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Fact vs. Fiction: Training the Public to Identify Mis and Disinformation



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Today's Agenda

- Understanding the landscape
- Defining the problem
- Responsible engagement
- Active participation



What IS mis and disinformation?

- Misinformation: false or inaccurate information
- Disinformation: false information which is intended to mislead or deliberately intended to deceive, especially propaganda issued by a government organization to a rival power or the media.



**What concern
motivates
you MOST to help
your community
address mis-
and disinformation?**

Mis- and disinformation drive cycles of fear and polarization, risking:

- **Trust in our institutions**
- **Health & safety**
- **Radicalization & civil unrest**

There is no silver bullet.



**We all share the responsibility
for addressing misinformation.**



What could a
**“whole of
society effort”**
look like?



- **Recognizing that everyone can be affected regardless of their political perspective.**
- **Acknowledging that misinformation doesn't look the same in every community.**
- **Responses should come from and make sense to the communities impacted.**

UNDERSTANDING TACTICS: Key forms of problematic content

- **Missing Context:** images, statistics and information lacking important details
- **Faulty Logic:** logical fallacies like false-equivalence or a straw man argument
- **Hate and Dog Whistles:** terms or themes that divide based on identity
- **Conspiracies:** blaming boogeymen for things that are hard to understand
- **Old:** something that was once relevant may not be today



It does not have to be **false** to be a problem.

WARNING

**The following images contain:
misinformation, conspiracies, and
other forms of problematic content.**



Tactics

Missing Context

When images, quotes, statistics, or ideas are shared without important contextual information, their significance can be manipulated.



Follow



Illegal aliens are FAR more likely to commit Federal Crimes based on statistics. They are 7% of the population, yet they commit:

- 72% of DRUG POSSESSION
- 33% of MONEY LAUNDERING
- 29% of DRUG TRAFFICKING
- 22% of MURDERS
- 18% of FRAUD



4:28 AM - 6 Aug 2018

653 Retweets 703 Likes

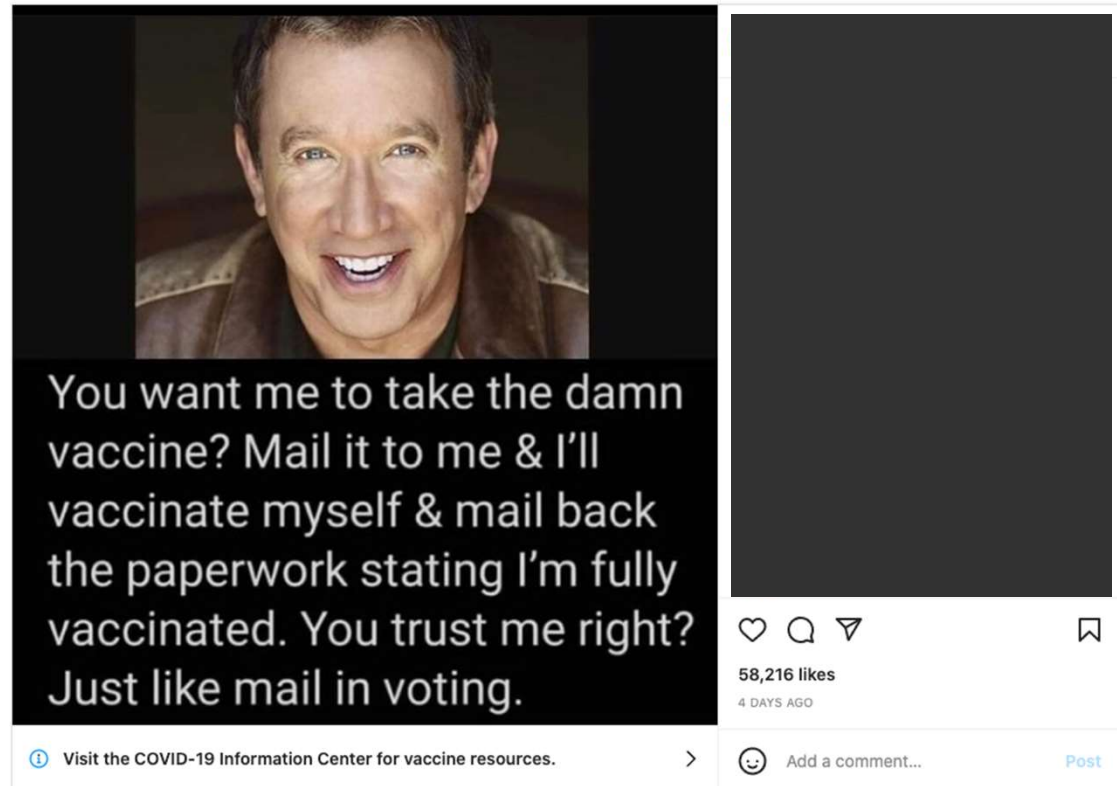


Tactics

Faulty Logic

Logical fallacies come in many forms:

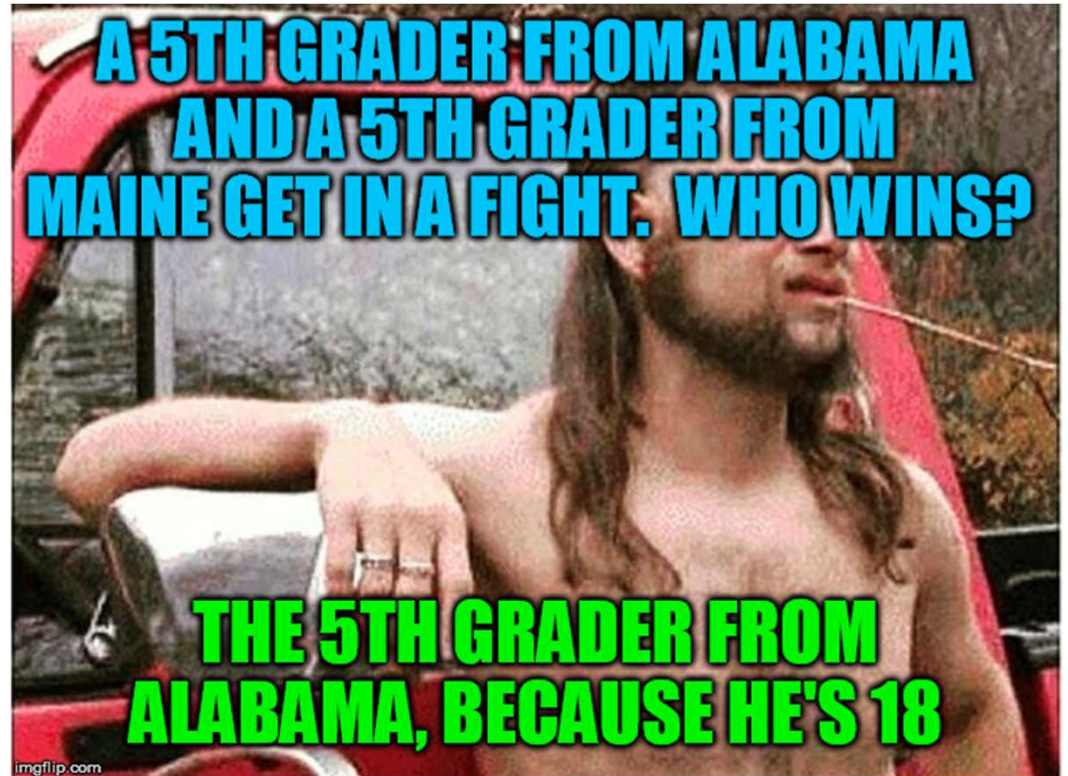
- False equivalence
- Red herring
- Straw man
- Slippery slope
- Appeal to authority



Tactics

Hate and Dog Whistles

Attacks based on identity and stereotypes can often be subtle and coded.

