: Yes.

MR. RHODY: Thanks very much. (Applause)

MR. DIONNE: When everybody laughed when my colleague said, well, we don't need any explanation of why we are here today. I thought, well, maybe I can dispense with my whole talk (laughter), but I thought I'd give it any way.

I'm E.J. Dionne. I'm a senior fellow here at Brookings. And I want to welcome everyone, quite literally, as Joe Biden might say, in the name truth, justice and the American way.

Now, for those of you old enough remember the reference, a good media environment means that you shouldn't have to be Superman to be able to find the truth, or at least the best approximation of it that we can have.

And we have assembled some extraordinary people here today to discuss the spread of misinformation, whether it is a bigger danger today than it is in the past, and what impact it can have on the media, democratic deliberation and free elections.

Thank yous are often left till the end of events, but I want to begin with them today, because so many people put it in so much work, so we could have this discussion today.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the Media & Democracy Program at the SSRC, particularly Jason Rhody, Kris-Stella Trump, no, she is not related to another Trump we might think of; Penny Webber; and John Sides, just a brilliant scholar, for making this event possible, and for spearheading such important research. If I may also, thanks to Ira Katznelson

for all of his early and essential work on this project.

Thank you to all our distinguished panelists who are among the most prominent thinkers on these topics in both academia and journalism. And thank you for the Brookings staff, Adam Waters, Adam I think this is your last Brookings event that you will organize, unless I'm forgetting something on our schedule. Boy, will I miss you.

Adam Waters, Leti Davalos, and Liz Sablich, who have done so much work here, and thanks to everybody for being here.

For nearly a century the SSRC has supported social scientists producing innovative research in the public interest. As Jason mentioned, the Media & Democracy Program was launched in 2017 to bring together a diverse group of experts to examine how transformations in media, technology and politics affect each other, and how policy might make those interactions more beneficial to democracy and the common good.

As a journalist, but at least as important as a citizen who wants democracy to prosper in our country and around the world, I was grateful for the SSRC's invitation to become involved in this endeavor.

The work that's already been completed, is a demonstration of the vibrancy of the debate over the proper responsibilities of the media and democracy and the ways in which new technologies can make enormous contributions to this work, while also creating large, new problems.

Technology is like that, it's neutral, it all depends on how we use it, and how we harness it. Today's program will, I'm sure, spark a similarly enlightening and thought-provoking conversation.

Our topic this morning is the consequences of misinformation, and over the course of the three panels you've already heard about, we will -- I won't give you a preview because you already had it, but we are going to sort of pay particular attention, I think it's fair to say, to how we can manage and correct misinformation and falsehood going forward.

We are hoping to spark a wider dialog and to deepen the synergies between

academic research and journalistic best practices. As I alluded to earlier, to say this is a timely topic is, if you will forgive me, not fake news.

When French President Emmanuel Macron visited the United States last month, he spoke plainly about the dangers of dis- and misinformation to liberal democracy. To protect our democracies, he said, "We have to fight against the ever-growing virus of fake news which exposes our people to irrational fear and imaginary risks, without reason, without truth, there is no real democracy, because democracy is about true choices, and rational decisions. The corruption of information is an attempt to corrode the very spirit of our democracies."

In his powerful book "On Tyranny," the historian Timothy Snyder offers 20 lessons from 20th century history, about the present era. Lesson 10 was once basic and essential, "Belief in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom," Snyder insisted. "If nothing is true then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. You submit to tyranny when you announce the difference between what you want to hear, and what is actually the case."

Today, the fight for truth may be the most important struggle of all, and the journey to alternative facts and to what has been called the post-truth world has a long history. This is not the first we have struggled with these questions.

We should also, by the way, not pretend that the rise of partisan media is anything new for us. In our country's early years and into the 20th century, the press was primarily a partisan institution, fiercely devoted to defending one party and attacking the other, or even defending the interest of a competing faction in a party and attacking another.

Over time, a movement emerged led by Walter Lippman, among others, to introduce the notion of objectivity into journalistic practice. Journalism, Lippman himself called on journalists to emulate, and I quote Lippman, "The patient and fearless men of science who have labored to see what the world really is."

Now, I have always wondered about comparing us ink-stained wretches, or at least we used to be ink-stained, to scientists, but it is a noble legacy that is still alive, and strive

for in our older media institutions, and also in so many of the new ones.

But the trend toward objectivity was later abandoned by transformations in the media and the economy, traditional media institutions, as we all know, face severe financial challenges, and the rise of alternative outlets with more openly partisan leanings, again, bringing us back in some ways to the origins of our nation.

Social media made it easier for citizens to inhabit their own information worlds, free not only from challenges to their views, but also from correction of error and misunderstanding. Technology made everything more efficient, and that included the spreading of lies.

In this new environment, the dedication of the older news outlets, the established newspapers and television and radio networks to balance became more and more problematic. Is balance is ever owed to falsehood? What can be done if one political candidate is outlandishly and shamelessly willing to make up facts and level a steady stream of unsubstantiated charges, while the other candidate is merely flawed in the way all candidates are flawed?

It needs to be said, the concern over the fate of truth and fact is not a sudden preoccupation of our current moment. "The rise of mass media makes the categories of truth falsehood irrelevant to an evaluation of their influence." Those are the words of the historian, Christopher Lasch in his book "The Culture of Narcissism."

"Truth has given way to credibility," Lasch continued, "facts to statements that sound authoritative without conveying any authoritative information."

In an observation that will ring true to the experiences of consumers, of certain websites and cable news broadcasts he notes, and I quote Lasch again, "By using accurate details to imply a misleading picture of the whole, the artful propagandist makes truth the principal form of falsehood." And Christopher Lasch wrote his book, published his book 39 years ago.

In 1994 Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times literary critic wrote a powerful

essay that could be republished in 2018 with absolutely no alteration, "Throughout our culture, " she wrote, "the old notions of truth and knowledge are in danger of being replaced by the nuance of opinion, perception and credibility."

Kakutani warned of "a universe in which truths are replaced by opinions, as citizens become increasingly convinced of the authenticity of their own emotions, and increasingly inclined to trust their ideological reflexes." Again, that was in 1994.

And of course in 2005 Stephen Colbert launched the Colbert Report by defining the word, the term "truthiness," by which he meant statements that people believe to be the truth regardless of whether they are connected to any facts or evidence. They just sound true to people. He was referring in part to the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq, but it was a term that applied very broadly to many aspects of our politics.

These problems of course aren't solely confined to the United States, as Macron's intervention suggested. Just as it did here during the 2016 election, the Russian government is systematically attempting to spread false information and to interfere with the democracies across Europe.

What Macron, for example, feared as well in the French presidential election in 2017, if the media there had responded differently to efforts to release information damaging to him only days before the voters went to the polls, autocratic leaders around the world had weaponized that phrase, "fake news" to deflect or suppress media criticism of the treatment of their own people.

But we should not be entirely without. I am a kind of hope monger, I confess. The resurgence of some of our major newspapers and other news outlets in ways in which new websites have picked up some of the reporting slack left by the decline of other media institutions, is one source of hope.

Journalism, I point out a very particular thing that I think is extremely helpful, is more adept than it used to be using reporting presenting and explaining data, many outlets have managed, often brilliantly, to maintain a strong allegiance to fact and truth while

presenting both in the context of a clearly articulated political viewpoint.

One of the most-widely cited observations in an era when even facts seem to have a political allegiance, is the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan's coinage, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts."

Speaking, if I may, just for this moment as an opinion journalist, I'll add that there is a need for a corollary to Moynihan's rule: opinion journalism cannot be called journalism if it is not based on fact.

In an ideal world, journalism of verification and fact would live side by side with an enriched and factual opinionated sector. And this may well be our future, but technology does not stand still, there will continue to be more opinion available than ever, combined with a greater capacity on the part of individuals to select only the point of view that they share.

It's why I actually like to get hate mail, it means people are reaching out across the divide to look at views that they can't stand. So, God bless all the hate mailers. (Laughter)

And the fact is that in the name of advanced --enhancing the online experience, social media platforms tend to push people toward others who are like them and agree with them, because it's always more agreeable to have someone agree with you.

Defending those engaged in the work of establishing verifiable truths, and I see that as one of our purposes today, and that's across a broad range, whether they are specialists in government agencies who collect and disseminate accurate information, scientists and others in the academy who subject their work to critical scrutiny, or the practitioners of old-fashioned journalism, defending all of these folks, is essential to carrying out all the other tasks of democracy.

"Disorienting the public by blurring the line between fact and falsehood," Alexander Hamilton warned us long ago, "Is the trick of the despot whose object is to throw things into confusion that he may ride the storm and direct the whirlwind."

It should now be clear that false balance does not serve the truth; defensiveness does not preserve journalism's values, and trying to appease critics who have

no interest in the truth, only compromises journalism's purposes.

The growing pushback in the media to untruth is a sign of health, and the rallying of many citizens who have put their money on the line through thousands of new subscriptions to a variety of news outlets, God bless them, has demonstrated that journalism's role in preserving democracy and liberty is more widely recognized than ever.

Still, as we will be hearing today, there is much more to be done to combat misinformation and to identify those who spread it.

Just a couple of points on some of the issues we might discuss today. We can abstractly distinguish between misinformation, untruth circulated without intention to deceive, and disinformation, falsehood spread with malicious intent.

But as we learn from the discussions just this past weekend about when and how the media should use the word lie, intent itself is often a contentious subject.

How do we approach problem of false information when the lines are blurred between lies and simple misstatements or exaggerations? Should the nature of falsehood affect our choice of interventions to correct it? Additionally, stories about the spread of misinformation via Facebook and Twitter during the 2016 Election have highlighted the ways in which social media can exacerbate misperceptions and fan the flames of conspiracy.

But can new communication technologies be harnessed to resist misinformation and strengthen democracy while preserving the freedoms necessary for a raucous and open political conversation? How can social media platforms become more consistent allies of both a raucous debate and of the truth?

Now, scripture teaches that the truth sets us free, which means that misinformation and disinformation are indeed the enemies of freedom. The right to seek and to find the truth is a right worth defending, and discovering ways to make that defense effective is an essential task.

So, I salute the scholars and journalists we will hearing from today, for undertaking that effort. If a lie can get halfway around the world before the truth gets its

sneakers on, our participants will help us to find much better running shoes and ways to get out of the blocks a whole lot faster. Thank you very much. (Applause)

And I am so pleased to welcome the first panel led by old colleague, Mark Stencel, where are you? There's Mark. I had the great privilege of working with both Mark and his mom, and they are both awesome people. Welcome, Mark Stencel. (Applause)

MR. STENCEL: All right. Well, while we are getting mic-ed up, let me introduce my colleagues here. I'm Mark Stencel, E.J. just kindly introduced me. E.J. described himself as a former ink-stained wretch, I guess that's --

MR. DIONNE: I still am one.

MR. STENCEL: That's right. I'm more of a pixel-stained wretch, but I now tell my students I am a fake professor or real news at Duke University. (Laughter)

I'm really thrilled to have my colleagues up here with me today. Let me introduce them. I'll introduce from your left to right, and hopefully I've gotten that right, or we are already starting out with misinformation.

But John Bullock here from Northwestern University, he is our official partisanship expert in this group, and we appreciate that, from Northwestern. We've got Matt Jordan from Penn State, who is our media studies expert. And then we have Lori Robertson from FactCheck.org, Managing Editor there to be our fact expert. So we get the perfect combination of people to talk about the persistence of misinformation.

Now, the structure of these panels today, each of our panelists is going to give us a few minutes of thoughts on the questions at hand, I'll respond a little bit, and then we'll move off into questions and answers. So, just so you understand how we are doing this.

So, let's start with you, John, if you don't mind?

MR. BULLOCK: No. Not a bit. So, my work focuses less on the production of misinformation than on the prevalence of false beliefs, and especially partisan differences between factual beliefs -- I'm sorry -- partisan differences with respect to factual belief between Republicans and Democrats.

You've probably heard about some of these differences before, like a 2010 finding, for example, that nearly half of Republicans believed that Obama had a secret plan to turn the United States over to a one-world government.

Or more recently, the finding that only a third of Americans would reject outright the idea that Hillary Clinton was involved in a secret child sex ring.

In no sense do I mean to deny that beliefs like these may be important, but they are getting the lion share of attention, and there's a very different class of belief that we can also be very confident is important, I'm speaking of bread-and-butter beliefs about the condition of the U.S. national economy and the state of U.S. wars.

It's these two conditions, the economy and war that most often seem to have large effects on our presidential elections. We do sometimes see partisan differences even with respect to these beliefs.

So, for example, you remember 1988, Democrats were must much more likely than Republicans to say that inflation had gone up during the Reagan administration. Twelve years later it was the reverse, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to say that the deficit had gone up under Clinton.

Now, by my reading, in both journalism and academia, survey findings like this are more or less taken at face value. That is, they are taken as uncomplicated indications of what people really believe, and the thrust of my research is that we shouldn't do that.

At least where there are survey findings that have some sort of partisan bend to them, well, these survey findings are not often good indications of what people really believe. And one reason is simply that partisans will sometimes say things in surveys to make one party look good or another bad, even if they don't believe it.

Now, I just want to draw out, I see four points emerging from the current research that I want to mention just to make this idea more specific.

So first, suppose that, like many in political science, you just want to take surveys at face value, even then it turns out that partisan differences and factual beliefs, at

least about the economy and war, they are not as great as we might imagine.

The most comprehensive study that I know looks at the American national election studies from 1988 through 2008, every factual question is asked about the economy or inequality. And it turns out, that the median difference in answers between Republicans and Democrats on these topics, 12 percentage points.

In other words, if you compute the percentage of Republicans answering correctly, the percentage of Democrats answering correctly, and you take the difference between those two percentages, well the median difference is only 12 percentage points. It's not nothing, but it doesn't justify a claim like, Democrats and Republicans are living in separate realities, at least so far as national economic conditions are concerned.

The second point -- so that first point applies if you want to take surveys at face value. But the second point is that you should not be taking surveys at face value, at least where very partisan matters are concerned. And as I've suggested, the reason is that -- well, there are two reasons, one is that there are partisans, Democrats and Republicans who know the right answers to our survey questions, but they give the wrong ones.

And they're doing this, not all of them, but some of them, to make their own party look good, or the other party look bad. On top of that, there are many people who simply don't know the answers to factual questions about politics. Like, has unemployment been going up or down? And many of these people too, instead of saying I don't know, will give a partisan answer.

Now, that may sound like bad news, but I'm presenting it to you as the good news. What it means is that we are perhaps overstating the prevalence of false beliefs when we take surveys at face value, and we are almost certainly overstating the extent to which Democrats and Republicans are polarized with respect to their beliefs.

A third point. The last of these upbeats point, I fear that I'm going to be closing on a rather dour note. So, this is the last optimistic point. We all know that first of all that many people don't know the answers to factual questions about politics, and we also know that they

won't always tell us that they don't know. People will often give a substantive answer, even when they really don't know.

What's less fully appreciated is this. Just a little probing will show you that these people who don't know the answer, they very often know that they don't the answer. In other words, they're not deluded about their own state of knowledge. And I take that to be a pretty good sign too. It's all us equal, it's good that people who don't know the answers are aware that they don't know the answers. All right.

MR. STENCEL: That's it for the good news, now the bad news. (Laughter)

MR. BULLOCK: Yes. So, the bad news, which does reflect: my more general feelings on the matter is this. So, the thrust of my comments has been that in certain respects we might be making a mistake to take surveys at face value. But if I'm right, what this implies is that we may have the wrong understanding of the connection between people's factual beliefs and their votes.

We claim to have a lot of evidence that there's a strong connection between people's factual beliefs and their votes. So, implicitly or explicitly, in our models of presidential elections, for example, beliefs about the economy and war, they seem to have a big influence on how we vote. But much of our data on this point comes from surveys.

And as I suggested, those surveys may not be good indications of people's actual beliefs. And it turns out that when you use different methods to elicit people's actual beliefs, the strength of the association between people's factual beliefs and their votes is cut in half. It's still substantial but it's not nearly as strong as we used to think.

So, in other words, we may be overstating the prevalence of false beliefs, or almost certainly overstating the extent to which Democrats and Republicans differ on matter of fact. But Democrats and Republicans, alike, their votes are probably -- or there seems to be less influence by these factual beliefs than we thought, probably less influenced by factual beliefs than we would really like.

MR. STENCEL: So, a quick question on this before you move on, how does

media consumption patterns affect this intersection of belief and partisanship?

MR. BULLOCK: Well, we used that think that in fact there was very little relation, because our line for a very long time, at least in political science, was that there was very little selective exposure to politics. So, it was not true, for example, it didn't used to be true, even in the late 1990s when Fox News already existed, it didn't use to be true that partisans were selecting particular media and avoiding other kings of media, some were to be sure, most were not.

