

MIT POLITICAL SCIENCE

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

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# MADE *in the* USA

BARACKOBAMA.COM

STATE OF HAWAII      CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH      DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FILE NUMBER **151**      **61 10641**

a. First Name (Type or print)      b. Middle Name      c. Last Name

BARACK      HUSSEIN      OBAMA, II

3. This Birth      4. If Twin or Triplet, Was Child Born      5a. Birth Date      Month      Day      Year

Single  Twin  Triplet       1st  2nd  3rd       August      4      1961

6. Town or Rural Location      6b. Island

Honolulu      Oahu

7. Hospital (If not in hospital or institution, give street address)      7b. Island

... & Gynecological Hospital      Oahu

# July 2010: Birthers

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

- Yes: 55%
- No: 27%
- Not Sure: 19%



## REPORT: THREE MILLION VOTES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAST BY ILLEGAL ALIENS

Trump may have won popular vote

Paul Joseph Watson | Infowars.com - NOVEMBER 14, 2016 5293 Comments



52K



226

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

If true, this would mean that Donald Trump still won the contest despite

### TODAY ON THE ALEX JONES SHOW

On this **Tuesday, Jan. 24** edition of the Alex Jones Show, we look at what Trump got done on his first Monday in office and what we can expect him to accomplish during the...

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Watch The Alex Jones Radio Show



## ● Two central questions:

- How is it that reasonable people can come to believe bizarre stories about our political system and the politicians who run it?
- How can we correct false information?

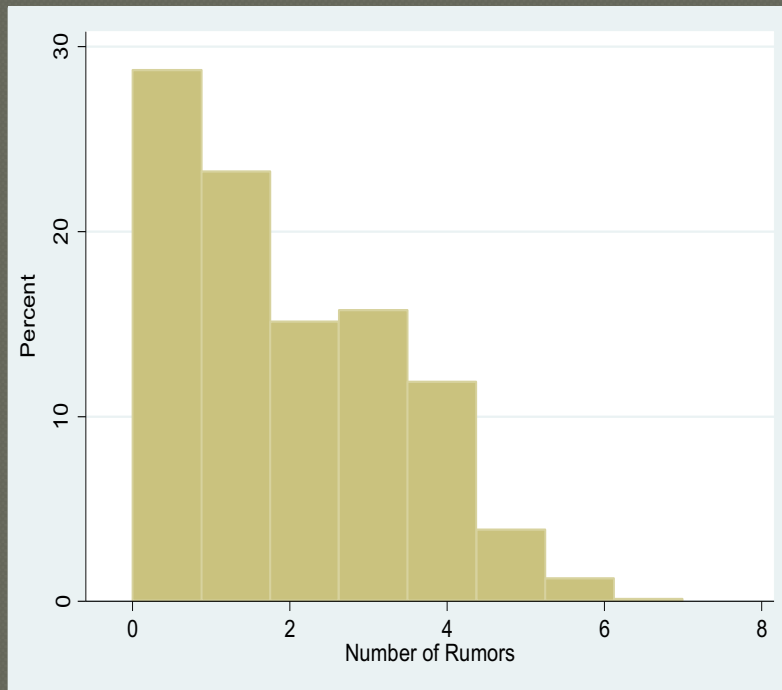
# Why Do People Endorse Rumors?

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- ◉ Do people really believe rumors?
- ◉ The structure of false beliefs
  - General tendency for conspiratorial thinking
  - The power of partisanship

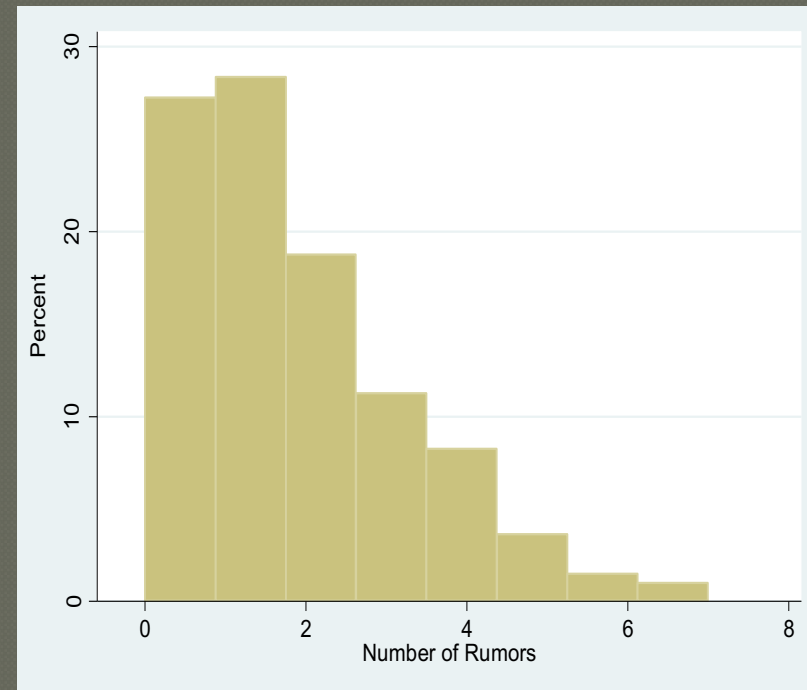
# Are These Fringe Beliefs?

