

WHOM CAN YOU TRUST? JOURNALISM AND FACT-CHECKING

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“Without facts, you can’t have the truth. Without truth, you can’t have trust. How can you have a democracy without that?” (Maria Ressa, co-recipient of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, investigative journalist, and CEO of *Rappler* in the Philippines)

We often read or hear news or commentary and wonder if it is factual, accurate, and true, and whether the source is unbiased. To evaluate the information, experts advise us – Be skeptical. Check the author. Check the publisher. Check the sources. How can we do that?

RELIABLE JOURNALISM SOURCES

Many reliable sources publish their code and standards, revealing what is required before they publish news. One can search for those by using the name of the news source and terms like “code of conduct” or “standards and ethics” or “policies and guidelines.”

Journalistic sources generally viewed as reliable and trustworthy include the following:

- *The New York Times* (left-leaning)
- *The Wall Street Journal* (conservative)
- *The Washington Post* (center-left)
- *BBC*
- *The Economist*
- *The New Yorker*
- *Associated Press, Reuters, Bloomberg News* (wire services)
- *Foreign Affairs* (bi-monthly magazine, international relations)
- *Politico* (politics reporting)
- *National Public Radio*
- *The Christian Science Monitor*
- *Time* magazine
- *Los Angeles Times*
- *NBC News*
- *ABC News*
- *CBS News*
- *National Review* (reporting/opinion from the right of the political spectrum)
- *The Weekly Standard Review* (reporting/ opinion from the right of the political spectrum)
- *The New Republic* (reporting/opinion from the left of the political spectrum)
- *The Nation* (reporting/opinion from the left of the political spectrum)

In addition to the editorial approach taken by publishers, the source of information used by journalists affects the quality of their reporting.

Media Bias/Fact Check mediabiasfactcheck.com/ Media Bias/Fact Check, started in 2015 by editor Dave Van Zant, is a website that evaluates 4300+ media sources and journalists. On the site, find lists of media sources according to biases, ratings of journalists, pseudoscience topics, lists of educational institutions and media outlets that use MB/FC as a resource, and other information.

Source Matters The American Press Institute has created a new tool, Source Matters, that supports source tracking by any news organization and helps those organizations practice more inclusive journalism. Read how it works at www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/api-updates/track-the-diversity-of-your-sources-with-source-matters-an-easy-automated-tool-from-api/

FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) fair.org/ is a national progressive watchdog group that publishes critiques of news practices and media bias. It advocates for greater diversity in the press and scrutinizes media practices that marginalize public-interest, minority, and dissenting viewpoints.

Minnesota Public Radio When evaluating the accuracy of an online article, a news story, or social media post, if the source is unknown or is not one that is known to be legitimate and reliable, readers should take the time to sort out fact from fiction. **Minnesota Public Radio's** website has links for "essential tools to fight disinformation" at <https://www.mprnews.org/can-you-believe-it/can-you-believe-it-toolkit>

NONPARTISAN FACT-CHECKING

It can sometimes be difficult to determine whether a news item or report is what is commonly referred to as "fake news," but the following resources can help. A good fact-checking service will use neutral wording and provide unbiased sources to support claims.

PolitiFact www.politifact.com

Owned by the non-profit Poynter Institute (pointer.org/category/factchecking), PolitiFact is a Pulitzer Prize-winning project of the *Tampa Bay Times*. PolitiFact fact-checks claims by politicians at the federal, state, and local level, as well as claims by political parties, PACs, and advocacy groups. It rates the accuracy of these claims on its Truth-O-Meter, which ranges from "True" and "Mostly True," to "Half True," "False," and "Pants on Fire." See also Poynter's MediaWise Project media literacy tools at poynter.org/mediawise.

FactCheck.org www.factcheck.org/

FactCheck.org is the oldest of the major fact-checking sites, launched in 2003 as a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The site fact-checks claims made by presidents, members of Congress, presidential candidates, and other in the political arena. FactCheck primarily focuses on presidential candidates during a presidential election and Senate races in midterm elections. In off years, it focuses on action in Congress. It reviews TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, Sunday talk shows and news releases. The site's stated goal is "to apply the best practices of both journalism and scholarship, and to increase public knowledge and understanding." They seek to devote an equal amount of time reviewing claims by Republicans and Democrats.