But increasingly, I fear that that's the case. And to the extent that that increases, we are going to see more of a role for false beliefs than we've seen before. In other words, I have upbeat points, but I don't think the trend is to be in the right direction.

MR. STENCEL: All right, wrong track. All right, Matt?

MR. JORDAN: So, I'm going to tell a quick story here about the development of media over time, as it pertains to misinformation. And so what I want to say is that as media has grown as a way of transmitting information across time and space, it's gathered communities together around this, but it's also afforded with the affordances of each of these media steps, the potential for spreading misinformation.

So we can go back to the printing press to see this. So, the printing press has long been associated with the spread of rationality, astronomical tables, mathematical charts, geometry, things like this, but it was also true that some of the biggest-selling genres at the early onset of print were mystical texts, Hermetic text, the stuff that gives us the Illuminati today.

So, because this stuff sold, because people were interested in the secret world out there beyond the facts, as you might say, and we see this as we move into the Counter-Reformation where propaganda itself comes from the propagation of faith. Right? And so you have these communities that are based on using whatever means available to zealously promote their views.

This was what bothered -- as E.J. mentioned -- this is what bothered the Founding Fathers, as we kind of reached the Age of Enlightenment that, you know, we have

partisan media, largely newspapers to be political organs, hence Thomas Jefferson thought they were all bad, but knew that the only antidote to it was a pluralistic media environment where people could, kind of, all get their perspectives in, so hence the freedom of the press.

So, by the time that Thomas Jefferson was writing in America, Hegel in Germany argued that the newspaper had replaced the prayer book, again, one of the biggest-selling genres of literature up until that point, as the daily prayer. So then the modern secular state, the imagined community, was formed around the consumption of news.

And so what interested me about this is the way in which you start to see a ritual consumption of news and information as part of how people organized their daily lives.

And that, in a way, also has as an affordance, a kind of blank-slate approach. We tend to believe what we read, and then check it later. So, the immediate thing is to see what's in the newspaper, take it in, and then we deal with things after that.

So, as the 19th Century progresses you see technologies that increase the speed of production and the space of transmission for media. Things like the Linotype, the steam press, that we see changes in models of news away from subscription toward daily sales, and what this means is that all of these affordances that the technology allows for, are starting to be used to drive sales, starting to be used to do this, and so we start to see the rise of sensationalism in journalism.

I've been researching the origin of the term "fake news" that has now become the moniker, and it turns out that fake news was something that progressives, and socialists and muckrakers started using at the end of the 19th Century, because they were so concerned about the way in which a -- or owned press, the press that was increasingly monopolized by big companies and was being used to misinform.

Now some of the misinformation that they pointed out was of the garden variety, priest walks on water, right, because everybody loves to hear some (inaudible), man eaten by locusts. Like these were the stories that because of the telegraphic wire now, could be spread and sold as commodities.

And because everything was about driving circulations, people had incentives to pick these stories up because they were, you know, run of the mill variety. But there were also concerns that these bits of misinformation were, also you would start to see things like cognition, problems where they were outright lies about, say, labor strikes, but also sins of omission, where the media frames were used by the people who controlled the newspaper to suppress news.

And that, in a way, is also a kind of misinformation, because as the progressives, like Upton Sinclair argued: without a vibrant press, we don't even know what's going on, so we can't fix our problems.

So, the term "fake news" then, was picked up as a way to kind of critique people like William Randolph Hearst who was driving a kind of increasingly larger wire service that was based on profiting off of people's interests in outlandish stories, sensational stories, stories of explosion, and stories of melodrama. And these are all things that we see a little bit of in our media environment today.

Another form of media that emerges is the radio, right, and we see in the beginning of the radio, take the case of the Titanic, right, the Titanic was saved, by the radio, or in a way they used the wireless telegraph to get The California to come save them. But also at the very same time there were fake radio reports about the Titanic being saved, that went out by individuals who were transmitting stuff.

So, again, we see this ambivalent relationship to the technology tool that then allows for both good things and also for the spread of misinformation.

Television we could think about as well. Think back to the movie network, right, Sydney Pollack's increasingly prescient view of the media environment, so that around the 1970s we start to see the erosion of the firewall between news divisions and programming, where what had once been a *quid pro quo* we give a license to promote -- you know, to make money off of this monopoly that we grant you as a licenses, and as a public service you do news.

Early '70s this starts to erode and there is increasingly a desire for profitable news, and what the network talks about is how opinion, which is a stripped down version of investigative reporting, we all know investigative reporting is expensive, sometimes you don't come up with anything. They figured out in the 1970s that if you just opine on the news, tell people how to think on the news, modeled an effective relationship to the news, that was what got people to tune in.

So the, I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore moment in Sydney Pollack's Network, this is about articulating the popular rage, right, and that's what people, Pollack worried about, were tuning in for.

So we see again, the affordances of media, the television which people at the time thought would bring people together toward a kind of more vibrant democracy being used to create these communities around information, and increasingly around affects. And I think this is that affective relationship of outrage and resentment is one to think about.

Adam Smith once wrote that we are not so interested in having our friends take -- of having people we know taking in our friendship, as we are in having them take in our resentments. And in a way, what we say today is a kind of a flourishing of that idea where the communities that we are increasingly moving towards, are our communities' anger, communities of feeling.

So, in the current media environment; and I want to talk a little bit about radio, because I think that also leads to some of the problems that we have. Radio was, you know, again a huge media that drew communities together across huge vast spaces, and they heard things at the same time, but by the 1980s the most profitable mode of radio was talk radio, right.

Again, these communities of affect where what you see are people increasingly figuring out that what got people to tune in every day was the question: what's he going to say next. So, Limbaugh, Imus, Stern, they would just say outlandish things, and people would say: oh, my, god, what's he going to say next? And in a way that's the -- those are the eras of the

Trumps and the Alex Joneses of the world.

So in a convergent media environment today, where we see digital using stuff from print, we see using stuff from radio, using stuff from television, you see this, but it's now compounded by algorithms, by the digital platform. Because what the digital platform does, is it allows you to self-select your community of outrage, your community of resentment, and filter everything out.

And not only that, but it does it for you. So, again, in the world of the digital platform, the customer is always right, and the customer is consuming the news, and what they are essentially doing is a feedback loop of belief, right, so they -- we tune in, we get our beliefs confirmed, and that makes us feel good.

But increasingly what used to be, if we go back to my Hegel quote, right, that the national media was the daily prayer, what we now see is vulcanizing niche media being done, right.

Steve Bannon was a Goldman Sachs who was investing in niche media. Targeting people because we know their digital profiles, and feeding them exactly what they want to hear to confirm their beliefs that they already have. This is what you start to see in niche media.

And again what it does, if you go back to the sins of commission is it suppresses all that other stuff. The things that you click on is what's going to pop up on your Google search, and Google knows that that's what drives their revenue, getting you to click, getting you to do that.

So, sensationalism, we've known since, you know, forever, that this drives sales, and all this is compounded now through the technologies that afford it.

So, this is I think the big challenge for misinformation, is how to cultivate a taste for something like pluralism, something like a media environment that is not just about what you want to hear, and I think that's the challenge we have today.

MR. STENCEL: So, a quick question about that. I feel like the research on a

filter bubble, echo chamber effect has been sort of a little back and forth on that. And what do you make of the other side of the argument, the fact that all of us complain about our -- you know, people being in filter bubbles, and yet we still hear Uncle Bob's crazy theories on Facebook. And so that suggests that the filter bubbles are being broken in some ways. Is it all about who believes which information from which sources?

MR. JORDAN: That's partly it, but I think that in an information theory, for instance, people who study games, right, they know that -- and what Facebook, you know, they are a surveillance company who is -- who trades, well, I guess, who trades essentially our digital profile.

They develop, every time we like, or now we have little emoticons about whether we kind of like it, but it makes our face do this or that, those are very sophisticated tools for developing personality profiles for us, but what they need is engagement. So, my theory on the crazy uncle is, in game theory, they realize that there has to be a little bit of noise in the game to keep people coming back, right.

If it's too much redundancy, it's not engaging, but if the crazy uncle is there, then it feels like a community. So, my guess is these are all being driven by data points that suggest that what creates more engagement, which is what Facebook and Google want, is in fact the crazy uncle popping up every once in a while to say outlandish things.

MR. STENCEL: So, it's simulated community.

MR. JORDAN: Right.

MR. STENCEL: Okay. Lori, fact-checking will save us, right?

MS. ROBERTSON: Oh, yeah. (Laughter) I think we've got it. Well, I was actually going to start with some good news.

MR. STENCEL: Good!

MS. ROBERTSON: On the status of facts, the topic of our panel. Facts matter, okay, and there's a real hunger for facts, and it's been interesting that there's been -- there's always been concern about misinformation and distribution, we don't distinguish

between the two, are falsehoods and misleading information. But I think we've definitely seen more concerns since the 2016 election and the growth of false news spread through Facebook and other means.

But while that's gone on, we've also seen evidence that people are very interested in the facts. The number of visits to our website hit records in the 2016 election, we typically see a big drop off after a presidential year, but we didn't see as much of a drop off. In 2017 the unique page visits to our site were about double what they were in 2013, which would have been the last post-presidential off-election year.

And people were also spending more time on our page in 2017, on average, than they were in 2016. So we think that's a good sign. Just to give some numbers, in 2016 the average time spent on a single page on our site was 34 seconds, we had a lot of traffic in 2016 but people weren't spending that much time on average, average time per page in 2017 was 2 minutes and 16 seconds. So, that's substantial, right? I think that's a good sign.

And these signs are not unique, that the signs that facts matter aren't unique to FactCheck.org. CNBC recently did a story on increases in ratings and readership of major media outlets, The Post -- Washington Post last year said its digital-only subscriptions had more than doubled in 2017. I think these are good signs. People aren't reading The Washington Post and The New York Times and watching CNN, and coming to our website, FactCheck.org, unless they care about facts, right.

So, then there's bad news, and the bad news is, you know, we find ourselves debunking the same false and misleading claims again and again. We, as fact checkers often live in Groundhog Day, which was great maybe, but so much so that we launched a feature during the 2016 campaign that we called Groundhog Friday, it ran on Friday.

And it was a wrap up of claims that politicians had repeated that we had already written about, you know, maybe multiple times. And this is the challenge certainly for fact checkers, politicians or viral claims will repeat themselves again and again, and I think that -- and perhaps my panelists could comment on this later -- but I think that repetition does help,

you know, spread and instill those beliefs or those claims.

And, you know, we can only write a story so many times before it starts to be ridiculous having the same story on our website. So, Groundhog Friday was one where we tried to, you know, repeat our fact check in not a completely annoying way.

But it's not just politicians that are repeating the claims, we see readers asking us about the same claims, again and again as well. And some of those questions, you know, some people I think are asking us to debunk viral claims that their crazy uncle sent them, or somebody sent them, and they just want us to write about it so they can send the uncle the link to our story. I know that happens and you can tell by, you know, what people write in their emails to us.

But others are legitimately wondering, you know, could this be true, and some of those claims that we see again, and again, really tap into common beliefs or common myths. And as an example, back in 2007 readers were asking us if senators got their full pay upon retiring and didn't pay anything into Social Security, didn't pay any Social Security taxes. It's not true.

We wrote a story about that and at the time Snopes.com, if you're not familiar, it's a website that debunks viral claims and has been doing so for a long time, they wrote that that email had been going around since at least 2007, so seven years later we wrote about it, and then eight years later, in 2015, people were still asking us about it, so we wrote the story again.

And, you know, that example is very bipartisan, it kind of nicely taps into this commonly-held belief that Members of Congress get, you know, outrageous perks associated with their jobs, and it's a matter of opinion of whether they get too many perks or not, but there are false claims out there about what they actually get.

So, I mean, all of that for us, it's very hard for us to measure our impact and we don't often have -- we don't even really try to do that too much, because we are busy, we are writing the -- we are fact checking, we are writing the stories. And I think that's true for a lot of

journalists, we are doing our jobs day-to-day.

But it does raise some questions about, you know, are we successful at debunking some of these commonly-held beliefs that are wrong? Are we successful for some people? Do people just forget, or something so strongly-held that just really have our work cut out for us?

MR. STENCEL: I wonder if -- I'm heartened by your traffic increases, that the subscription numbers of The Post, and The New York Times, but it always makes me think there's a -- one of my favorite political stories, I have no idea if it's true, but if it's not don't tell me because it's one of my favorites. Is that, you know, a campaign rally in 1956, and someone shouts out to Adlai Stevenson, "Every thinking person is going to vote for you." And he says, "Yes, madam, but that's not enough, we need a majority." (Laughter)

And I wonder if, you know, if fact-checking work, which is stuff we work on a lot at Duke of course, is in its own sort filter bubble, that it is only reaching a certain audience, and what you all are thinking at FactCheck.org about how to break beyond the audience that you've built to reach other kinds of audiences.

MS. ROBERTSON: Sure. Yes, and I think that one thing we've talked about, you know, readers -- not all readers -- but some readers tend to gravitate toward the article that's negative, or that's criticizing, or saying something that a politician that they don't like said, was wrong. I didn't say that very well.

But yeah, you don't Hillary Clinton, she said something wrong, oh, you really read this story, well, did you read other ones. So, I mean a couple things that we've tried to do, you know, in thinking about that, we occasional do stories, and I wish we had more time for it, called the facts on, or the facts about, you know, fill in the blank.

We've done some on immigration, or the Republican health care bills, and we weren't fact-checking a claim. We were dong often in sort of a Q&A type format, just giving the facts on something. And you know, it's the open question then, does that attract people from, you know, very divergent political viewpoints, I hope so, but that's one of the -- one of the

methods that we've employed since to try to reach out.

MR. STENCEL: Great. And way of my own reaction to that, my focus has been very much on the changing media, information ecosystem and its effect on the persistence of misinformation, disinformation, and the role that requires journalists to take of being guides rather than gatekeepers.

And I think that that -- this maybe jumping a little ahead to our third panel today on the solutions to some of these problems, but it's enough of a concern that might my friend Eric MacDicken and I are writing a survival guide for media consumers, because the landscape has become so confusing and confounding to most people who even want information but have a hard time figuring out what sources to rely on, and what to navigate, what to trust.

The work and research we've been doing at Duke has mainly been focused on the use of technology to help fact checkers like Lori at FactCheck.org, and The Post, and at PolitiFact, and other fact-checking organizations across the United States and around the world, to both accelerate the reporting process for fact-checking, because as Lori will attest, there are not enough Loris in the world. Fact checking is a time-consuming kind of reporting, it can take a day if not weeks sometimes to fact-check certain claims.

And so we want to accelerate that process with technology, and also use technology to help increase the reach and impact of fact checking, particularly in the audiences that may not be getting that kind of information now.

And it's sort of reverse engineering that the technology you describe, Matt. That has sort of allowed for a persistence of misinformation, and sort of whipping that around to try to use the same tools to reach other audiences with fact-checking journalism.

But I don't know that -- from what you all have said -- that just corrections are enough to overcome this persistence, and so where are your -- you know, again not to jump way too -- further down the agenda here, but where are you looking for signs of hope that we can sort of help audiences reconcile facts and beliefs and actions? Or is that just impossible, and we are fighting against human nature?

MR. BULLOCK: It may not be impossible. I'm not saying that it's possible. I suppose one area to which to which I look as the effects of fact-checking, not ordinary citizens, ordinary readers of journalism, but on politicians themselves. So, there's limited evidence, but evidence which suggests that in fact, fact checking affect the views of politicians, such that if they know they are being checked, they are more cautious in their statements. That's the kind of thing that makes me optimistic.

MR. STENCEL: Great!

MR. JORDAN: Well, I like this metaphor because it works for everything, but do you know the movie Fight Club, and one of the rules of Fight Club is you never talk about Fight Club. I think what we see is kind of misinformation or a Fight Club going on out there, and that the -- you know, the media outlets are playing this misinformation game because it's good for ratings.

Why else would you have Kellyanne Conway on TV, right? She's going to lie every time you put her on there, and you give her a platform to do that. You know, know exactly what she's going to do, right? So, what the -- CNN, who has been taking a lot of heat for this lately is going to say, well, we just put it out there for the viewers to decide. That's been the traditional kind of post-talk, kind of abdication of responsibility, in my opinion, on this.

So, I think one of the things that needs to happen is that journalism needs to reclaim its dedication to principles of justice through equality, and make those important that notions of journalistic objectivity based on falsification post-talk falsification, because once the phrase gets out there, once the media frame gets out there, once the falsehood gets out there, it takes on a life of its own, as you know.

So, I think it's up to journalists and media outlets to start being more responsible. And you can make this into a great spectacle, right? Three strikes you are out, you never get invited back, it need not be, you know, dull, but I really think it's going to require a new approach to producing content.