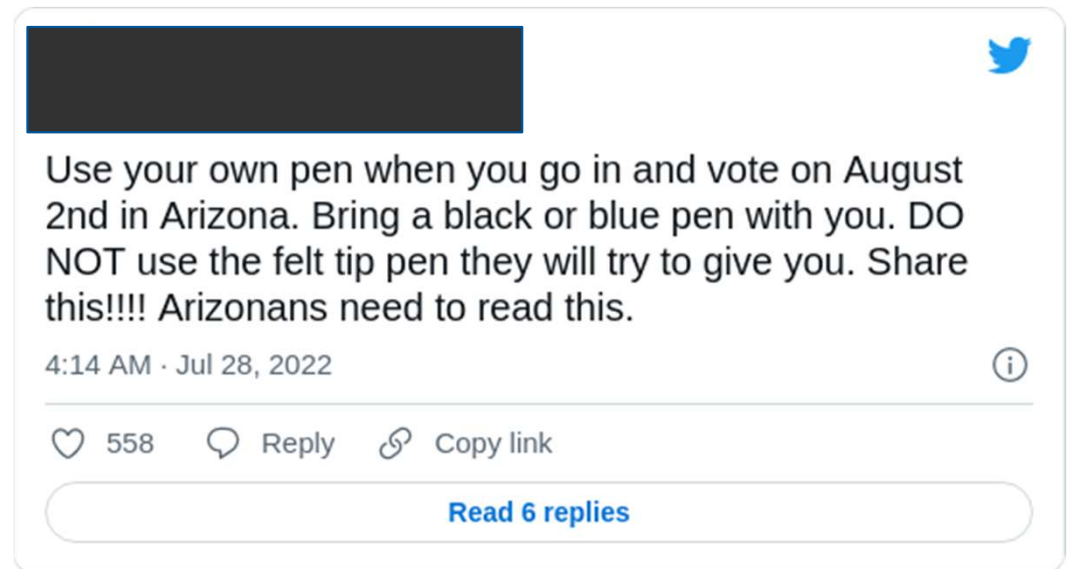


Tactics

Conspiracy Theories

Innuendo is a powerful vehicle for amplifying paranoia and fear.

Conspiracy theories often deliver or imply extraordinary explanations for mundane situations.



Tactics

Old and Out of Date


Old content is often hard to recognize when reshared on social media.



[Redacted]

Follow ▼

Amazing, but not shocking at all anymore. Nearly 200,000 Florida Voters May Not Be Citizens [nbcmiami.com/news/local/Nea ...](https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Nearly-200-000-Florida-Voters-May-Not-Be-Citizens)
✓ via @nbc6



2012 Election: Nearly 200,000 Voters May Not Be Citizens
This story from the Associated Press was published in 2012. An initial list cited in this report of 180,000 names was whittled to 2,625 and ultimately to 85, accordin...
[nbcmiami.com](https://www.nbcmiami.com)

1:01 PM - 12 Nov 2018

16,224 Retweets 31,244 Likes [Redacted]

Examples in NYS

- Door to door impersonation and misinformation campaign -13 counties
- Organizations at town halls claiming elections are fraudulent and voter rolls are wrong
- Targeting diverse voters
 - Robocalls targeting black voters
 - Equis



Impact in NYS on Elections

- 1 in 3 election workers has left their job at least in part due to fears for their safety, increased threats, or intimidation
- 2 in 3 election officials believe that false information is making their job more dangerous
- Staff difficult to retain