FactCheck relies on primary sources, nonpartisan government agencies, and respected and trustworthy experts in researching issues.

FlackCheck.org – www.flackcheck.org

Headquartered at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, FlackCheck.org is the political literacy companion site to FactCheck.org. The site provides resources designed to help viewers recognize patterns of deception, flaws in arguments in general, and political ads in particular. They also cover science and health.

Open Secrets opensecrets.org

The nonprofit organization Open Secrets was created after a merger of the Center for Responsive Politics and the National Institute on Money in Politics. Open Secrets is a nonpartisan, independent nonprofit, run by the Center for Responsive Politics, which is the nation's premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. It is the best source for discovering where candidates get their money and how much they get. Open Secrets follows the money in U.S. politics by tracking private-sector and industry groups, unions, and lobbying groups, to find out whom they are funding, and how much they spend to lobby Congress. This site allows readers to track campaign spending and contributions.

Washington Post's Fact Checker www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/

The *Post's* Fact Checker is run by journalist Glenn Kessler. The site assesses claims made by politicians or political advocacy groups and gives out Pinocchios for inaccuracy. The *Washington Post* has a clear left-center bias, which is reflected in its fact-checks, which are excellent and sourced. However, it fact-checks right-wing claims more than left. Otherwise, the *Washington Post* is a good resource.

The Sunlight Foundation www.sunlightfoundation.com

The Sunlight Foundation is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that leads the way for public accountability data journalism through use of civic technologies, open data, and policy analysis. It began in 2006 with a focus on the U.S. Congress, but now also covers government work at the local, state, and international levels.

Snopes.com www.snopes.com

Snopes is the go-to destination for debunking strange internet rumors. California couple Barbara and David Mikkelson founded the site in 1995 to uncover urban legends, rumors, and other questionable bits of folklore that had begun cropping up in chain emails and message boards.

Source Watch sourcewatch.org

Source Watch provides well-documented information about corporate public relations (PR) campaigns, including corporate front groups, people who "front" corporate campaigns, and PR operations.

PARTISAN FACT CHECKERS (those with a purported liberal or conservative bent)

Media Matters for America www.mediamatters.org

Launched in 2004, Media Matters is a not-for-profit progressive research and information center dedicated to monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in U.S. media. Media Matters analyzes conservative cable, broadcast, radio, and print news and commentary for factual errors and provides daily notification about misinformation, with resources to rebut false claims.

NewsBusters www.newsbusters.org

NewsBusters devotes itself to "combatting liberal media bias." It was launched by the Media Research Center in 2005, the same group behind CNS News.com. It has been criticized by Media Matters and others for its questionable fact-checking techniques.

CANDIDATES, GOVERNMENT, ELECTED OFFICIALS, and VOTING RECORDS

Vote Smart www.votesmart.org

Vote Smart's mission is to provide free, factual, unbiased information on candidates and elected officials to all Americans. Vote Smart is based in Des Moines, Iowa.

ProPublica www.propublica.org

ProPublica is an independent, nonprofit, non-government-funded online newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest, founded in 2007-2008. It covers topics like government and politics, business, criminal justice, the environment, education, health care, immigration, and technology.

Ballotpedia ballotpedia.org/factcheck

Ballotpedia is a nonpartisan nonprofit established in 2015. Content focuses on American politics; offering unbiased information on elections, politics, and policy. It offers daily, weekly, and monthly email newsletters. The Weekly Brew email highlights top news stories from the week.

Gov Track www.govtrack.us

GovTrack.us began in 2004 and is a project of Civic Impulse LLC. Its mission is to help Americans participate in their government. It provides information about Congress and is free to use. It is committed to integrity; aiming never to misrepresent or exclude information to favor one side. It does not accept grants from partisan organizations, government agencies or outside organizations

USA Facts usafacts.org/

USA Facts is a nonpartisan organization and website that offers government data, including population, government finances, and government impact on US society.