MS. ROBERTSON: And one of the other things we've tried to do is educate

our readers, particular with, you know, what we used to call fake news, now we need to come up with a new term, but the completely made-up websites that look like legitimate news organizations, but aren't.

And I feel for our readers, because there are so many of them, and there are also new legitimate news organizations that maybe they haven't heard from, so they see these names of websites, and don't always know what's real and what's not.

But, you know, we've said that the readers are, and the news consumers are really the first line of defense here, so you know, take the time to read something before you share it and repost it, and a lot of the made-up stuff, you know, a lot of it so many times will say, that's actually a satirical website, and if you went to their About Us page they'd flat out tell you, we make stuff up, because we think this is funny.

But a lot of people don't go to that About Us page. So, I think some of the spread could -- you know, maybe it's optimistic to think, but could be controlled by the news consumers themselves.

MR. STENCEL: I mean, FactCheck.org has been around for a long time, by fact checking since 2003?

MS. ROBERTSON: Yes, 2003.

MR. STENCEL: And so you've had different flavors of government control and politics. Do you see -- does party control in Washington, or anywhere else politically, affect the kinds of messages you hear, or the kinds of facts that you end up checking? Does it affect who is lying, or who is perceived -- who is lying how does that -- how do the partisan shifts affect our understanding of this? Because so much of the research on this has been in recent years, and so I'm sort of interested in how it looks over time.

MS. ROBERTSON: Yes. Well, I think we do see the same types of claims, we definitely see the same types of ways to make false and misleading claims form politicians across parties. You know, a couple of examples, we've called them before like patterns of deception. So, a politician might want to make a point and use a statistic that's five years old

instead of using the most recent one, because that old statistic makes the point better. That's, you know, Democrats and Republicans both do that kind of thing.

You know, we look for qualifiers like the most or the highest, or the least, and those are often misleading. So, I think -- you know, I don't think one party as a stranglehold on those things, it's a very common behavior really that we see across parties.

MR. STENCEL: From a media studies or political science point of view, are there, you know, obvious factors in the way partisanship, or even particular partisanship affects our dealings with reality in facts? Are there demographic differences, ideological differences? Go ahead.

MR. BULLOCK: Sure. So, not one of most expert persons, I think even on the panel on this point, but age, for example, is a factor. People are more likely, I gather, to share misinformation if they are older or less (inaudible).

The most obvious way for partisanship to enter into this question would be if partisanship really is causing people, not just to expose themselves to partisan media of their own stripe, but also to not expose themselves to mixed media, or media of the other ideological stripe.

To the extent that that's happening, it makes it, I believe, easier for politicians to misinform, because they don't have to worry about damage to their reputation.

MR. JORDAN: Machiavelli once, in a letter to a prince, argued that, you know, it's sometimes necessary to deceive, but if you get caught essentially you have to have excuses ready. And if you think about the feedback loop with partisan media, that's a lot of what happens.

It's that if somebody leaves the media bubble, and sees the world that doesn't conform to the belief community that they are into, you need a fix. You need a kind of booster shot of your media to alleviate the anxiety that's created by leaving that media bubble.

And I think that's what you're seeing, why some of the -- why Fox News is so desperate these days, why it's so shrill in hammering through repetition and misinformation, is

that people that are in that media bubble when they leave it, need immediately to alleviate the anxiety that's produced by leaving it, which has a -- you know, a commercial benefit for serialized media, right, it's people tune in for their fix.

MR. STENCEL: The excuse chapter of Machiavelli may need some editing, just giving -- All right, we should turn some of this over to you all. We would love to hear questions. A reminder that we are playing Jeopardy rules here, all statements should be made in the form of a question. And we'll see what our panelists have to say.

Right in the middle here on the center aisle; and somebody is going to bring you a microphone as well so everybody can hear.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Thank you so much. This is a lovely panel. My question is for Lori, and I was wondering if you know what's driving this increase in people visiting FactCheck.org, and if you can tell if it's -- that you've been linked more in news stories as a reliable news source? Or, are people generically going to it, or if they are coming from Google search results? And if maybe one of those is driving more of this increasing interest in fact?

MS. ROBERTSON: Okay. Thanks. Unfortunately I don't have a breakdown with me. I know we do get a lot from Google searches. That's very valuable to us. But, you know, like I said, we are not -- right now we are in this trend with other news organizations of seeing an increase in readership. You know, clearly the Trump administration had something to do with that as well.

There's a lot of news, in general, I haven't gone back to see -- to look at our output, but I know we are working more. There's a lot more issues to cover, so we are probably putting a lot more content out there as well than we were in, say, the last off-election year. I could go double check that, but it certainly feels that way.

So, you know, I think those are some of the factors, and then it's not even included in, you know, the statistics that I have access to on our sites, we have some partners, or friends we call them, for other media outlets. We are a non-profit so our content is free, so USA Today publishes -- republishes a lot of our stuff, MSN, and so we get -- and we don't have

access to their numbers, but we know it's, you know, millions more are seeing our stuff through those outlets as well.

MR. STENCEL: In the very back row there was someone with a question.

QUESTIONER: Raphael Sakoff, Voice of America. My question is to all panelists. While the story from this week which became one of the greatest examples of misinformation, about maybe you've heard -- I think everyone has heard about Arkady Babchenko, the Russian journalist reportedly killed in Ukraine on Tuesday, but on Wednesday, next day, Ukrainian's Secret Service said that it was -- a special operation.

But everyone on the world, all media, everyone published, because there were statements from police, from local government. What do you think about this type, what type of misinformation it was? Thank you.

MR. BULLOCK: I would tend to say, that was an extraordinary type of misinformation. (Laughter) No, in all seriousness, my focus, like the focus I believe of most of or all of our panelists, is American misinformation, American politics, and misinformation in the United States. I suspect that the kind of events that you've just described, about which I have a read little, are rare in the United States. And I suppose if I want to make a bigger point about it, it's that if nothing else, we should be grateful for that.

MR. STENCEL: Lori and I are both active, actively involved with the International Fact-Checking Network, which is sort of the consortium of fact-checking organizations like FactCheck.org, but around the world, of which there are many at this point.

I'm curious -- I mean, like you said, most of us are focused on American politics and misinformation, disinformation, but in your reading of the research are there different patterns to how things play out in different parts of the world? Or, is it really the same game everywhere? I don't know if any of you have insights on that.

MR. JORDAN: I read an article back during the campaign that was looking at Russian Cyber Ops misinformation as a tactic of war, and was just talking about clouding the field is one way to kind of confuse and, you know, kind of take away people's capacity to get

together and decide on and talk about things. And I imagine that this is an example, by just putting out things so that nobody knows quite what to believe.

MR. STENCEL: Soviet era and misinformation tactics applied to modern context. Actually, up here in the front, E.J. I think wanted to make a point on this particular story.

MR. DIONNE: Yeah. No, I wanted to ask -- I wanted to go somewhere completely different.

MR. STENCEL: Oh. Okay.

MR. DIONNE: First of all, thank you all, you were great. And Lori, I figure that someday an academic is going to write a paper on the correlation between total number of lies in the public sphere, and your audience, because I think that's -- Two quick questions. Question one, on the partisan perception, and correct me if I'm wrong, it's been my impression that there has been a real shift in the decade or so on people's -- the relationship between partisanship and people's comments on the economy.

A real lack of fit between your own circumstances and how they judge the economy differently, and you saw that after Trump's election, where for a lot of Republicans we suddenly had the biggest two-week economic boom in history. And for Democrats we had the quickest two-week economic recession in history.

I'm just curious if you've noticed a sharp increase, particularly on economic judgments, because at least that's what I have notice in the polls, I haven't studied it systematically.

The second is a question I always like to ask because it's never -- I've never fully understood the answer to this question, which is: why is it that conservative radio took off in a way that liberal radio never did? And it's not entirely true in television, for example, where eventually when MSNBC went more liberal it actually discovered there was an audience that never worked for radio.

And, you know, I can't believe it's simply Rush Limbaugh's genius in creating

this form, which he deserves, I'll say, credit for. So, those are my two questions. And again, thank you all, very much, for being here.

SPEAKER: Do you want take this?

MR. BULLOCK: Yes. E.J., let me take on the question, the first question about partisan differences in perceptions of the economy. So, the short answer is, I don't know whether, in fact, more recently partisans have become more divided in the sense that some event, some sudden change, like Trump's election, causes people all of a sudden to say that they are -- or perhaps really, to evaluate the economy.

What I do know, and it may well be that that is what is happening, but what I do know is that this sort of thing has been happening to a substantial extent for a while. For example, when Romney ran against Obama, late in the campaign, there was a very good economic report. All else equal you might think that this was making Obama look good.

The Republicans became more likely after the fact, after that report was released, to say that the economy was doing poorly, and it was not an insubstantial difference. So, whether these differences are growing -- they may be growing, but they've been around for a while. There's even evidence back from the Nixon administration of this sort of thing happening.

The other thing that I would say is this, if you ask important but very narrowly-tailored questions about the economy, like: has inflation been going up in the last eight years, the last four years? In fact, answers to those questions are better than they used to be, both in the sense that people are more accurate than they used to be, and in the sense that the parties are less divided than they used to be.

I mean, the all-time greatest difference between the parties on that particular question if memory serves, is 1988, which you might signals just the much lower salience of inflation as an issue relative to the way it used to be in the '70s and even in the '80s.

But it's at least a small note of optimism, that we have seen high watermarks for some -- for false responses, or inaccurate responses to certain kinds of tailored economic

question.

MR. JORDAN: And I'll take the radio for a try. And I think it's -- one, I think it's not true that, and if we recall, MPR actually has huge audiences --

MR. DIONNE: But that's not partisan (crosstalk) --

MR. JORDAN: Right, right. But what I would say is that that's where the -- well, let's just say, like if you think about the Oliver Stone's movie, "Talk Radio" right, it's about based on this shock jock, Alan Berg in Denver who was killed, and I mean, that does a good job of describing though the intimate outraged generation amongst the audience.

There's something about the moment that that came on in the 1980s, people were trying, feel dispossessed, and shock jock radio appealed to a kind of notion of personal freedom that pushed back against kind of vague forms of authority that were keeping the working man down.

And so the shock jock is about the guy who straight-talks, who says what's true, and part of the enjoyment that people get out of that is having somebody who is willing to say anything. I would like to say that the liberals haven't done that because that's not part of the political identify marker as much, so it just doesn't -- that format has appealed not so much to a partisan audience, but to a certain personality type that may be predisposed toward that type of identify politics.

MR. DIONNE: Does that suggest that a certain personality type leans right then?

MR. JORDAN: Well, Trump --

MR. DIONNE: I'm just following your logic.

MR. JORDAN: Trump is a great -- I mean, Trump is a shock jock. He learned his trade from Howard Stern, right. Say the outrageous thing. He's the guy who just can't be held back, right. And I think the appeal that he has to people is more based on that charisma as a personality type than it is on his politics, is what I would say.

MR. STENCEL: I do think, and I'll say this as a Former MPR person that -- I

mean, one, public radio is news and information, it's not talk radio, it is not (inaudible), and actually the audience was a lot more ideologically diverse than is generally understood. Also a much bigger audience than most media business coverage ever sort of really picks up on. I mean millions and millions of people a day.

But I think some of the appeal of talk radio as a daytime audience, in particular, where a lot of the control in talk radio has taken hold, may have as much to do with sort of daytime listening demographics as well, and people looking for alternatives to traditional media coverage, and particularly in those day parts. And so --

MS. ROBERTSON: Can I go back to the first question just quickly?

MR. STENCEL: Yes, please.

MS. ROBERTSON: So, you know, I mean with fact checkers we certainly think it's interesting that Trump is saying how the economy is doing so well, and nobody ever thought this would happen, and when you look at the numbers, well, it's a continuation of the growth that we saw before he was elected.

But that's not unusual, not just for economic issues, but we've seen it in the past with education where the candidate wanting to get into power and particularly when it's a change of party saying, oh, our state of education is terrible, and finding statistics that support that. And then once they get elected, oh, the education is doing great and, you know, here's some statistics on that. So, you know, it's a framing issue that we certainly see.

MR. STENCEL: Lori, with this much inbound as you all have to content with every day, has the way that you choose what to check change? Or is the mix of subjects that you focus on shifting, and you're trying to counter program, through the natures of lies, or what other people are fact checking?

MS. ROBERTSON: Not really, no. I mean, we are still going through speeches and other events. I think one thing that has definitely changed over the years, is we used to be very ad-focused, but this is more, not so much what we do, but more of a nature of the media landscape. We used to really do TV ads, and that was the main form of political

communication, and now we do much less -- we'll start to do more during the midterms, but we do much more tweets and Facebook posts and, you know, speeches, and other forms of communication.

MR. STENCEL: We have time for a few more questions. The gentleman right up front, here?

QUESTIONER: Thank you. To Lori's concept of framing, framing an issue, the question is. Much of what you're talking about is in the political spectrum, candidates, et cetera, during campaigns, et cetera. To what extent, once there is an election, do these lies then become vetted to the point where when you have to implement policies based on blatant lies?

Is there something about the process, whether it's lobbying in Congress, or filing papers within the various regulatory agencies? Is there something we can look to in our process that purifies, or sanitizes, or sterilizes, or in some way modifies the lies in the actual governance process?

MS. ROBERTSON: Well, we rely on government agencies a lot for statistics and information, and if you look at the economic numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, are wonderful sources information, our Congressional Research Service Reports, Congressional Budget Office, Joint Committee on Taxation, those are all nonpartisan organizations that, you know, they are giving projects from JCT and CBO, but otherwise, you know, giving a summary of the facts and what we know. I don't know if that's --

QUESTIONER: So what's there to show that that's working?

MS. ROBERTSON: These guys are the ones to ask.

MR. JORDAN: Let me, feeling just from those -- look at the way that the Environmental Protection Agency or the CBO have been attacked so viciously. So, I think there are these purifying elements already there, which are professionals who work on this stuff for a living. And what's right now is being done is eroding confidence in those institutions, that used to check us from the lies. And I think that's probably the more nefarious thing to think

about.

MR. BULLOCK: If I may, very briefly? It's not that I have a particularly good answer to your question, I don't know a research suggesting that if I cite the BLS, people automatically believe it. But because institutions like the BLS and the Congressional Budget Office are undermined a lot, probably not true in this room, but in general these institutions are just vastly under-appreciated. And one thing that we really ought to be doing is thinking as hard as we can, and working hard to shore up the credibility and the reputations of these institutions.

These really among the best, most neutral institutions that we have, that deliver bad news to both parties, and they do a lot of the time. I think it's -- if we are going to be fighting this information, it's not going to be a wholesale solution, but one thing we've got to do is to protect these fantastic institutions.

MR. STENCEL: Okay. I'm going to go back to the other side of the room here.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. It's a very, very interesting panel. Thank you. You know, I was going to ask about allegations of weaponized fact checkers, where politicians have alleged that certain cites will effectively dog their claims in an attempt to discredit under the guise of fact-checking, or being unbiased observer. Is there a way to prevent -- and of course this connects to what you were saying previously about traditional organizations being undermined for partisan reasons. Can you talk a little bit about that, and how you can counter that -- those kinds of claims?

MR. STENCEL: I have a lot of thoughts, from my own research of weaponizing fact checks; but before that, Lori?

MS. ROBERTSON: So, you know, we do get -- we get complaints from both sides on our coverage and, you know, I think the best thing we can do is, you know, tell people, well, look at this story we did, or look at this other story we did, and do our best to fact check both sides. But without -- you know, E.J. talked about the false equivalency, we are not trying to count, you know, we've got on the five on the Democrats, let's make sure we have five on the

Republicans.

We have to report as we see things. And, you know one issue we have, we do a lot of stories on President Trump and, you know, people ask us about that. You know, aren't you going to fact check somebody else? We do fact check other people, but he is the President of the United States, and that is our main focus, and he also is very prolific in terms of tweets, and the campaign speech this week, so we do have a lot more material to look at.

MR. STENCEL: In some of my own research on the impact of fact checking, particularly for the American Press Institute, we looked at how political organizations appropriate fact checks, and use them to club their opponents. And so they would do an ad with ominous music saying, PolitiFact and FactCheck.org confound our opponent to be a lying liar, and so that's an interesting form of weaponizing tactics.

What's even more interesting is when the political organizations that use fact checks in that way in their advertising or political messages, or in debates, will mischaracterize a fact check to use the credibility of a fact checker to beat up on their opponent, which actually happens a shocking amount, and I'm not quite sure what to do about that, other than to call them out on that every time it happens.

So, or two more questions, in the middle right here, the gentleman with the glasses?

MR. SHORE: Wonderful presentation. My name is Stephen Shore. Barry Goldwater once had the proposal when he expected that John Kennedy would be his opponent, of at least doing some joint travel together, and instead of partisan rallies have the give and take, not unlike the Lincoln Douglas debates. Do you think a greater number of these joint travel or joint unscripted appearances might help repudiate a more outlandish claims that candidates might otherwise be tempted to make?