Acceptance



Mean=1.8

Not Sure



Mean=1.7

# Correcting Rumors Is Hard

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- Rumors are sticky
- Direct contradiction?
  - Intuitive: Fiction vs. fact
  - But doesn't always work
  - Corrections fade over time
- Source credibility
  - “Non-political” isn't the most effective
  - In a partisan time, is anything non-political?
- Accuracy Nudges



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

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# An Era of Post-Truth Politics?

Welcome to the post-truth presidency

**Oxford English Dictionary Names 'Post-Truth' Word of the Year**

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

The Age of Post-Truth Politics

Facts are futile in an era of post-truth politics

**No, We're Not Living in a Post-Fact World**

# The Rise of Fact-Checking

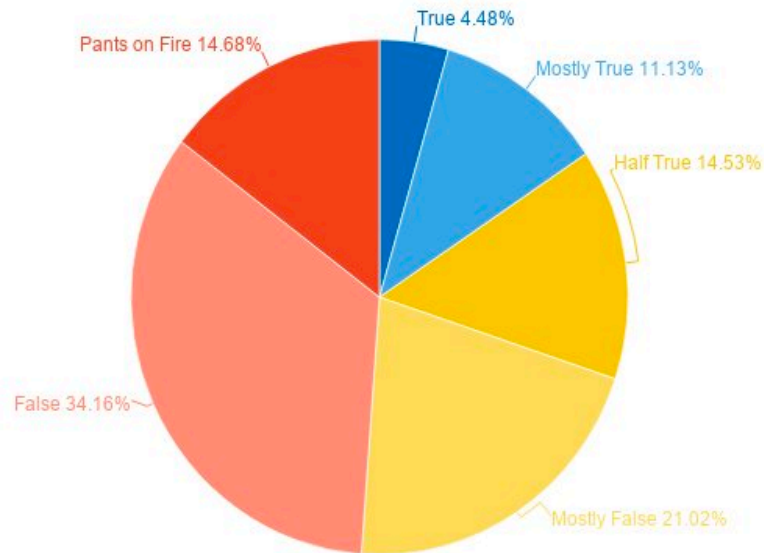


Source: Duke Reporters' Lab (2020)

What are the consequences of living in a world where **political misinformation** – and **corrections** of this misinformation – are prevalent?

