

Assessing Truth in the Information Age: Evidence from Politifact

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A special thank you goes to my family, for allowing me to dream and encouraging me to make those dreams reality.

## ABSTRACT

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Title: Assessing Truth in the Information Age: Evidence from Politifact

Despite unprecedented access to information, the American public has been shown to have difficulty distinguishing factually correct information from misinformation. Misinformation can, and does, alter voting patterns and policy preferences which impact the range of policy solutions available to policymakers. In recent years, media organizations have begun specialized 'fact-checking' operations in order to address misinformation in American politics and public policy- reviewing claims made by political actors in order to separate fact from fiction. Using data from the 2010 Congressional Elections and the fact-checking organization Politifact, this paper looks factors affecting the accuracy of claims made by persons running for Congress in 2010.



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With the proliferation of cable news networks in the 1970's and 1980's and the rapid expansion of internet access during the 1990's and 2000's, Americans now have more access to political information than at any other time in U.S. history. Despite living in what has been dubbed the "information age", there are several contemporary examples where political elites were able to use misinformation to shape public opinion. Once transmitted and accepted by the public, that misinformation has the potential to distorted voting patterns and issue preferences (Nyhan, 2010). For this discussion, misinformation will follow Nyhan and Reifler's definition of *political misperceptions*: demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs about the world that are contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion.

During the debate over health care in the United States a claim was made by opponents of reform that the legislation being considered in Congress contained a provision that would require citizens to go before so called 'death panels': government organizations that will make decisions about who will and will not receive health services when they are critically ill. The claim originated with Betsy McCaughey, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute with a Ph.D. in constitutional history. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 she made an appearance on a radio program hosted by former Senator Fred Thompson and made the following comments on what she found in the proposed health care reform legislation: (McCaughey 2009; qtd. in Nyhan, 2010):

And one of the most shocking things I found in this bill...[was] that every five years, people in Medicare have a required counseling session that will tell them how to end their life sooner, how to decline nutrition, how to decline being hydrated, how to go in to hospice care. And by the way, the bill expressly says that if you get sick somewhere in that five-year period—if you get a cancer diagnosis, for example—you have to go through that session again. All to do what's in society's best interest or your family's best interest and cut your life short. These are such sacred issues of life and death. Government should have nothing to do with this.

While this claim about government death panels (a term coined shortly after by former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin) originated with Betsy McCaughey, it was repeated by several prominent Republican members of Congress including Rep. John Boehner, Rep. Michelle Bachmann, Rep. Virginia Foxx, Rep. Paul Broun, and Senator Chuck Grassley (Medimatters.org, 2011; Nyhan, 2010; Politifact,

2009a). Representatives Bachmann and Foxx even repeated the claim during speeches on the floor of the House of Representatives (Foxx, 2009; Politifact, 2009a).

Since 2001, various organizations have initiated political fact checking operations in order to evaluate such claims, including *Factcheck.org*, *Politifact.com*, and The Washington Post's *Fact Checker*. Politifact evaluated the death panel claim on July 23, 2009 and gave it the lowest rating the fact-checking organization assigns: pants on fire. Catherine Richert, who researched the claim for Politifact and wrote the explanation for the rating, commented that "[Betsy McCaughey's] claim that the sessions would tell seniors how to end their life sooner is an outright distortion" (Politifact, 2009b). FactCheck.org also rated the death panel claim as false and called the claim "nonsense" (Factcheck.org, 2009).

The American public was very aware of the death panel claims made by Republicans who opposed health care reform. The Pew Research Center for People & the Press surveyed 1,003 adults in August 2009 and found that 86 percent of people surveyed had heard about death panels (2). Roughly half of the individuals surveyed correctly rejected the claims about death panels; however some 30 percent of individuals surveyed said the claim about death panels was true, while the remaining 20 percent did not know whether the claim was true or not. Nearly one-third of the individuals surveyed held a view about death panels that was demonstrably false.

The original claim about death panels was not made by an elected official (although Betsy McCaughey has previously held public office) but was quickly picked up and repeated by Republican members of Congress. A demonstrably false claim about death panels- one that fact checking organizations have called "nonsense" and "an outright distortion"- was made in at least two speeches given on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives (Politifact, 2009a; Politifact, 2009b; FactCheck.org, 2009; Nyhan, 2010; Foxx, 2009). That claim was then transmitted to the public, and was accepted as true by many Americans.