MR. STENCEL: The Trump-Clinton bus tour would be fun. (Laughter)

MR. JORDAN: I mean, I think the danger would be the Punch and Judy show, right. But I think maybe not so much in terms of misinformation, but E.J. talked earlier about

Walter Lippman, but as a counter to the Walter Lippman notion of falsification and verification, we might throw in a lot of John Dewey there as well.

Which is to say that modeling something like a conversation aiming toward shared purpose, we need a lot more of that, and if that would -- if that is what you have in mind, I think that that could very much help repair some of the damage that's done by the Punch and Judy Show.

MS. ROBERTSON: Yes. I'd say we often find -- you know, we'll have politician's office contact us and say, hey, why don't you guys look at this ad or look this claim that my opponent is making, and sometimes they'll provide, you know, valuable information to help in the fact check. But a lot of times a politician's fact check of another politician doesn't really get to the claim. It's kind of countering that claim with other claims. So it's, yeah, not always beneficial to have politicians fact-check one another.

MR. BULLOCK: I would love to see that sort of activity, whether it would have an effect, I'm really not sure. What I wonder about even more is just how to get from here to there. The change in norms, I'm thinking to the U.S. Congress specifically, the change in norms in the last 25 years, in the U.S. Congress, has been just been astonishing. We used to have, of course, as you know much more of this activity, 30, 40 years ago. Whether we can get that level of bipartisan communal activity together again? I simply don't know.

MR. STENCEL: And one last question, sort of toward the aisle in the middle here.

MS. ROSENBERG: Thanks. I'm Lisa Rosenberg, with Open the Government. I wanted to follow up on your proposal, which I like, sort of the three strikes you're out, if Kellyanne Conway, or somebody is, you know, on the news. How does that approach apply to White House press briefings, or covering the President's Twitter feed? I mean, it sounds like a joke question, but I'm serious. There's a point where there's so much misinformation or disinformation being applied by, you know, the top. How do you not cover it?

MR. JORDAN: Well, you have to change institutional norms. Theirs is a

journalism professor at NYU, Jay Rosen, who had a hashtag, SendTheInterns, for the White House Press Briefing, because no new information was being given out at those, so why you turn that into a spectacle that you pretend this is going to have news value, is a question, I don't know. I mean, the answer is that it generates news cycles, right, and that's what CNN and the big media right now is making money hand over fist, covering the lies, right.

And that's the incentive. If you look at the ratings over, when Trump was candidate and look at the ratings since, they love this, because it's outrage generation. Kelly Conway comes on, says something crazy, and then their opinion people say, she said something crazy, and then repeat. And you don't need writers, you just invite the same people on, and you sell advertising for it.

And it's that this is -- you have to change the institutional norms, and our institutional norms are that you cover the White House briefing. You have the President's Advisor on. And I think journalists need to rethink that, because the institutional norms are being used against them right now

MR. STENCEL: All right. Any other answers on that question? So, you know, I'm going to wrap this up a little bit with, we've talked about three strikes you're out, we've talked about sort of joint appearances, the possibilities.

One of those interesting things I've learned in the past few years of looking into the whole fact checking universe, which comes from our colleagues at Full Fact in the U.K., which is sort of the FactCheck.org of the U.K., and they were telling us about a rule in Parliament, that if you are caught saying something inaccurate in Parliament that you have to go and correct the record.

And so one of the things Full Fact does, is that it's doing its fact check work, will often report those falsehoods in a way that that then requires Members of Parliament to respond. And I keep wondering what would happen if the House or Senate passed such a rule, since they can pass their own rules what effect that might have.

But I really want to thank our panel here. So, Lori, Matt, John, thank you very

much. Thank you for your questions. (Applause)

We are going pause for a moment to make room for "The Spread of Misinformation" discussion, which is coming up next. So, thanks.

(Recess)

MR. SIDES: Thank you all for being here. I'm John Sides. I'm a professor in the Political Science Department at George Washington University.

It's okay. My students talk when I talk anyway, so I'm used to it.

We're really gratified to have three excellent scholars to talk to us today and to think about the spread of misinformation beginning with Amber Boydstun, who is a professor at the University of California Davis, who said to me before we gathered here today, "I love being in D.C." Which made me wonder if perhaps she wasn't well or something was wrong. The last time I was in Davis, California, it was about 88 degrees and perfectly sunny.

MS. BOYDSTUN: It's lovely.

MR. SIDES: And here we are.

So she's a scholar of news medium and political communication.

We're also joined by Pablo Barbera, who is a political scientist at the London School of Economics, and has done a great deal of interesting research about social media and, in particular, this thing called Twitter, which you may have heard of.

And then finally, Robert Faris, who is research director at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. And Robert has been involved in a lot of different research projects, but one in particular that I've always found very valuable was a lengthy report about the nature of news coverage of the 2016 election and the media ecosystem that was in some sense created in the context of that election which he may be talking about a little bit today.

So I'm going to turn it first to Amber for her opening thoughts on this subject.

MS. BOYDSTUN: Yeah, thanks, John. It's exciting to be here.

I'd like to start in thinking about the spread of misinformation and disinformation

by reiterating a point that both Jason and E.J. made at the beginning, which is that this is not a new phenomenon, and it would be unfortunate, and not a little bit ironic, if we accidentally misrepresented or mischaracterized the prevalence and the criticality of misinformation and disinformation. It's always been the case since the beginning of human political communication, that we have sought political information in order to understand the world, and we have used political information in order to try to share and promote our own views. That means that it's always been the case because humans are fallible and because we have games of telephone that we've had the spread of misinformation. And it's always been the case because there have always been nefarious political actors among us that we've had the spread of disinformation. It's also always been the case that misinformation and disinformation spread more easily than true facts because they tend to be more salacious. And it's always been the case that it's all too easy for us to believe selectively those pieces of misinformation and disinformation that reinforce our own world views.

But there have been a lot of things, of course, that have changed, and I do think that it's important to take stock of the role of misinformation in our current political reality because I do think that it has a greater threat to democracy than it has in generations past.

Lots of things have changed. We have, of course, this increasing spread of fragmentation of the media marketplace around the world, but especially in the United States. We have the strongest media marketplace competition of anyplace in the world, and that means that news outlets of all stripes are increasingly needing to appeal to our preferences through things like click bait to get us to pay attention to them because they need our viewership. And it's also the case that we have an increasing ability, as John mentioned earlier, to self-select, to cherry-pick which pieces of news we want to get.

It was the case in the '60s and '70s that we all got the same news, and it's probably no accident that it was during that period that there was the lowest association in recorded history between our partisanship and our votes when we were all effectively getting the same information.

It's also the case that we're increasingly polarized at the national level of politics, although importantly, there's not overwhelming evidence to suggest that Americans at large are increasingly polarized.

But to this list I want to add something that I've been thinking about a lot, especially in my work with Regina Lawrence, and that's that we have, more than ever before in human history, an increasing blurring of the divide between entertainment and reality, and therefore, between fiction and fact. It used to be the case not so long ago that there was a clear divide. That you'd turn to Walter Cronkite for fact and you'd turn to the Lone Ranger for fiction.

But it's not so clear anymore. We live in this saturated media environment. It's saturated not just with things like Game of Thrones and A Handmaid's Tale, but it's also saturated with shows that are entertainment shows but they look a little bit like reality. So you can think of the Colbert Report or the various versions of The Office. And we also have reality shows. We have fact-based shows that are wrapped in entertainment shrouds. You can think of all reality TV, including importantly The Apprentice, and you can think of Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. We have a lot of this.

So we have this increasing blurring of the lines between entertainment and reality and, of course, we have also a president who heralds to us from the world of entertainment as previous politicians have done. But unlike previous politicians, he has not lost the trappings of entertainment. He still purports himself in a way that looks as much like an entertainer as it does like a politician.

So how are we in this kind of context to approach our selection and consumption of information? And I think especially for those of us who are academics, we have students in our college classrooms now who were born in the year 2000. They don't know a world before Fox News. They barely know a world before Breitbart. They certainly don't know a world before Twitter and Snapchat. And so how are they supposed to navigate this saturated entertainment world? Surely, this kind of bleeding between fact and fiction in this

entertainment-saturated environment is affecting us individually at a psychological level, and collectively, at a social level. And so that's the bad news.

But I'll flip it as John did. But now I'll talk about the good news.

And I think the good news is that when I think about my students in particular, they're remarkably savvy. Maybe because they grew up in this digital entertainment world, they're remarkably savvy. I would argue -- I don't know of any research that shows this but anecdotally it seems like they're even more savvy than us older generations at differentiating between the media that they consume.

But largely, all of us, we're adaptive. We're an adaptive species, and we're an adaptive society, and democracy itself is an adaptive entity. And so I think we can think of other parallels from past history in trying to understand how we might navigate this particular type of situation.

So I've been thinking about potential parallels and I want to just float one here. It's not going to work. It's going to break down in lots of ways, but bear with me.

I've been thinking about the parallel of processed food. That it used to be the case that food was food, and we all ate food. And we then went through this period where all of a sudden we can't pronounce all of the ingredients in the food that is available to us in the grocery store. And at first, the general public I think wasn't aware from what I've read, we really weren't aware of what was happening, but then we were aware and we put policies into place to regulate the demarcation of different ingredients in the food that we buy, and we've gone through different waves of public education and awareness about the food that we consume.

Well, if we think as a loose parallel about our information diet, then we can think going forward of potential policies that we could put into place as a government and society to help us regulate our information intake, but also, in general, a broader education campaign to coax us to be more self-aware of what we're consuming. But like this parallel with processed food, we can imagine that as a society we're going to be differentially able to adapt based in large part on our socio-economic status. That not unlike the food deserts that a lot of

people encounter, some people don't have the money to buy a subscription to The Washington Post or The New York Times. They don't have the time to be self-aware of the kind of media they're consuming. And so that's the part that I think is, to bring it back around to the sad news, I think that's the part that I am most concerned about, is that we're not all going to be equally able to adapt to this shifting information environment.

MR. SIDES: I did eat a lot of Velveeta cheese as a child, I have to confess.

MS. BOYDSTUN: Yeah? That explains a lot.

MR. SIDES: And it's still delicious.

Let me ask you just a quick question by way of follow up. This is a theme maybe we can also talk about a little later in conversation. But one of the potential -- one of the arguments that some scholars have made about the fragmentation of the news environment, or the media environment more generally, is that their consequences is not so much the self-selection of fact in terms of, oh, I only want to consume news that is convenient to my partisanship or my ideology, but the bigger consequence is that people who are not really that interested in politics now have many, many options. So you can turn on the news. You can turn on the TV at the news hour and there is no longer any need to watch the news. You could watch, let's say, I don't know, a hockey game that, you know, maybe some of us were watching last night. So, you know, do we think that one of the consequences of fragmentation is not so much making people become more intensely partisan but also just making people become less politically engaged?

MS. BOYDSTUN: Yeah, that's true. And that's concerning. The silver lining that I take is the work that several scholars have done on soft news, on the fact that even if you choose intentionally not to turn on the news at night and you don't read a newspaper but instead you just watch daytime talk TV and you watch the morning show, you're still getting information and it's still information that's relevant about the world. Would we prefer that people read The New York Times and The Washington Post? Absolutely. But we still pick up information in everything that we watch. But the flipside is that that's concerning because we're

still picking up political information about the world, even when we watch Game of Thrones, right, it influences the way that we think about politics.

MR. SIDES: Great. Thank you.

Pablo?

MR. BARBERA: Thank you.

In my remarks, I want to focus specifically on the role of social media in the spread of misinformation.

So we all know that social media websites like Facebook and Twitter are one of the most important vectors for the exposure to political misinformation. The same new technology that allowed, you know, opposition forces during the Arab Spring to literally start a revolution are now giving a platform to conspiracy theorists and actors that are seeking to manipulate the political agenda, either in their own political interests or financial interests. And it is true that attention to these problems spiked during the 2016 U.S. presidential election during which “fake news” was widely shared on social media and reached a large number of citizens, provoked at least in part by foreign actors. (Inaudible) from the Pugh Research Center, exposure to misinformation during this period was nearly universally. Seventy-five percent of U.S. adults report having seen at least some made-up news stories online.

In some of my ongoing research, I spoke specifically on measuring and understanding the prevalence of misinformation on social media, which misinformation defined as news stories that appeared to present political facts that are demonstrably false or misleading. And our goal so far has been to try to determine, what are the cognitive and psychological factors that explain why someone would decide to click or share a false news story?

And to answer this question we conducted an analysis of news stories being shared on Twitter during the 2016 election. And what we found was, to be honest, quite shocking. We found that stories from online websites that produced mostly misinformation were shared almost as often as all 16 most popular media outlets combined. So that includes

New York Times, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC. So in other words, false stories were shared at rates comparable to actual news stories by mainstream outlets during this period. So at least when it comes to Twitter, during the 2016 election there was as much misinformation being shared as actual news.

However, it is also true that not every user shared misinformation at similar rates. We found significant heterogeneity in the extent to which users were likely to share -- to provide misinformation. The two most important factors were age and ideology.

So individuals of ages 16 and more were five times more likely to share false news stories on Twitter than those ages 18 to 25, right, which is interesting with your earlier point about young people perhaps being more savvy. And conservative users were twice as likely to share false news stories as moderates and liberals. So this part could be explained partially because there was a relatively higher prevalence of pro-Trump or anti-Clinton news stories during this period, but finally, we think (inaudible) explain why someone would click or share false news stories, we need to look at age and ideology.

These findings also align with the results from some excellent work by Andrew Guess from Princeton University Scholars, Brennan Nagonen and Jason Ryford, who measured individual news consumption in general online during this period and found that, again, age and alignment between individuals' ideology and the leanings of specific news stories were the most important factors explaining why people were exposed to this idea.

This evidence and other evidence that point in the same direction have similarly provided new fuel to this debate on the Internet and social media as ideological echo chambers, like really came out in the discussion today. And the prevailing narrative on this subject put forward by authors such as Cass Sunstein or Eli Pariser is that online misinformation is currently being amplified in partisan communities of like-minded individuals. In these online spaces, false news goes unchallenged in part thanks to perhaps all these ranking algorithms that are filtering out any dissenting voice.

But despite (inaudible), my view is that the connection between online echo

chambers, polarization, and the spirit of misinformation is actually quite more nuanced than that. Empirical studies of news consumption in online settings have systematically found that exposure to diverse news is actually higher in social media than in other types of online or offline news consumption. Cross-cutting political exchanges are actually much more frequently than commonly assumed. And just to give you an idea of all the political stories that the average person sees on Facebook or Twitter, something like one third, 33 percent do not align with their prior political beliefs.

And in fact, some of my own research has found that if anything, for most people, social media is actually having a depolarizing effect. So in other words, compared to other types of news consumption, exposure to political information on social media may be leading to ideological moderation for most people. Why? Because it's increasing the range of views to which we are exposed.

But, I mean, to be clear, that is not to say that there might be some individuals that are indeed fully embedded and completely homogeneous communities. We also found in our research that there are groups of people that are in these online spaces where agreement is basically the norm. So for these people, we may still expect to see some causal relationship social media and the appropriation of misinformation, but at this point, I think the empirical evidence clearly is telling us that the prevalence of ideological echo chambers on social media has been vastly overstated.

And that leads me to my main point here in my initial remarks. The mechanism that has been determinant in explaining the spread of misinformation on social media is not the existence of political echo chambers. It's actually the opposite. Precisely because social media is increasing unfiltered exposure to political opinions across the aisle, citizens are now being increasingly exposed to all types of ideas, and that is also going to include conspiracy theories, hyper-partisan stories, and liberal political opinions.

The message of this apparent paradox, it is important to understand how specific social media features are transforming the way in which we consume news. Social

media sites like Facebook or Twitter, what they do is they facilitate maintaining connections to both strong and weak ties. So in the classical work by Mark Granovetter, a sociologist in the 1970s, he defined strong ties as those with whom we have the most interaction. So there's going to be like close friends, relatives, et cetera. Weak ties are going to be acquaintances, distant relatives, coworkers, et cetera. And weak ties are crucially important because they expose us to new information, to diverse deals. Right? And this is where social media, I believe, represents a very profound share of news consumption.

It is now, you know, thinking about who is delivering the news? Our friends are delivering the news. Right? The stories to which we are exposed are in large proportion being shared by weak social ties, which are likely to be more ideologically diverse. Right?

So to make sense of it, just consider for a second, right, when was the last time you saw a false news story on social media? Who was the person that was sharing that story? Would you have seen that story in the age before social media? Right? And I'm quite sure that for most of you that person was this crazy uncle that really came early in the discussion, right, who is always sharing all these political stories that are like bordering on conspiracy theory. So that person would still probably hold the same beliefs in the age of social media, before social media, but the difference is that now we're seeing it. Right? Now, it's not only during Thanksgiving dinner when we're exposed to those ideas. Now we see it all the time on our news feed.