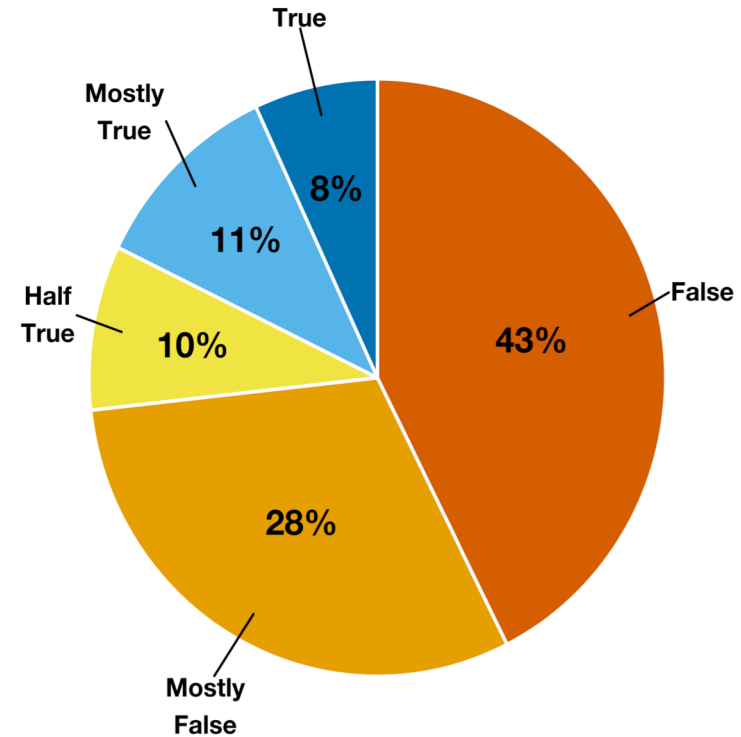
# Experimental Design

## Donald Trump's PolitiFact scorecard

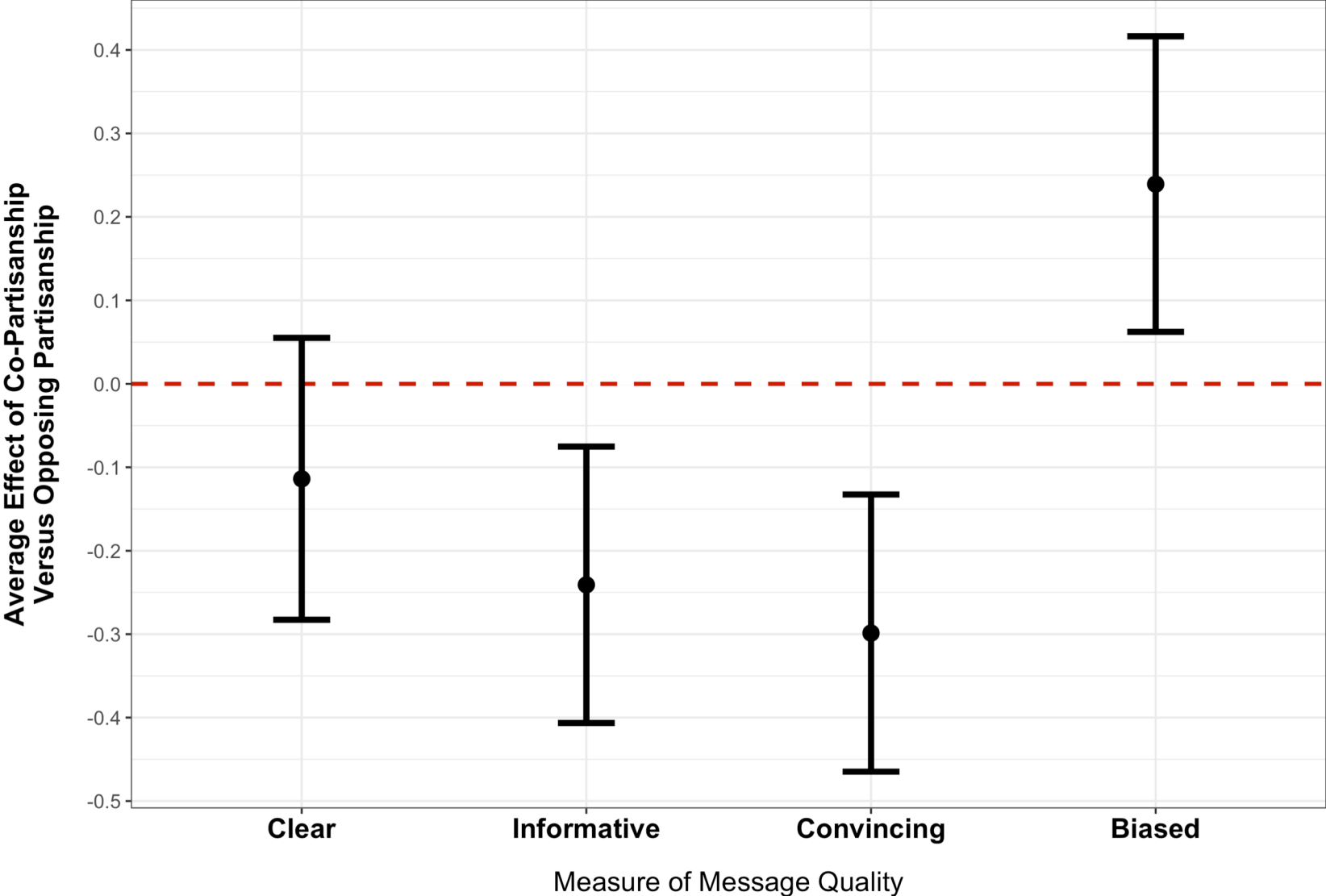


POLITIFACT

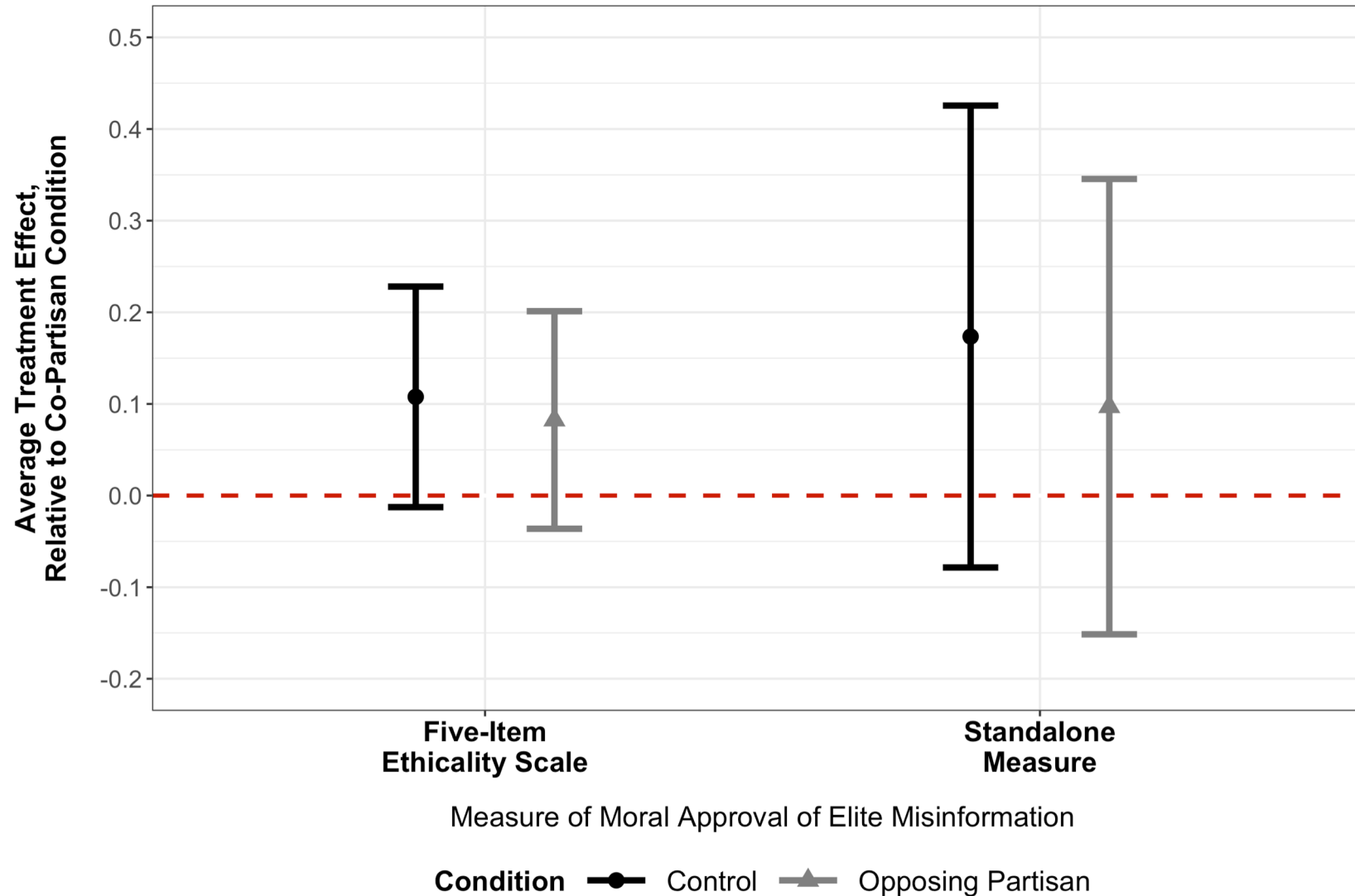
## Fact-Checking Record: Sen. Wilson (Republican)



# Perceived Message Quality



# Moral Approval of Elite Misinformation



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# The Healthy Elections Initiative

**Charles Stewart III**

*Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor of Political Science at MIT*

[cstewart@mit.edu](mailto:cstewart@mit.edu)



State Election Reports & Profiles +

Voting by Mail +

Healthy Polling Places

Become a Poll Worker

Election Administration Tools

Election Data

Other Reports

COVID Election Litigation Tracker



Promoting a Safe & Equitable 2020 Election

## FEATURED CONTENT

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



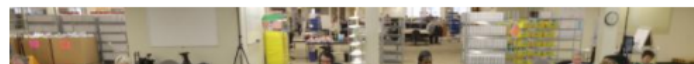
### Healthy Polling Places

New: Using human-centered design to make the elections safer and more accessible



### Data

New: Map visualization for election data





# Activities

## Student-Led Research

- State research
- Substantive topics
- Modelling assistance

## Support of Partners

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

## Opinion Leadership

- Op-eds
- Media appearances
- Public engagements
- Cooperation with other fact-based players



# What's Next for Healthy Elections?

- + Focus now is on the unfolding election
  - Monitoring mail ballots (student-led research)
  - Monitoring poll worker recruitment (partner work)
  - Updating state-centered reports
- + Preparing for the counting process
  - Assembling data and expertise for counting period
  - Standing up an “election science boiler room” to share information across universities on Election Day and beyond
- + Going out of business once the victor is declared
- + Then MEDSL takes over



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