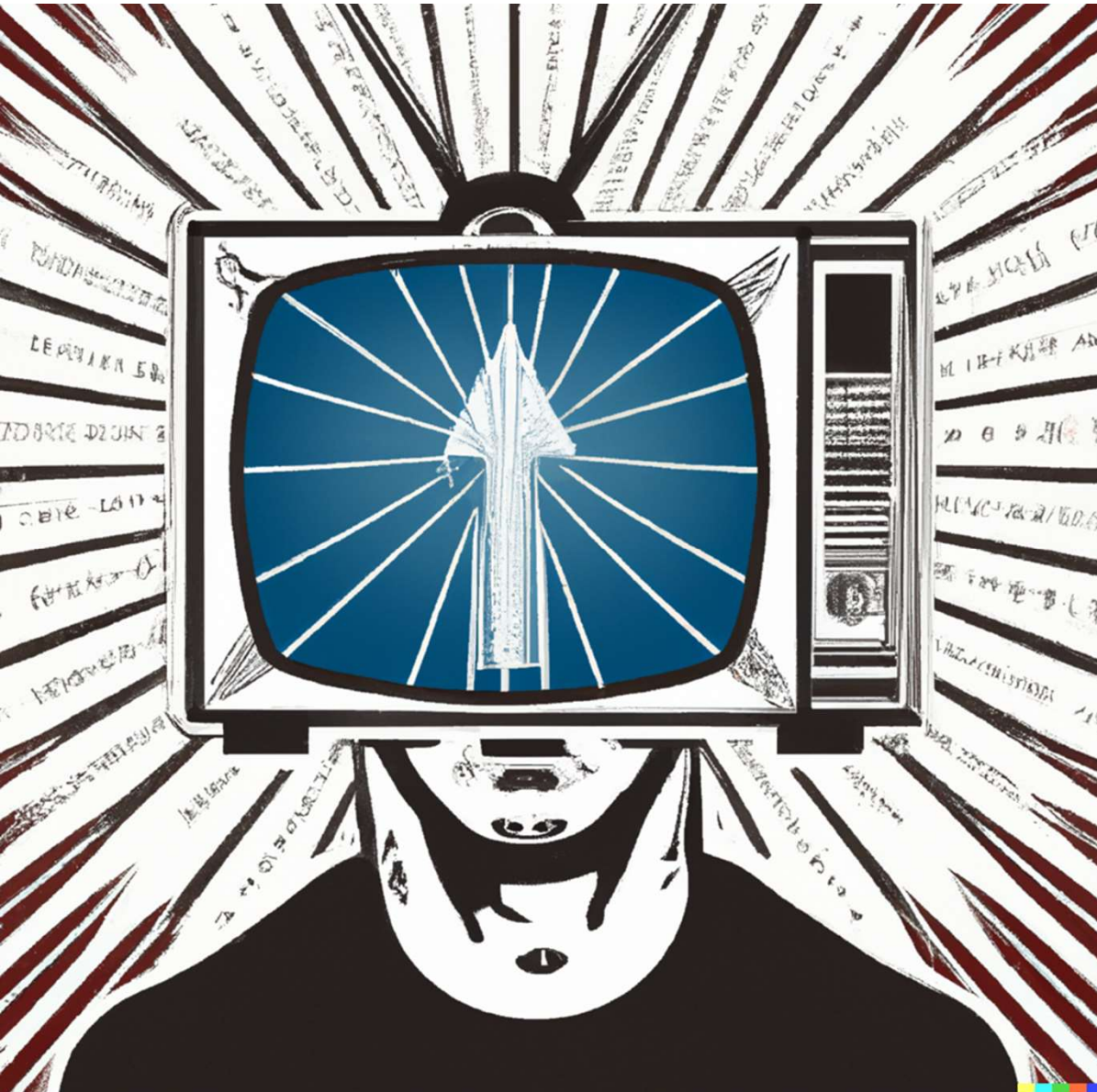
Share your
perspective

**Which of these tactics have you
experienced most recently?**

- Missing Context
- Faulty Logic
- Hate and Dog Whistles
- Conspiracy Theories
- Old and Out of Date



UNDERSTANDING THE APPEAL:
What makes disinformation stick?



What Makes Disinformation Stick

Motivated Reasoning

Content that reinforces our existing bias is easier to believe and accept as true.



What Makes Disinformation Stick

Emotional Appeals

Content that appeals to our emotions rather than reason triggers our reflexes and we can jump to conclusions not supported by facts



What Makes Disinformation Stick

Easy Answers

Big and confusing problems that are explained with easy answers offer us a shortcut that bypasses our critical thinking skills.

What makes disinformation stick?

- **Motivated Reasoning**
- **Emotional Appeals**
- **Easy Answers**

Often these appear in the same message

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION: Why do people **create** disinformation?

Political Agenda

Some bad actors produce and spread falsehoods and deploy misleading tactics to persuade people.

Profit

Many disinformation creators exploit the virality of messages to generate revenue from ads and ecommerce.