So just to conclude, I think like the broader point that I'm trying to make here is that if we're going to assign blame for the spread of misinformation and potentially then defy solutions to stop this spread, we should look not only at the features of the platforms but also at the broader news ecosystems. Right? And the psychological factors that explain how audiences select and process the news.

And similarly, and I will end with this, it is important to understand the unintended consequences that certain interventions may have. So if we want to increase exposure to the other side that may also increase exposure to conspiracy theories. And in

contrast, right, because false news stories are often engaging and click baiting and we like them, they attract the attention, if we stop, you know, completely, like I say, if we ban completely false news, what could happen is that actually exposure to political information at all may actually decrease because a lot of people, they only click on a political story because it has like this click baiting thing. It could be that that leads to less political interest, less civic engagement, et cetera. So testing this hypothesis is challenging and, you know, but in my opinion, these are the type of hard and maybe uncomfortable questions that we should be asking ourselves in the digital age.

MR. SIDES: Pablo, thank you.

I want to say back to you what I think you just told us. It's not a surprise to me as a social scientist, but I don't think it's fully appreciated. If I don't get this quite right you can adjust the terminology. But here we go.

Most people do not live in a media echo chamber, and to the extent that they consume news via social media, they live in less of an echo chamber than people who don't consume news through social media.

MR. BARBERA: Yes. So to be clear, it is the case that still like most of what the average person sees on social media aligns with their prior beliefs. But in isolation, that data point is not as relevant. What we need to do is compare social media political consumption with the same but online in other places and offline. And if you compare those three spaces, social media is finally by far where people see most diverse news.

MR. SIDES: Okay. So in other words, most of what we think is true about echo chambers reflects an echo chamber of false news about echo chambers. Okay.

And can I just get you to just say one other quick statistic which I think is just a useful benchmark for us, particularly living as we do in this wonderful city of Washington, D.C., what percentage of Americans are actively Twitter users?

MR. BARBERA: Like 15, 20 percent.

MR. SIDES: Fifteen percent, give or take. Okay. So 85 percent of Americans

are not Twitter users. Eighty-five percent of Americans. So God bless America.

Rob Faris?

MR. FARIS: Thank you. Thank you so much, John. It's great to be here and I really appreciate the opportunity to share some of my work and ideas on this important topic.

I spent the past two years studying digital media and U.S. politics, along with colleagues at the Berkman Klein Center at MIT. We've built a platform specifically for this purpose called Media Cloud. And what it does is it collects news stories and it allows us to analyze and map those. And so we've done that for the U.S. election and the year after the election. And a few things jump out from this.

So one of them won't surprise anybody, is that we have different segments of the media ecosystem. Amber mentioned fragmentation before. We see that. That's clear in our media ecosystems. We've known that from surveys in the past. Conservatives trust one set of media. Liberals trust another set of media. And our trans-partisan sources of authority are an endangered species right now. And that's deeply troubling I think for everybody.

The next thing that jumped out from the research that did surprise us is that these media ecosystems as we map them out are asymmetric and profoundly asymmetric. And what I mean by that is on one side of the media ecosystem you have media sources that are in the center, center-left, and even the left, that provide an integrated whole. They're interlinked. They cite each other's work. They're part of one media ecosystem.

And at the other side, conservative media has moved off to the corner. It's more insular. It's more partisan. And the connective tissue, which would be the center-right, is stunted in U.S. media communications. And that surprised us. And so we've spent the rest of our time trying to figure out what that means.

Let me just pause there and say that this observation, it's partisan. It sounds partisan, and it's a little bit awkward in that, but that's not just Cambridge, Massachusetts speaking. The data actually are very, very clear on that matter.

What comes from this is that we have different ecosystems that are structurally

and functionally different. I want to explain how.

So E.J. started off by mentioning Lippmann and objective journalism. That's one universe. And objective journalists, they have a different relationship with politicians, one which is often adversarial. Sometimes friendly but often adversarial. Partisan media has a different relationship with politicians in that it's mostly friendly. In fact, it's almost always friendly, and where partisanship and objectivity are at odds. Partisan media, almost by definition, leans towards the partisanship and ends up with an adversarial relationship with objectivity and the truth at times.

And it's obvious, I think, but I think it's overlooked very often that they're just functionally and structurally very, very different, and that what we have in political communication in the United States right now are functionally and structurally different media ecosystems that operate by different rules. And I think that explains a lot of what we see in disinformation right now.

I also think it means that anytime we think about media and disinformation, that if we ignore that fact we're going to get a lot of things wrong. So if you forget everything else I say, media ecosystems are partisan, they're polarized, and they're deeply asymmetric.

What this also means is I think we like to demonize people on the other side of the aisle frequently but I think the thing to keep in mind on this is that the behavior and the practices and outcome of media have very strong structural and functional bases to them. So we may not like Sean Hannity, but Sean Hannity is almost inevitable as a part of this media universe. The things that lead to success, the standards of success, and the motivations that drive people are different on both sides, and were it not Sean Hannity, it would be someone else.

And the roots of these things are structural. It's not personal. It's not a matter of integrity, honesty, any of those things. It's just these deep ecosystems which have been decades in the making are producing these outcomes and that's what we have to grapple with.

So I want to just throw one more thing by this lens, which is thinking about the

sources of this information in media. So there's a lot of culprits out there. There's Facebook algorithms. There's crazy uncles. A little bit close to home when you say Bob, but I'm a Rob, so I'm okay with it.

Media manipulators, click-bait factories, people with a mix of commercial and political motivations to feed people partisan BS. They're out there. Russians. Those kinds of things. But what we see is that they are interacting through these existing media ecosystems. And for me, it's less troublesome or it's less consequential the source of this information out there than the ability of that disinformation to gain traction within media ecosystems. And what we've seen is that conservative media, because of these structural elements, is more vulnerable to disinformation than the Lippmann objectivity, fact-based journalism that we see that's rooted in many, many decades of practice and behavior. And that's kind of what we're looking at there. It means that we can be worried about Russians, but the more important part is the larger media sources and what they're doing with this information and whether they're seeking to tap this down or seeking to amplify it in what they do. And that's what we saw in the past election. We've seen it over the past year when you see Uranium One becoming a big story on Fox News, or the Seth Rich conspiracy, or repeated coverage of the Deep State going after Donald Trump. Those are particular functional and structural aspects of conservative media. And we see the bubbling up on social media of craziness on both sides. And for me, the more important question is how far does it get in? And I don't know the evidence on this, so maybe some of the fine scholars here will have an idea of this, but it seems fundamentally different to me if you hear a rumor on Facebook and you wonder is this true or not. We all know to treat things you see on Facebook with a good degree of skepticism. It becomes a different matter if you read it on Facebook, it comes through email, you hear it on the radio, and then you see it on TV. That's a very, very different world than hearing it on Facebook and The New York Times telling you it's not true.

Final point I want to leave you with is that we would like to blame a lot of the current problems on technology. E.J. said in the beginning, technology is neutral. Technology

feeds through social and political processes. And if technology were the problem, we would see these problems resulting in more or less equal measure on both sides and we do not. So let's not point all fingers at technology. We need to be wary of it and there are things we can do to try to improve the way social media is intermediating, excuse me, media, but our problems run much deeper than that.

MR. SIDES: Thank you, Rob. Or Uncle Rob.

The --

MR. FARIS: Crazy Uncle Rob.

MR. SIDES: It may be useful just to, without going too deep into the arcane details, but to talk a little bit about how you're mapping these ecosystems. You know, so if you go and read the work that Rob and others have done with the Berkman Klein Center, you'll see these maps for each media outlet is a little circle, and the ones that are more central to the network are kind of close to the middle and the ones that are further out are sort of more peripheral. And then there's lines that connect these circles and that measures the sort of, to the extent to which they interact with each other in different ways. And so when he's talking about center left or left kind of in one sphere, and right in another sphere, that's because there's not a lot of ties that connect those two different networks from each other if there's insularities. So how are you measuring, you know, what data are you gathering to sort of map that network?

MR. FARIS: Thanks. So two different measures, which complement each other. So there's no one single view of a media ecosystem that tells the whole picture. It's a little bit like the blind people and the elephant where you're felling around and describing a different beast by the way you look at it. One way we do it is by looking at the interlinking patterns between media sources. So when The New York Times chooses to link to The Washington Post and not to Fox News, or sites within the right wing media ecosystem link to each other and less to the others, it creates a map. And what that map reflects is a media centric view of the media ecosystem according to the authors and editors of the media

ecosystem.

We have another map that reflects the behaviors of Twitter users. So we leverage the proclivity of Twitter users to share similar media sources. So we have two very, very different views of the media ecosystem, one based upon writers from Fox News and Breitbart and The New York Times, and the other based upon the 15 percent of Twitter users, which is a broader subset. And they offer similar but slightly different views of media.

MR. SIDES: Can you also just say a little bit -- you talked about the stunting of the center right. Can you just give a little bit more detail about what that looks like in your network map? And has anything changed from 2016 to 2017 in the way that these different media within the political right function?

MR. FARIS: Sure. So the center right are people that get most of their attention from the right but also get some attention from the left and center as well. And that's what defines the center right. And the folks that are in that cap are the National Review, the Weekly Standard, The Federalist. A lot of them were Trump skeptics and never Trumpers. And they were effectively sidelined in the 2016 election. As the partisan lines were drawn, you were either with Trump or were not with Trump, and the Trump skeptics weren't getting much attention from the left or the right as a result.

That hasn't changed that much in the past year. I think the partisan lines are drawn as cleanly and strongly as before.

MR. SIDES: Even with the decline of Breitbart, based on traffic statistics and other kinds of things, do you think it's as central a node as it was in 2016? Because in some sense it took the place of what you would have normally ascribed -- a place you would have normally ascribed to the center right publications. The venerable National Review after all.

MR. FARIS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SIDES: Do you think that's changed in the wake of the election?

MR. FARIS: So I want to harken back to Amber's point about intense competition within media now.

MR. SIDES: Okay.

MR. FARIS: So we see a much stronger demand response in media. And so one of the factors that certainly led to Breitbart's success during the election was that they carved out a very strongly, early pro-Trump position that Fox News was not able or willing to make at that point. And I think what we see in this changing prominence over time was that Breitbart was sucking a lot of attention that Fox News otherwise would have gotten. Since the election, Fox News is not conflicted about where their loyalties lie. They are not worried about Rubio or about Cruz any longer, and I think that they've regained their audience, in part because of that. And I think that might also explain why Breitbart has fallen in prominence.

MR. SIDES: Thank you.

So I want to ask a question of all of you guys, and I want to harken back to E.J.'s comments about, and Amber echoed this, none of this is new. None of this is new. Many of these things are features of American politics. I would often go so far as to say it's actually better now than it used to be. Better than the era of "yellow journalism." We have a journalism that is not yellow journalism, that didn't exist to the extent that it does now. We have news outlets that strive for objectivity that didn't exist in a world where newspapers had partisan affiliations, and then in earlier eras of American politics, explicit partisan subsidies, cash, right, given to them by political factions and actors.

So you don't have to agree with that statement by any stretch. But I guess the question I would like to ask is, what is the right way to put the environment today in context? I mean, should we be comparing it to the 1800s and then maybe we feel better? Or should we be comparing it to like Walter Cronkite and we feel worse? And I think that's an important question because adjacent to this conversation about, you know, #misinformation is a conversation about democracy in decline in the United States and elsewhere. And there's a lot of emotion in that debate that sometimes feels to me to be fairly ahistorical, fairly like what happened 20 minutes ago is the most important thing that's ever happened in the history of American politics. But maybe I'm just being sort of contrarian. Like, maybe I should wake up

every morning and be more alarmed every single day.

So how do we grapple with this question is, is it bad today? Like, what are we supposed to compare today to in order to get an intelligent answer to that question?

MS. BOYDSTUN: Well, I'll start.

Yeah, that's the magic question. I think that's the magic question. And it's all relative. I don't think I would say, maybe just because I don't want to say, but I wouldn't say that democracy is in decline. I would say democracy is in flux. But it's always been in flux. Right? We've always had to challenge something. I personally, and also as an academic, am less concerned about the role of misinformation than I am the role of mistrust. And those are aligned but I think they're orthogonal. They're different conceptually and they're different practically that the steepest, sharpest danger I think we face is that we're increasingly not trusting our government, we're increasingly not trusting the media, and we're increasingly not trusting each other, specifically not just Uncle Rob but all of our friends who are across the aisle, who I would reiterate, science shows that we're not. In fact, we're at large becoming more polarized as citizens, and yet we're distrusting each other more. So I think that that's dangerous. It's certainly reason for concern. But as you say, there's lots of things to like about our current form of democracy and our current form of the media landscape that we didn't have before, only one of which is that individual citizens really do have more agency now than they used to and that is a good thing and a bad thing potentially, but it's also a good thing.

MR. BARBERA: I mean, to me the irony is like had, like, you know, a few thousand boats going in the other direction in 2016, would we be here talking about misinformation? Like, would we be having this like monologue, like, well, there's this crisis. Right? So I think our role as scholars is to take one step back and like put things into perspective.

MR. SIDES: There would be so many fewer Brookings panels right now. It would be amazing. This place would be a ghost town. Just kidding. Go ahead. There's always going to be Brookings panels. It doesn't matter what's happening.

MR. BARBERA: So to me, I agree, misinformation is not new. I think what perhaps is a bit troubling is like this mistrust in the media. And I think, like, more generally, I think there's a crisis of method in the sense that across like different fields, like science or like the media, or like government, there's a crisis and there's, you know, kind of like not like the not like the output, per se, but just like the way things were, like the basic principles. Like journalism, like the standards. Right? Like, now there's like mostly multiplicity of news outlets that pretend to be like very serious, to produce very serious journalism, but in a way they don't follow the same standards. Like, in science, there's all this like fake science now, you know, this crisis of like (inaudible) civility. There's also a crisis in like not following the right standards. So I think that's what we should be focusing on, like trying to make sure that, you know, we follow the rules and we don't get taken away by like the moment in which we're living.

MR. SIDES: Rob?

MR. FARIS: I'm going to agree with the panel that the thing we should be concerned about is the erosion of institutions that speak to everyone across the populous and that misinformation, disinformation, it's not unrelated to that but it's an underlying problem that we need to worry about.

We're going to have a hard time comparing this to other things. It's new and different now, and for better or worse, social media and the Internet, eventually mediated communication has changed our world in important ways that I don't think we fully understand yet. I guess I would just reiterate that it's a weird kind of -- feels like a transitional outcome now that things look so different on one side than the other. I don't think that that's permanent but I'm not really sure what to make of it. But we can't go back to Walter Cronkite, and that wasn't perfect either. There were catastrophic media failures at that time as well. We have some more new and different catastrophic media failures ahead of us as well.

MS. BOYDSTUN: Can I add something?

MR. SIDES: Sure.

MS. BOYDSTUN: So Rob's work shows nicely that the behavior of media

systems is structural. It's rooted not in personality or in personal aspects but in incentives and institutions. But if we were to think of a simulation where all we do is we put in a set of incentives for a given news outlet, then all we would get is click bait; right? That's the natural conclusion of the types of incentives for news systems on the left and on the right and in the center. So I take great comfort in the fact that we have so much investigative journalism still today. That's not a product, I mean, that's a product of professionalism and institutions, but it's not a product of the marketplace. And that tells me that there are still people, there are still many, many journalists who care about getting things right and getting things right not in a quick manner but in an investigative manner, but there are also consumers who are continuing to ignore the click bait and to pay attention to those deeper, truer stories.

MR. FARIS: If I could just add to that, we would be remiss to not mention the decline of local journalism, which is (inaudible).

MS. BOYDSTUN: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. FARIS: I think everyone agrees.

MS. BOYDSTUN: And that may be -- yeah, that should be the next panel.

MR. SIDES: Let me ask you guys one more question and then we'll take some questions from the audience.

Amber gave us the wonderful metaphor of processed food.

MS. BOYDSTUN: You're welcome.

MR. SIDES: Thank you. I'm going to steal that for years to come.

So, I mean, we all know that, you know, Velveeta is sort of not as good as kale, and we should all --

MS. BOYDSTUN: But delicious.

MR. SIDES: -- eat more kale. So but then without trying to argue with you in any way that I can tell, but Pablo sort of raised this interesting idea that there are lots of unanticipated consequences when we're trying to sort of put parameters on what gets published or what people pay attention to because for most of us the more we consume, the

more we consume. All right. And so the more we get of the bad, the more we get of the good at the same time.

So poaching again on the third panel as the first panel did, you know, is there a way to get us from Velveeta to kale that doesn't end up with a perverse kind of consequence? You know, Pablo raised the specter that we just wouldn't actually get as much information, period. We would become more -- less politically engaged and informed because we're trying to avoid being misinformed. So is there a way to thread this needle?

MS. BOYDSTUN: Well, I think we should be cautious about policy because policy is something that is much easier to implement than it is to take away. And I think there are all kinds of unintended consequences that we can see. I don't want someone to tell me that I have to eat kale for lots of reasons. I don't want someone to tell me that; right? I want to be able to make my own food choices and that makes sense, but I also want everyone to have equal access to kale if they wanted. And I want people to be equally, at least equally available, equally able to be informed about the relative health benefits of kale and Velveeta. And so in my mind it's more about information and awareness on a citizen level, but also I'll return to this point about how I think, especially because of the decline of local news, we are facing not just a challenge of misinformation and disinformation, but a disproportionate challenge of those things for people, for example, of lower socioeconomic status. And so I don't know what kind of policy we could put into place but, I mean, it's hard to imagine a subsidization system by the government that is something that would appeal to us in a normative way but I don't know. I don't have a good answer.

MR. BARBERA: So my answer is also we don't know, but I will explain why we don't know. I think this is a really hard question. So let's assume for a second that we want to implement a policy that will make for fake news (inaudible). Like, we are going to tell the platforms the lead and the fake news. First of all, what is fake news? Like, this is a question that we haven't really discussed, but it's actually really hard to identify what is fake news because in a lot of like fake news articles there's always like a nugget of truth. Right? Like

hyper-partisan stories which might be true but misleading, there's completely false stories, and there's like a whole gray in the middle. So first of all, it's very hard to define.

Second, even if we make fake news forbidden in let's say social media, there's not like a multiplicity of platforms. Right? Like, we're getting news in our watches now; right? So how do we come up with like a comprehensive way of doing that? It's also a problem for like measurement. Right? Like, we don't know exactly, first of all, like very basic questions like how much, you know, what proportion of all the political news that we see are misleading or false stories? We just don't know. So like coming out with like potential policy proposals to fight fake news, like, where we run into this wall of like, well, there are all these challenges. Like (inaudible) methodologically and substantively.

MR. SIDES: Rob?

MR. FARIS: I'll agree. I can't imagine a policy prescription that would be palatable in the U.S. context at this point. I think anything that would try to limit the production and distribution of political speech is kind of a third rail and rightly so. I think we have a lot of things that we can and should try in the meantime to shore up things and that the roots of solutions are not in law or even in technology but are in politics, and that's where we ought to go before that.

MR. SIDES: Let's take some questions.

Yes, ma'am. You were quick on the draw.

There's a microphone coming to you on your right.

MS. MCKENZIE: Hi, my name is Meredith McKenzie. I'm here on behalf of the NYU Center for Business and Human Rights.

You mentioned that we should be concerned about Russia, but really, and even in the last panel they said, well, we're here to talk about American misinformation, but how much of it comes from Russia, and what is the responsibility of businesses to look at their model and what they're profiting off of misinformation. You said maybe the solution is in politics, but is there a solution for tech companies and media businesses?

MS. BOYDSTUN: You got this.

MR. BARBERA: Yeah, I mean, it's tough. The weird thing about this is like why do we (inaudible), like the supply side, when part of it is like just financial incentive. Like, there's (inaudible), like kids in Macedonia, creating fake news pages, simply because they're making a lot of money out of it. But then also, you know, Russian propaganda, which in many cases, is very difficult to identify and it's like politically motivated. So I think it's been very challenging to come up with ways to fight this, but I agree. And I think a broader point is like all the discussion so far has focused on fake news mostly in the U.S., but in other countries, so again, in the U.S., we're worried about democracy, but in other countries we're worried about genocide. Right, just like places like Myanmar and Sri Lanka where false stories are being shared and that's into political violence. And like that's also like something which we should pay attention to.

MR. FARIS: So it's easy to imagine trying to prevent using all means necessary to prevent foreign intervention in U.S. elections. I think that doesn't bump up against First Amendment protections and ought to be pursued. There are limits to it. I mean, there are a few things we could do. The Honest Ads Act, which would require online ads to disclose who's actually financed those ads I think is a good sensible idea. There's nuances and complications with any such things. How do we know who's where and what lengths do we go to document that is a hard question. A more difficult question is what's political and what's not and where one draws the line around that. But I think that makes sense and there are things that can and should be done. I think social pressure on social media companies is appropriate as well. And again, it's a political, social solution to a political and social problem, which is ask them to do better in certain circumstances, and it's not government policy, it's not binding upon everyone. But we're just going to have to muddle through. There's no easy answers to any of that.

MS. BOYDSTUN: I'll just add that in thinking about potential Russian interference, it's really a difference of resources. It's not that we have to look outside our

country for people with political aims who are trying to game the system to influence a people. It's just that in these documented cases there was an excess of resources. And that doesn't make it a small thing but it's an exaggeration of an existing problem.

MR. SIDES: David. Right there.

MR. BARKER: I tried to be quick on the draw.

This is David Barker. I'm from AU.

My question is mostly for everybody's new favorite uncle. But others can chime in, too, if you want to.

I'm very interested in the two media echo chambers that you described that allow most of the people in this room to pat themselves on the back in terms of the center and center left echo chamber that tries to adhere to traditional Lippmannesque journalistic standards. And then the right wing system. But I'm wondering if your analyses are recent enough or if you're seeing any changes in the last year and a half on that. Anecdotally, it just feels like, you know, when I watch late night TV and we see that Stephen Colbert got a lot more popular when he decided to go full throated against Trump every night. Jimmy Fallon lost a lot of popularity when he refused to do that for a time and then now has jumped on board. When I pay attention to Twitter, and even honestly, when I look at the headlines in my Washington Post feed in my inbox every morning, it feels to me like the traditional center and center left is becoming a little bit more foxy. And then I could talk about podcasts, too. Right? The popularity of Save America and whatnot starts to, it seems a lot like, you know, political talk radio.

So I'm wondering if there's any evidence again that both on the right, that Fox is becoming more foxy, but that the traditional center and center left are also becoming more Foxy.

MR. FARIS: Thank you for the question. It's a good one.

So we have. We've kept tabs on the past year. And Colbert and Jimmy Fallon do not appear in our analyses. So they are not getting the same traction within Twitter and

within the media ecosphere that mainstream media is. And Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, Political Hill, they are as they have been. They certainly have a clearer focus than they had in the past. But there are still people in the room and the people running these organizations are still saying eat your kale, insisting that their reporters serve kale. So I don't think that has changed that much.

MS. BOYDSTUN: You're welcome.

MR. FARIS: The left is certainly more energized than they were before. There was an enthusiasm gap prior to the election where the partisan right was much more engaged with things, and we have seen evidence that that has shifted since the election. And I think that that is partially reflected in Colbert and Fallon. But I don't even know where to place them in the media ecosystem. They fall in that kind of entertainment political kind of muddle that is hard to describe which we wish didn't exist. And on the right, things are as they were. If nothing else, right wing media is more unified than it was before as it's not an election period any longer. The difference being that they are more on the defensive than the offense as they were before, though you do see a surprising amount of offense. I mean, going after the Clintons well after the election is a sign of that, that that was a successful way to do business and continues to be there.

MS. BOYDSTUN: I think it's really interesting that part of the asymmetry between the left and the right media is not only the degree of network closeness but also the nature of the media. So the first panel talked about how talk radio, or at least about how talk radio is almost exclusively on the right and late night comedic news-based shows are almost exclusively on the left. And that may be indeed exclusively for institutional reasons, but I wonder. I think it's an interesting question. Dannagal Young at the University of Delaware is writing a book right now on the psychological links between conservatives and liberals and comedy. And yeah, I can't wait to read that book. You should check out that book.

MR. BARBERA: If I may, I would just like to agree. So some of the research that I've done with some colleagues has found like similar asymmetries between the left and

the right. And by looking at change in recent, basically after the election, the big thing, the big movement has been CNN from a relatively, at least (inaudible) to the left, but something that I think is important to take into account here when we think about these issues is that, you know, one thing might be the average (inaudible) outlet, but I think it's also important, kind of like the range of views to which they expose you to. Like, CNN is famous for like giving voice to both sides of an issue, whereas, like maybe Fox News, MSNBC, which is like relatively more extreme, may only give you one side of the debate. So that's important.

MS. SIDES: Yes, ma'am. Right here.

MS. BALLINGER: Ann Ballinger, retired intelligence analyst. And I want to ask you all a question. But (inaudible) might be able to answer this.

Why can't we fight back? If we really want truth as opposed to fake news, we could do what the Post did last week, which had a one page -- do you remember that blue page? It was (inaudible), which makes me somewhat suspicious. I suppose I know who paid for it. And good for you if that's true. But we don't have to take this. Do you want to find out what the truth is? You could go to a library. Librarians are trained. Are there any librarians here? Librarians are trained to show you what is true, what is not, what can be a source of information. And this is something you don't have to have the money to subscribe to all the newspapers and journals that I like to subscribe to. But most people do have access to a library. Can you all address yourself to that?

MR. SIDES: Yeah. Actually, this is a great -- this is something I wanted to ask, so I'm going to ask it the way I was going to ask it, which is the same point that you're making. You know, when we talk about policy, we think, how are we going to fix this? How are we going to fix this? And we say, well, we can't do very much because, you know, First Amendment, et cetera. Or it's hard to categorize fake news. And I think that's absolutely right.

So I guess my way of framing this question is, is there a way then -- should our focus be on, you know, let the Velveeta people make the Velveeta. Fine. How do we help the kale growers? That's a different way of approaching this issue, which gets into the economics

of the news business. Also gets into the personal choices that people may or may not make as consumers. But are there ways that we might -- E.J. and I both helped to write for a publication that is now owned by a very wealthy man. It turns out that's a pretty good way to get money as far as I can tell. He doesn't pay me. I'm not a paid employee of The Washington Post, so this is not -- no conflict of interest here.

But that's one way to do it. But are there other ways to strengthen ecosystems that are truth providers in ways that enable them to be a counterbalance to misinformation, a counterbalance to Russian misinformation, a counterbalance to just sort of just rank partisanship or anything else that we think might not be the information that voters need or Americans need to be good citizens.

This is our last -- your last word on this panel, so go for it.

MS. BOYDSTUN: All right. Well, money goes a long way, and I think money to fund more libraries and better infrastructure in libraries, and money to fund all of the various news outlets that are producing kale, that will go a long way. Especially if that money, again, could go towards funding subscriptions for people to get through the paywall for people who can't afford it. There are a number of newspapers that offer student discounts. That's great. But there are lots of people beyond students who just can't afford it.

The harder task I think is time. That it's a very different thing to ask someone to consume a newspaper article even on line than it is to ask them to glance at Twitter in the morning. It's just a very different task. And increasingly, as our economic workplace is shifting, it's harder and harder I think, again, specifically for lower socioeconomic people to ask them to take that time.

MR. BARBERA: I want to highlight the role of civic education and digital leader I see here. I think like a lot of the patterns that we're seeing are due to the fact that a lot of people like don't understand that when they see something on social media or the Internet, like sometimes it's going to be false. Right? Like, there are people actively trying to mislead you either for financial or political reasons. So I think like developing that conscience of like, hey,

you know, think twice whenever you're reading something. Look for like the reputation of the outlet, and like learning how to do that. And that's something not only to be taught in schools but like farther in life. So now like the role of age in explaining like the deficient effect. I think the role of education is something like we should definitely think about.

MR. SIDES: Rob?

MR. FARIS: So that's the right question and it has no easy answer. I mean, my sense is that it's the everyday work of building democracies that we have to reengage with and that's everywhere from funding libraries and paying teachers better salaries and buying subscriptions to newspapers and donating money to philanthropic organizations are all the things that we need to do. And we need to try to fend of polarization and partisanship where we can. You know, I think one of the big concerns is the encroachment of political life on all aspects of the collective endeavor and that the more that gets politicized, the less likely are we to come to kind of reasonable collective decisions on things moving forward.

MR. SIDES: We're going to take a 10-minute break and reconvene at 11:45. Please join me in thanking our panelists.

(Applause)

(Recess)

MS. BROUSSARD: All right, folks, welcome back. I hope you had a lovely break. My name is Meredith Broussard; I'm a Data Journalism Professor at NYU in the Department of Journalism, and I also have a new book out called "Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World". So I'm going to be leading our next conversation about solutions to misinformation.

So our panelists are Alexander Coppock, to my left. He is an Assistant Professor at Yale and he's in the Political Science Department. And we also have Magdalena Wojcieszak, who is an Associate Professor at the University of California at Davis, who is in the Communication Department.

And we are going to be talking about, okay, what we do. All right. Alex, do you

want to start us off?

MR. COPPOCK: This is a tremendous amount of pressure on this last panel. We've been building up to what we are going to do about all this. (Laughter) So I apologize for the inevitable failure that we will present unto you. So I study persuasion response to political information, and I do that using survey experiments where you bring people into the survey environment, I'm going to measure some demographic characteristics about them, then I'm going to randomly assign them to either see a piece of information or not. I then compare their attitudes afterwards to find out what the effect of this information on their attitudes is.

I think it's important to just like state this is how I know. I know about what I'm about to tell you because I did random assignment. So this is an experiment in which I've controlled whether or people see this information. So I've done dozens and dozens of these survey experiments and I just want to tell you three things that I've learned from doing these survey experiments. The first thing is that people update their attitudes in the direction of the information that you present them. So this is the not counterintuitive result. This is the normal, boring, hard to publish (laughter), but nevertheless like really important result, which is that people update their views in the direction of information. So that's point number one.

Point number two is that these updates are small. Of course they're small. If they were big that would mean that every time you encounter a new piece of information you're just flopping around, right. So these are small. What I mean by small, if you care about standard deviations, it's one-tenth of a standard deviation. What's that in percentage point terms -- it's about a five percentage point difference. So imagine the control group agrees with the statement at a rate of 50 percent, the treatment group is going to agree with the statement at a rate of 55 percent. Of course there's variation from issue to issue, there's variation on like whether the source is a particular kind, et cetera. Those differences are small relative to this. The main thing that we're describing, which is that I give you a piece of persuasive information and you update your views in the direction of that information. Okay, so that's point two, in the direction and it's small.

Point number three, and this is the one that nobody believes me on, but I really hope you can believe me because it's really, really true. (Laughter) It's that it's not different for different kinds of people, okay. So republicans and democrats aren't different from one another in their baseline points of view. But they both update by about five percentage points. So we get what I call persuasion in parallel. So they start out separate, they are both persuaded, and they end up still disagreeing with one another, but the information is persuasive to both groups. That pattern holds for parson groups, young versus old, black/white, rich/poor, well-educated/not well educated. So when I look to see whether or not there are differences in treatment response to information, the answer is yeah, sure, maybe a little bit. But we're talking about that five point difference and it's plus or minus one for these different groups. So we should not be expecting large differences in response to information.

So those three points about information. This is a panel about misinformation, and so the question is does misinformation behave in any way differently from information. And the answer from -- so the bank of experiments on misinformation is about ten deep -- maybe there's twelve. We don't know as much about it as we do about information, but the summary result from the ten or twelve that have been done is that yeah, no, you tell somebody a lie, they believe the lie a little bit more. How much more? I don't know, about five percentage points, right? (Laughter) Okay. So if you tell them a rumor they believe the rumor a little bit more. You tell them a falsehood about some government policy, they update in the direction of the rumor. It's a small effect and it's about the same for everyone. So as far as we can tell on what misinformation does to people, it does what information does, and that makes sense because how are you supposed to know what's true and false. You don't have access to the truth, that's why you're reading the article, right? Okay.

So the bad news is that we are all very susceptible to misinformation, like news headlines. Everyday are we getting revised? And I'm sure that we've all believe something that has been then corrected by a newspaper, and that's just part of the way that this works. What about corrections to rumors? Well, it turns out that corrections work just the same as

every other kind of information. Like the experiment is, first I expose you to a rumor and then I expose you to a correction to that rumor. The people who are corrected don't really believe the lie at a lower rate. By how much more? I don't know, it's about five percentage points. (Laughter) So the corrections also work like information.

So there's a lot of discussion about what's the best kind of correction to do. People are like, don't repeat the lie, or you have to give an alternative plausible story. My understanding from my reading of those ten or twelve experiments is that the differences across correction strategies are overblown. That if that five percentage point difference -- and then we're talking about small variations at the margin about what strategy is more effective versus another. And if you imagine the like data requirements of being able to distinguish a five point effect from a four point effect, you need a sample size that is much larger than what political scientists are bringing to bear. So I think it's great for us to iterate on what kinds of corrections, or like what's the best way to write a fact check story or what's the best way to write a story that's correcting misinformation in general. It's great for us to iterate on that, but I think that the most important thing to do is counter the information in whatever way you like. So future experiments should absolutely run a horse race across these things, but so far the extant evidence is that corrections work. Do some corrections work better than others? Open question.