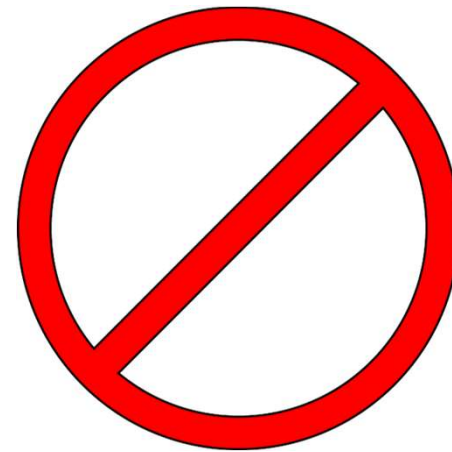
Pride and Pranks

Hate and conspiracies are often invented and promoted by trolls who seek attention and thrive on chaos but don't care about the substance of their lies.

Strategies for Action

- **First rule: DO NOT ENGAGE**
- **When to consider engaging**
- **Counter messaging strategies**
- **Structured conversations**

When in doubt:
DO NOT ENGAGE



Don't argue

Creating a defensive posture pushes someone deeper into their corner and makes it harder to communicate





Don't amplify

Commenting, sharing, or hitting dislike online only serves to further promote the misleading content.

Don't repeat the language of the falsehood

Language has power, and we shouldn't cede that power by using the terminology created by disinformers.





Don't embarrass

Ridiculing someone, especially with derogatory language won't result in a positive or receptive response.

Don't contradict with **ONLY** a fact- check

Fact-checks are important, but when you share them without context or more discussion, they can reinforce distrust in the source.



When SHOULD you consider engaging?

TIPPING POINT

When a misleading narrative has crossed a tipping point – and demands response (this varies widely depending on your community and audience) but requires good judgement

DATA DEFICIT

When misinformation exposes a clear data deficit that can be filled with good information so that the people you reach aren't susceptible to the falsehood because they already have good information to fill the gap.

RESOLVE OBSTACLES

When you are directly engaging with people where the misleading information creates a practical obstacle to moving forward.

Counter Messaging

Prebunking as Inoculation:

Getting ahead of rumors by exposing misinformation risks so that people are immune to them when they appear in the wild.

10 tips for prebunks



What to prebunk

1
Figure out what information people need

2
Choose your example carefully

How to design it

3
Wrap it in truth

4
Warn your audience

5
Add some detail

6
Draw out the tactic at play

7
Explain how you know what you know

How and where to share

8
Keep it simple

9
Make them shareable

10
Find where your audience is and publish there



Source: [First Draft Guide to Prebunking](#)

Counter Messaging

FACT

Lead with the fact if it's clear, pithy, and sticky—make it simple, concrete, and plausible. It must "fit" with the story.

WARN ABOUT THE MYTH

Warn beforehand that a myth is coming... mention it once only.

EXPLAIN FALLACY

Explain how the myth misleads.

FACT

Finish by reinforcing the fact—multiple times if possible. Make sure it provides an alternative causal explanation.

Source: [Debunking Handbook 2020](#)

Structured Conversations

Ask Questions

Explore what the other person believes, why it is important to them, and how this translates into their concerns

Show Empathy

Establish shared values to build upon and communicate respect for their beliefs and fears

Explore Motives

Discuss the underlying motivations behind the actors at the source of misleading messages

Share Perspective

Share your personal experience and explain how you came to your own conclusions

Tools

- LWVNYS Election Security one-pager and resources
- PSAs and social media posts
- Election observation toolkit
- Training- LWV Democracy Truth
- Know your rights (voting)



PSA



VOLUNTEER REPORTING: **Civic Listening Corps**



Recognizing and Reporting

Train

Learn to recognize common forms of misinformation.



Listen

Observe the discourse online and offline within your community



Report

Identify problematic content, flag and annotate it

Start Today



SMS +1 859 374 8741

WhatsApp +1 202 301 8788

Email lwv@tips.junkipedia.org

Web www.junkipedia.org/tips/lwv

Join the League effort at
the Civic Listening Corps:

tinyurl.com/lwvciviclistening

Resources

- League of Women Voters: [Misinformation Guide](#)
- Office of the US Surgeon General: [Misinformation Toolkit](#)
- Union of Concerned Scientists: [Countering Disinformation in Your Community](#)
- George Mason University: [Debunking Handbook 2020](#)
- [News Literacy Project](#)
- Cambridge University / Jigsaw: [Prebunking Training Videos](#)

Thank you!

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