I want to end on what this means for the way that our political discourse goes. We often describe people who believe fake news as susceptible to fake news. And that word implies that people are differently like susceptible to the introduction of fake news. And I don't think that that is true. I think that we are all approximately equally susceptible. And I think it's a way of denigrating our political opponents to call them, oh, those stupid people over there, they believed that thing that's demonstrably false. We all believe a bunch of false things, we are all susceptible to information. They are also susceptible to correction. And so I think that that's like a bit of like a dignity that we can give to political opponents that their convincible and we should take up the task of doing that. I'll leave it there.

Thank you.

MS. BROUSSARD: Great, thank you, Alex. All right, Magdalena?

MS. WOJCIESZAK: Great, thank you. So I will be disagreeing to some extent here. I will first outline what I think are the challenges to the efforts to curb the spread and the acceptance of misinformation. And I will later propose some ideas, and one of them will be pretty controversial I believe.

So, first the challenges. So first the very strategies aimed at curbing or correcting misinformation rely on the assumption that people care about truth, that if only we give people more information, if we only put more facts or evidence out there, then everything will be better and different. And that may not be the case, because first of all, some citizens do not care about verifiable or objective truth as we would define it. And the use the media, turn on the TV or go on line, not necessarily to find that objective information or evidence, but rather to reaffirm their in group identity, for instance, to see what the opponents are doing, or actually to find support for what they themselves believe to be true, which may not be what is defined as objective truth. And, importantly, and that's a point made by Kelly Garrett from Ohio State University at the symposium at Stanford, some people may endorse falsehoods knowing that there is evidence to the contrary.

So, for example, I know that scientists say that vaccinations are safe, but I choose not to believe that and I choose not to vaccinate my children anyway. What do we do about that? Is that misinformation, is that misbelief? How do we craft correction efforts in those situations, for instance? So that's the first challenge.

And, second, giving people facts or telling them that false information is false does work, but I think that it works, according to research, in situations that are increasingly rare in the current polarized climate. So, for instance, research shows that citizens will reject misinformation when it is refuted by unlikely sources. So, for example, a situation in which a republican politician corrects what President Trump has said, or, you know, Breitbart news corrects what Fox News said, or vice versa. Such corrections work, but our politicians or media

organizations likely to correct misinformation coming from within their political in group. Well, I think it's not very likely, also based on anecdotal observations. Also (inaudible) what prior panelists said, appealing to an independent authority is said to work. So, for example, we may tell people that Nobel Prize winners or a reputable think tank say that something is false. That works. However, again, how many institutions are now reputable for both political camps? That's not that many.

So, also some work shows that corrections included within the same article as the misinformation or inoculating people against misinformation before they see it is effective. So, for example, an article may first say that some people think that Obama is a Muslim and in the next paragraph say that that's not true. But misinformation spreads on line long before it is corrected. And so these efforts are effective, but they are partially artificial as well. And a crucial challenge here, subsequent fact checking sometimes works, but often, and there is some work as well that shows does not erase the attitudinal effects of misinformation. So, in fact, some argue that correcting misinformation may give it even more power and risks spreading it to an even larger audience. So, in other words, merely repeating a rumor increases its strength.

So, given the challenges of correcting misinformation in the current political climate and once it has been processed, what may work. So I speculate about two strategies, a micro level strategy focusing on individual cognitive skills and a macro level strategy focusing on the system. And that one is more speculative.

So the first is the micro level strategy. So I propose that we attempt to alter the way in which people approach information in general. So, for instance, including certain prompts or cues on social media or on websites of media organizations may perhaps encourage people to be more critical and process information in an unbiased way. So the work by Dave Rand at Yale shows that people who have analytical reasoning skills are more able to discern fake news from real news. So this work suggests that interventions that promote analytic and open minded thinking can help prevent belief in misinformation. And, in my own

work, which focuses on selectivity political polarization to greater extent than on misinformation, I and my co-authors find that experimentally priming accuracy motivation, so telling people to be accurate when approaching information or endorsing or emphasizing social norms of open mindedness may encourage partisans to look at balanced political content.

So now I look at some other interventions focusing on positive effect, for instance, making people feel happy. And the next step is to examine whether these strategies can help prevent exposure to, acceptance of, and the spread of misinformation. And let me emphasize that these strategies, so promoting analytical thinking, open mindedness, accuracy motivations, or other mental states in the media exposure context, are content or issue neutral. So most of the efforts in that correcting misinformation is focused on specific content of course. So in these situations, the corrections need to analyze the content, prepare the rebuttals, and so forth. And it's rather easy to say partner up with Facebook or with Microsoft to have banners on social media or some prompt encouraging people to be more critical or more open minded, independent of an issue.

And the second strategy to correct misinformation is the more controversial one. So this macro level strategy focuses on the system in attempting to prevent exposure to misinformation in the first place. So how could we do this? So I speculate in at least about two ways, and as Pablo mentioned, it is extremely challenging, very difficult, but this is the more provocative statement of my presentation. So one could be identifying problematic sources and downplaying their importance, let's say in Google searches. And here the question is who holds the authority to determine what is problematic and to identify those problematic sources to begin with, so the public would be and should be skeptical if say a private or public entity were to do that. But can the emerging artificial intelligence powered collective filtering systems be an acceptable possibility? I know that some scholars and some platforms are working on that, so that could be a way forward.

And another macro level strategy would be to increase the cost of sharing misinformation. And by that I mean actually fining media organizations or sources that

purposely spread false information. And this strategy is controversial in the U.S. where there is a huge emphasis on freedom and sometimes at the expense of public good. But, for instance, in Germany, Facebook is required to take down hate speech at the expense of being fined. So that also relates to the three strikes and you're out comment from our first panel.

So those are my ideas. And in the last minute or so I wanted to also to encourage us to carefully think of what it is that we are trying to influence as scholars and practitioners. So in thinking about corrective efforts we may want to differentiate between the effects of exposure to misinformation on knowledge first. So what I mentioned at the start, the difference between knowing the real facts or the evidence but nevertheless choosing not to believe it versus an attitude. So, for instance, will knowing the real facts change my voting decisions, for example. Will it or will it not? We don't know the effects. And on such relevant behaviors as information sharing on social media. So to what extent do people share information that they know is false on social media, again knowing that they are spreading misinformation. If they choose to share knowing that they are sharing falsehoods, then corrective efforts that we may engage should account for that as well because then the rumors or misinformation may continue spreading despite various efforts to encourage people to have the correct evidence based knowledge.

MS. BROUSSARD: Okay. Great, thank you very much. So I'm going to respond to a couple of things that both of you said and I'm also going to offer five points -- more than three -- but I've got five points that I want to talk about regarding misinformation.

And to the first point, I want to tell a story about a time that I was misinformed. It started when I was a kid and my mom would keep a jug of distilled water on the basement steps for ironing and for, you know, humidifiers and stuff. And I always thought, oh, the distilled water is like special because you buy it, it doesn't come out of the tap. And then when I was in about ninth grade I had this really nutty science teacher who one day started telling us that the way that they make distilled water is they take a canister of hydrogen and they take a canister of oxygen and they shoot them at each other (laughter) and that's where the distilled water

comes from, because when you combine hydrogen and oxygen you get water, because it's H20. And I didn't know any better, I was like oh, okay, that must be how they make the distilled water. And I went about my business. And it never came up again, ever, until I was an adult and my kid asked me about distilled water. And I was like, oh, well, you know, they like shoot the hydrogen and the oxygen from the canisters and that's what makes it. And he looks at me and he goes, that doesn't sound right. And my husband looked at me and he said, what are you talking about. (Laughter) And I said well, that's what he told me in science class. And then I remembered that this particular science teacher had told me a number of other things were totally wrong. And, yet, I believed him because I was 13 and he was a teacher and he was a science teacher and I had absolutely no way of knowing otherwise because he was the expert who had been presented to me as an expert who I was supposed to listen to about how the world worked.

And so I think about this incident, this incident of misinformation when I think about misinformation spreads, because many of us don't know what we are misinformed about. And it is entirely possible for intelligent well meaning people to be confused about things, the way that I was confused about the distilled water. And it didn't matter until it did.

So I think about that and then I think about expertise, and I think about who do we trust as experts. I trusted my ninth grade teacher as an expert, but I clearly should have only trusted him as an expert in certain realms, not in the realm of chemistry and manufacturing. (Laughter) So I want us to think about who we trust as experts when we are talking about misinformation because the source of the expertise matters a great deal. Is it accurate -- well, it's accurate if it's coming from an expert. Well, people are not experts across fields, okay. So like Elon Musk might know a lot about taking a payment company like PayPal public, but Elon Musk does not necessarily know anything about tunnels and infrastructure, and we should not necessarily assume that just because somebody is good at one thing that they are also an expert in something else. So important point in understanding misinformation.

I also want to talk about stickiness. So cognitive psychologists have done a lot

of work on how do people perceive risk. The psychology of risk perception is totally fascinating and it has a lot to do with understanding the psychological processes behind misinformation. There is one cognitive psychologist who does a really great job. His name is Paul Slovic, he's out of Oregon. I totally recommend reading his work. He has a great book called "The Perception of Risk". And one of the things that psychologists say is they talk about the stickiness, the difference in stickiness between anecdotes and statistics. So if I tell you that my cousin's sister-in-law's kid got killed by a falling television, you're like, oh my god. Okay, that's horrifying. And it's somebody who I know and so you feel like you know me and so you can imagine this poor little child, right. If I told you that ten kids are killed every year from falling objects in the home, it wouldn't hit you the same way. The anecdote is more powerful because we're humans. We evolved as an oral culture. Human stories hit us harder and are stickier inside our brains than statistics are. Okay, so human stories are more sticky than numerical stories.

So those are the first things I'm going to talk about. The second thing I want to talk about is I what to talk about something that Magdalena brought up, which is the idea of fines, fines for misinformation. I'm really looking forward to hearing what people have to say about this, because I imagine it's a very controversial idea. But I want to talk about the idea of experimenting because in technology we talk a lot about, you know, moving fast and breaking things and experimenting. And what if, as an experiment, we treated platforms as publishers? What if we tried saying Facebook has exactly the same responsibility as the *New York Times* to make sure that what they are putting out there is true? So right now there is a legal framework that allows Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, all the platforms to avoid responsibility for what's published on them. And that clause is called CDA 230. Anybody familiar with this? Yeah? Okay. So CDA 230 is Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and it says that if you are a common carrier you are not responsible for what people are doing on your platform. And this came about way back in the early days of the web and it was designed to protect digital companies from being held responsible. And the same like we wouldn't hold Verizon

responsible for somebody making a phone call and like -- I don't know, what's something me and you could do to somebody on the phone?

SPEAKER: (off mic).

MS. BROUSSARD: Yeah, harassment. Okay. So like you wouldn't say oh, it's the telephone's fault or the telephone company's fault if somebody is making harassing phone calls. So tech companies, way back in the day, in the early days of the internet, said oh, well, you know, it's not really our fault. People are just going to use the internet for whatever they're going to use it for, same way people use the telephone for whatever they're going to use it for, and it's the same thing. So we need to be held blameless. And so we put together this law. And so a lot of people are saying, all right, well maybe it's time to look at CDA 230 and revise it based on how things have turned out over the past 20 years. So I'm not saying let's abolish it, I'm saying let's look at it and let's see if we can use that regulatory framework to make us safer and see if we can do better around there.

So that's one thing we could talk about. Another thing I want to talk about is the idea of the popular versus the good. So there are lots of things that are popular but not good, like racism or ramen burgers. (Laughter) And social medial platforms and a lot of algorithms are set up to pick up on what is popular and amplify what is popular. And this has implications for misinformation because the kind of misinformation that we call fake news is very popular. Like it was very popular to say oh, yeah, Hillary Clinton is running a child sex trafficking ring out of a pizza shop in wherever, which is obviously crazy, but it was very popular. So our algorithms can't just amplify and spread what is popular, they have to also be tuned for what is good because otherwise you just get dreck and the algorithms don't make us better as a society.

And if we're going to talk about the difference between popular and good, and we're going to talk about how algorithms work and how social media algorithms work, we also need a little bit more computational literacy across the board. And we need more media literacy across the board. And we especially need more media literacy among the people who

make algorithms. So I'm a data journalist. That means I find stories in numbers, I use numbers to tell stories. I started my career as a computer scientist, I quit to become a journalist. And so I hang out with a lot of computer scientists and data scientists, and one of the things I've noticed is that they don't really understand the difference between different types of information. They don't think it matters. And they don't understand the news. Now, I think a lot about the news because I'm a journalism professor. So like, you know, perhaps I'm being unrealistic, but there seems to be a kind of blindness to nuance in information and there seem to be a lot of people who believe that everything that's published on the internet is journalism, and it's not. There's a lot more nuance to it.

So I think that the final thing that we can do, in addition to understanding more about the psychology of belief and risk perception, in addition to trying to treat platforms as publishers and seeing how that goes, in addition to keeping in mind the distinction between the popular and the good, and developing more media literacy and computational literacy, is we can keep in mind what computers can't do. So one of the ideas I talk about in my book is the idea of techno chauvinism, this idea that technology is always the highest and best solution. And a lot of us seem to have this belief that somewhere out there is an automated solution that is going to fix the problem of misinformation. When Mark Zuckerberg testified before congress, he said 30 times, we're going to build AI tools to fix this problem, we're going to build AI tools to fix this problem. And if there were a way to build AI tools to completely fix this problem, somebody would have built them by now. Like AI tools are not going to solve the entire problem. The problem is going to be -- if we are going to attack this problem, it's going to be part humans and part computers. There's no fully automated system that's going to work. Thank you for them.

So let's keep in mind what computers can't and let's design solutions that pull humans into the loop, let's design solutions that fit the way that we know society operates, the way that we know psychology works, the way that we know political systems work, the way we know partisanship works, and let's start from there. So that's how I'd say it.

Thank you.

So I want to ask a couple of questions. So, Magdalena, you brought up the idea that some people are spreading misinformation on purpose and you brought up the idea of vaccine deniers. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

MS. WOJCIESZAK: What specifically? Which --

MS. BROUSSARD: So people who know on some level that what they're spreading is probably not right, but they do it anyway. What's going on there?

MS. WOJCIESZAK: So what I mentioned were two things. That there is a group of citizens, and I do not know how large that group is or what percentage of the population that -- and maybe you can talk more about that -- that knows the facts, that knows the scientific evidence, but chooses not to accept it or not to believe it. So, again, I don't have numbers here, however, that vaccination example was just an example or an illustration of that. That there are individuals who may know that there is scientific evidence for lack of association between vaccinations and autism, but still reject that scientific evidence and choose not to vaccinate their children, for instance.

Same would go for genetically modified food and some other scientific controversies that have evidence behind them, but people choose not to accept that. And so that's one thing.

And, second -- no numbers here, maybe Pablo would have them -- what's the percentage of people sharing misinformation knowingly. So they know that it is false, they know that it is incited to misinform. So it is aimed at misinforming and they still share it. I do not know the percentage, but it seems to me that that is a part of the sharing activity. In that particular case, when we aim at correcting misinformation, for both of those cases, when people have the facts but choose to reject them, giving them facts will not change their belief. So how will we target, how will we design corrective interventions that differentiate between knowledge and beliefs, or having the evidence or knowing the information and still believing the contrary.

And the second thing is how do we design interventions aiming at curbing the spread of misinformation on social networks. So if people share knowing that it is false, telling them that it is false will not lead them to share less because they share in order to get more likes. You know, social media is all about being social and popular, right? So maybe I will generate more comments or more likes when I share something that's painfully false. So then, again, how do we target interventions that recognize that? That it's not about lack of information, because people may have the information, they just choose not to accept it.

MR. COPPOCK: So I think the sharing activity is a lot like the survey response that John was talking about on the first panel. So when we're talking about the survey response where people give the partisan convenient false response, I'm like what is going on there, is that cheerleading, is that just for fun. Maybe the psychology of the sharing behavior is similar to the expressive survey response, and that's like a connection between those two literatures that I believe has been heretofore unexplored.

The vaccine stuff just drives me nuts. It is the one -- one sole area where there is good demonstrated evidence of this kind of behavior. So Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler did two studies, both preregistered, on big samples. This is a correct finding. It's this ten percent sliver by construction, because I believe that they found the bottom ten percent of people who believed in vaccines, they gave them pro vaccine information. And what did these people do, they reported a lower intention to vaccinate. And you can imagine that this is not amenable to my hypothesis, and so I like worked hard to try and break this finding. (Laughter) I downloaded the data, I'm like this can't be true, this must be p-hacked, this must be -- not p-hacked. Like it survives every corruption. Multiple specification. They replicated this study, they did it again. So this subset of people, when you give them this correct information, they report lower intention to vaccinate.

They also report higher belief that vaccines work. What? (Laughter) Like it makes no sense. So, on the one hand, they report a lower intention to behave in a particular way. On the other hand, they're belief in the efficacy of vaccines has gone up as a result of

being told by experts that vaccines work. So the motivated reasoning literature uses the word reject a lot. And I think we should stop doing that. It is categorically not true that people reject information in the sense that they update their beliefs about this thing. I really don't know what the intention to vaccinate survey question means for behavior. I'm not sure that there's a good correlation between the self-reported intention to vaccinate and the way that people behave in the world. But that is to be demonstrated. And no shade thrown at all on the excellent study by Jason and Brendan on that point. But vaccines are also anomalous in this literature. Like the vast majority, hundreds and hundreds of issues in which people are presented information, they do not backlash, they update in the direction of information. And so we have a tendency to focus on these anomalous findings whereby people are motivated to reason -- so goes the theory against this evidence.

But that is not the main story. The main story is that people respond in the direction of evidence.

MS. BROUSSARD: So it sounds like I picked exactly the wrong topic to focus on. (Laughter) So let's talk about a sphere where corrections to misinformation is working. What are some of the social issues or projects that you feel optimistic about?

MR. COPPOCK: So I'd like to pick up this Facebook conversation, because that same set of authors, Brendan -- and I believe that Andy Guess is on this project as well. You can correct me, Pablo, if I'm wrong, but where they have tested this Facebook approach of, ah, it appears that you are sharing a story that has been tagged as false. So AI has -- by which they just mean they took some conditional averages, like AI is this nonsense bill of goods that people have sold us that there is new statistical tools -- they're the same statistical tools repackaged -- but whatever, that's neither here nor there. (Laughter) They can make a guess, like machines can have a good guess, good as maybe human coders, but they've got a good guess about whether or not we would agree that a story is called fake news. Then they can include a little warning on the story. Right at the moment of pushing share, ah, I notice that that link comes from something that we have guessed as fake news, are you sure you want to

share. And the sharing behavior goes way down and people have -- like this is an effective approach.

Now, the question is, is this like an ethical thing, is this like a suppression of First Amendment rights. I want to offer to you that it is not a suppression of First Amendment rights. Facebook's algorithm conditions us. When we see stuff in our feed, it's what our friends have shared and that has an effect on our psychology. That has been demonstrated. In fact, there's a famous study on Facebook where they like perturbed that algorithm to learn about its behavior and people were all up in arms, oh, Facebook is experimenting on us. Wait a minute, you guys, their algorithm was already acting on us and for goodness sake, isn't it good that they're learning about what their algorithm does by perturbing it a little bit, right. Okay. So their algorithm does act on us. It's of course like appropriate that that platform acts on us and they have an ethical responsibility to have it be acting toward the good. So I think it is perfectly reasonable for their algorithms to do just like -- maybe we found Mark Zuckerberg's testimony in congress unsatisfactory, that he didn't somehow take enough responsibility. But I think the approach of hey, let's have Facebook tag stuff, that's going to work. I think that that's hopeful.

MS. BROUSSARD: Okay. And, Magdalena, does this fit with your idea of downplaying problematic sources?

MS. WOJCIESZAK: Yes and no, because the idea behind downplaying problematic sources is aimed at minimizing exposure to misinformation. So when people -- we'll just carry on with the vaccination example -- when people type in Google, you know, are vaccines safe, you know, there are sources that would say no, they cause autism, would appear on page number ten of Google search. So in a way people just not see information that's false. What you mention, and that's a second step, which I fully endorse, is minimizing the sharing of information once a person has already been exposed. So to minimize subsequent exposure by other people who are strong or weak ties on social media. So in this scenario a person, you know, an individual Facebook user has already seen a link or a video and then that little window that opens to alert an individual just prevents that person from

sharing and subsequent exposure. To my knowledge, and again I'm looking here at Pablo, Facebook has experimented with that and it has been found to be ineffective. But maybe I'm misremembering.

MR. COPPOCK: (Inaudible) tells me that it works, but I don't know.

MS. WOJCIESZAK: Yeah, yeah, so it works -- and that's another problem, all those -- not all those, but some of those corrections or strategies work in experiments, however, you know, again, when we think of the real world of exposure, the nuances of how people get their news on line and off line, you know, we do not have these neatly controlled settings that we have when we do experiments on line or in a lab. Again, we need to start there to show what potential strategies may work, but then we need to see whether these strategies are realistic and ecologically valid in the nitty gritty world of information seeking.

So, for instance, that unlikely sources (inaudible). This is fantastic. But again, like it's not very realistic that a politician who is on the right will correct President Trump. So, again, it will work that sort of correction as we know from experimental evidence, but it's not likely to happen in the real world.

MS. BROUSSARD: I wonder if it's also possible that studying the behavior and articulating the behavior changes the behavior. So maybe the fact checking intervention did change behavior at first and then people got more savvy about it and so the behavior of the social media users changed and then the results were no longer true.

I want to ask you both, how do you curate your own social media feeds? Like do you use all of the computational tools that are available to quell misinformation?

MR. COPPOCK: I've done that check my feed thing to make sure that I'm following enough women (laughter) and I was --

MS. BROUSSARD: That's a good intervention?

MR. COPPOCK: -- shocked and dismayed. I thought that I was doing this in a gender free way and that was not true. So I've modified my Twitter feed accordingly. But I follow a political scientists and a bunch of statistics nerds and they are pretty unified in their

political leanings. (Inaudible) the filter bubbles, you know. (Laughter) Disconfirmation.

MS. WOJCIESZAK: Actually I have to add another twist to that, and also related to filter bubble, I am academically and personally very interested in exposure to dissimilar views. So how to encourage people from across the partisan isle to see views of other people who you disagree with. And I realize that on Facebook -- I'm not on Twitter, among the 85 percent -- and I'm not American, so among many more of non-Americans who are not on Twitter -- on Facebook I see a lot of information from President Trump, for instance. And I'm not following him on Twitter, I'm not following him on Facebook. It's actually my liberal friends who share his Tweets at extremely high rates. So to me it's very interesting, both practically and academically, what are the effects of these exposures, because I do see information that in my case comes from across the partisan isle, but it's already filtered through the perspective, the opinion of my in group friends, right. So somebody could say, oh, look at this idiot and here's the Tweet. So, again, what does that mean? If this being in a -- like I see information that's counter attitudinal, but it comes from within the in group. Is it still counter attitudinal, or is it, as I think, only reinforcing my prior beliefs about certain issues or actors?

So if we curate our exposures, we may see more of the out group information. But again, it's likely to be filtered either through our friends or acquaintances and later through our cognitive biases that you mentioned as well. So the effects of it may not be as democratically beneficial as people would hope they are. Again, first we give people more information, more facts, more truth, and then they believe it -- not likely. Second, we give them more dissimilar, diverse information, they will become more tolerant. Again, I don't think that's the case because many people, as motivated reasoning framework shows, would just counter argue and reinforce their prior views.

MR. COPPOCK: Right. I have not seen idea that people counterargue in such a way that the information is counterproductive. I have not seen any evidence that making a positive case for your point of view is counterproductive. If anything, it doesn't do anything. But in most cases it helps.

On the filter bubbles point, my coauthor, Andy Guess, has done this great study in which he installs a browser tracker and people are walking around the internet. And so you get to see what people encounter. And of course many of the news links that people encounter come from social media sites first, right. That's how people find their way to journalistic content. And if you then scale what people are seeing, the vast majority of people are seeing stuff in the middle. And the vast majority of the media dye is purple, which should like update your point of view on the prevalence of echo chambers. Like most of us are in the middle, and that's fantastic.

One of the like frontiers of this research is how much are people hate sharing? I mean we don't know the prevalence of hate sharing and because it's really hard to train a classifier to be like, oh, the text above the link is positively balanced or negatively balanced. We don't have that yet at all. And so surely hate sharing takes place, maybe some of you have done it, but we don't know whether or not the majority of clicks come from the pro attitudinal version of the share.

MS. WOJCIESZAK: And then also to build on what you mentioned about Andy's work, in Amsterdam, where I was prior to joining UC Davis, there is a similar project, a personalized communication project, where they actually developed a software plug in to track individual on line exposure. So it's not only that the majority of the people are in the middle, but a majority of the people do not go on line to look at political content, period. So those who do, they are in the middle. But it's actually still a minority of individual browsing activity. So actually at the University of Amsterdam they actually shut down that -- or they are this summer -- that software plug in because it just wasn't generating enough variance in exposure. We can talk about that later.

But, again, this is also something to keep in mind when we're so worried about filter bubbles and misinformation. It's actually the majority of the American population is not on line to consume news. They look at sports, they look at cooking, they look at cute cat videos, but definitely not at political or news content. So that's also something that puts our event in

perspective in a sense.

MS. BROUSSARD: Well, I did this interesting thing with my Facebook feed and my Twitter feed actually where I went through and I used all the tools to take misinformation out of my feed. So I shut off all of the advertising options. You can go in on Facebook and you can basically destroy your advertising profile. They make it very hard to get to, but you can Google it, and you say, all right, I want to find out what my ad profile looks like and you can edit it. So if you take all of that out and then you mute the people -- you know, you mute your crazy Uncle Rob -- then it does actually do a lot toward getting rid of the misinformation. It's just that you have to want to do that.

MS. WOJCIESZAK: Exactly.

MS. BROUSSARD: And it's not the default, and most people are not going to go in and like spend the time de-clicking all of these little things.

All right, so we do have time for some questions. What do people want to know about? The gentleman in the black shirt right here.

QUESTIONER: My question is for Magdalena in reference to your idea of fining the providers. I recently saw a clip on YouTube of someone speaking at another forum, and I think this gentleman had been or is an editor of Time magazine, and was talking about the use of propaganda domestically, so not externally. And he was saying that it's a good thing and that every country does it. And so when you're talking about fining people for spreading misinformation how does that apply to domestic use of propaganda or misinformation?

MS. WOJCIESZAK: So, again, I must emphasize that it was just a speculative idea that was meant to be provocative. Nevertheless, I do think that that works also precisely in those contexts. And here, you know, we run into all the challenges of how do we define misinformation, how do we identify the sources that spread it. But perhaps here the differentiation in definition between disinformation and misinformation could be useful because disinformation being content that's purposefully developed and shared in order to mislead. So there is a purposeful attempt, it's not just not knowing whether something is true or not, but

purposely sharing something knowing that -- or creating something that you know is false.

And in this case, identifying the sources, the websites, for instance, to do that and fining them could be an effective way of maybe shutting some of them down, for instance. And, again, whether is it a violation of First Amendment, I don't know, but I don't think so. And that's something that's actually done in Europe in several countries.

MS. BROUSSARD: Checkered shirt back there.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. It's a very interesting discussion. My question is about this is something that Alex brought up, in the vaccination discussion about the intention to vaccinate and whether that actually reflects real behavior. It sparked a question, which is how much does misinformation on line, how much does that actually lead to off line behavior, like voting or joining a protest or not vaccinating?

Thank you.

MR. COPPOCK: Thanks very much for the question. So on the protest, I don't know if you guys saw this hilarious thing, there's 5000 sign ups to protest at some event and one sad person with a sign took a self with the police that were scheduled to be there. (Laughter) So, anyway, it is definitely true that on line behavior and off line behavior are not the same.

With respect to voting, there is a great paper out by David Brockman and my soon to be colleague, Josh Kellough, where the they have taken approximately 50 experiments that were done in the real world, so not in the lab, like real campaigns that randomly did or did not try and persuade voters to vote for their candidate. And the summary answer from their work is it doesn't work at all. So that the average effect of the mailers, the phone calls, the television advertisements is zero. Now, there are quibbles to be made with that study, but it suggests that some things, like attitudes -- that's what I've been trying to convince you all of is that I can move attitudes. It's pretty easy to move attitudes. Write an op-ed, you move an attitude. It appears to be harder to change this stubborn behavior of voting for a particular candidate. Although many things differ between those kinds of studies, and so the jury is really

still out on whether or not we can move behavior.

I'll leave it there.

MS. BROUSSARD: Okay. Great. Right here in the red sweater.

QUESTIONER: Hi, Danielle Culate, National Cancer Institute. So the thing that I've been thinking about the most is, you know, over the past four years or so the research in this area has really accumulated and we've got a number of synthesis of the research. Like U Penn just had a conference in December on this and the white paper is available -- highly recommend checking that out. There's a book edited by Brian Southwell and Emily Thorson on this matter that is a collection of research. And, Meredith, your book sounds very interesting; I'll check that out for sure.

But what do we do in terms of moving research to reality, because as researchers we tend to run all these experiments but don't really think about how that applies in the real world. So how do we start bridging that gap and what steps should we be thinking about moving toward that goal?

MS. BROUSSARD: Well, I think, clearly, one of the answers is we have more panels at Brookings. (Laughter) That seems like step one.

MR. COPPOCK: I'm content to be a (inaudible) academic in the ivory tower and just learn things, but I understand that that's not like -- in some sense I'm paid to do more than that.

One obvious way to change the way the conduct of academic research is to do more field experiments. And so there's this growing movement in development economics, in some areas of political science, to do field experimentation. It's the kind of work that I admire the most. It's the ones that policy makers and practitioners are like that looks like what I do, and thank you for at least holding out a control group and now I can see the effect of this.

So I did a very cool collaboration with the DC police department where we randomly assigned the presence or absence of body worn cameras. So that was a policy maker driven experiment. And the only thing the researchers were doing was flipping coins.

And so this was the right kind of collaboration. And if any of you are in positions of power in which you would like to know the answer to a real world question, there are just dozens and dozens and dozens of hungry academics who would be willing to flip the coins for you. And so like that's one positive thing that I think we can do to bridge the gap.

MS. WOJCIESZAK: Absolutely. So I fully agree with that. And, second, great collaboration between nonprofits, for instance, and academics in field experimentation. And that's not the crowd here, but another one is to alter the institutional incentives, because running field experiments is more time consuming that running a lab or on line experiment, for instance. And, also collaboration with NGOs or other policy makers as an academic often comes at -- you know, it takes time that say could be devoted to yet another publication. And the institution, being the university, values yet another publication, not necessarily the collaboration. So, here would be also institutional change could -- or in my view -- is needed in order to cross the ivory tower and the real world bridge.

MS. BROUSSARD: And I think there are two very concrete things we can do. One is in academic publishing we can speed up the publication cycle. So I publish both academic work and public work in journalism, and my journalism cycle is such that I can turn something in in the morning and it's up by like 10:30 in the morning, right. And then I do say a book review for an academic journal and they're like, oh, this is great, it's going to be out in a year. And it's the same -- like I have just performed the same work but why does it take a year to put this out in an academic journal. It doesn't need to take a year. So we could speed things up there.

I think academics can also write in plain language. Like you can write a complex research paper and you can write it in the jargon of your field, but then how about also writing a plain language version. So places like The Conversation do a really good job of this, where they have a science writer partner with an academic and kind of translate the academic writing for a popular audience. More partnerships, where the science writers get paid by the way, are really fantastic. And I think that would move the conversation forward.

This has been an extraordinary conversation. Please join me in thanking all of our co-panelists, SSRC, and Brookings. (Applause)

MR. DIONNE: So my AI just told me that these are awesome people we've had and you should share them widely. (Laughter) So I want to thank you so much. Good scholars can be fair and balanced in the true sense of the term even on difficult questions like truth and falsehood, information and misinformation. Again, I want to thank everybody at Brookings and the SSRC, John Sides, who did so much work helping to put this together. Thanks to C-SPAN, which will be broadcasting this, and thank you, all of you out there who have watched this. Brookings, I believe, will also be putting this up on our website fairly soon.

We are considering, in the name of fairness, of organizing a new conference in defense of uncles and Velveeta cheese. And panelists will include uncles who like Velveeta cheese better than kale. (Laughter) I think we'll have a lot of volunteers for that.

And, last, inspired by one of the panelists, I am actually more a Deweyite than a Lippinite, and so I wanted to close with a thought, again from Christopher Lasch, reflecting on Dewey. Lasch wrote that if we insist on argument as the essence of education, we will defend democracy not as the most efficient, but as the most educational form of government, one that extends the circle of debate as widely as possible and thus forces all citizens to articulate their views, to put their views at risk, and to cultivate the virtues of eloquence, clarity of thought and expression, and sound judgment.

We have a ways to go to get there, but I think Lasch's goal would be better served if we engage each other and, yes, argue with each other, on the basis not of falsehood but facts and information not misinformation. We have a lot of work to do and I'm grateful to all of these scholars for being so deeply engaged in it, and for all of you for staying for the entire session.

Thank you very, very much. (Applause)

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