The questions that follow are: which elected officials are transmitting misinformation, and to what degree are their claims demonstrably false and their beliefs contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion? The growing number of political fact checking organizations has the potential to help to answer that question. This paper looks at one such organization- Politifact- to examine the factual accuracy of statements by members of Congress and determine what factors, if any, lead members of Congress to make inaccurate statements.



Politifact regularly judged claims by elected officials and candidates for Congress to be less than truthful. Further analysis shows that Republicans were more likely than Democrats to make inaccurate statements- spreading misinformation- while Democrats were significantly more than Republicans to have statements rated true or mostly true. Evidence suggests that individuals in close races were less truthful than those in less competitive races, and that statement accuracy declined as Election Day approached. There is some evidence that Politifact is more likely to cover statements by Republicans, but there were no readily identifiable biases in the data used for this analysis.

Before examining the factual accuracy of elected officials, it has to be shown that misinformation in American Politics is problematic. Information (or misinformation) can be transmitted directly from elected officials, but often that information is picked up by the news media before being transmitted to the public. In order to understand how often elected officials transmit misinformation, it would also be helpful to understand the role that the news media plays in informing the public of information (or misinformation) transmitted from elected officials. First, the case will be made that misinformation from elected officials and the news media has the potential to alter voting patterns and policy preferences. Then, the media environment will be explored in order to understand the new media's role in transmitting misinformation. After discussing the effect misinformation can have on the public and the media's role in transmitting that misinformation, a method for operationalizing and testing misinformation will be developed using the fact checking organization Politifact.

### **Misinformation, the Public, and the News Media**

Misinformation is only an issue if it leads individuals to vote differently or express different policy preferences. If, despite being misinformed, people still vote for the same party or candidate or support the same position as they would have with 'perfect information', then misinformation is not necessarily problematic. A number of studies have looked at misinformation and its potential to distort public's voting and policy preferences. A discussion of the literature on 'irrational voting'-voting against one's own self-interest- will help demonstrate the consequences of misinformation for the voting public.

When talking about irrational voting it makes sense to start with Larry M. Bartels' *Irrational Electorate*. Bartels primarily focuses on the behaviors of uninformed voters, as opposed to misinformed voters. The difference between uninformed and misinformed is that the uninformed generally know that they do not know, while the misinformed believe what they know is true even though it is not. While not the primary focus of his work, Bartels does take some time to discuss misinformation. In reviewing the work

of Johnston, Hagen, and Hall-Jamieson, Bartels observes “The ideal of rational voting behavior is further undermined by accumulating evidence that voters can be powerfully swayed by television advertising in the days just before an election” (48). The Johnston et al study quoted in Bartels concludes that George W. Bush’s victory in 2000 was likely due to an increased volume of television ads just weeks before the elections. Bartels then discusses the debate over social security privatization during the 2000 elections. He relates a study by Gabriel Lenz, which examined public support for social security privatization (Bartels, 48). Lenz found little evidence that people changed their vote because of the various candidates’ stances on the issue. Instead, voters learned the candidates’ views from campaign advertising and media coverage and adopted the same position on the issue of privatization as the candidate they already supported.

Bartels also introduces the notion the misinformation can, and often does, result from partisan bias. In 1988, a majority of strong democrats responded in a survey that inflation had gotten much worse under President Regan when in fact inflation had fallen significantly during his eight year presidency. A 1996 survey found that a majority of Republicans surveyed believed that the Federal budget deficit had increased during Clinton’s first term in office when in fact it had shrunk from \$255 Billion to \$22 Billion (49). While Bartels does not directly address the consequences of misinformation, he does make some important observations: the voting public can be and are influenced by the news media, campaign advertising, and cues from political elites; and that misinformation is susceptible to partisan bias even among those who are generally well informed about politics.

Marcus Maurer and Carsten Reinemann conducted a study which looked at the effects of misinformation in televised debates (2006). Televised debates allow voters to form opinions about candidates without the influence of journalists, and numerous studies have found that voters actively learn about candidates from watching debates. An earlier study found the most important motivations for watching televised debates are the desire to learn about candidates’ issue positions, to compare candidates’ personalities, and to gain information for making voting decisions (qtd. in Maurer and Reinemann, 492). While it has been demonstrated that audiences learn from watching televised debates, it does not mean that what they learn is factually correct. Maurer and Reinemann make this observation:

Politicians taking part in televised debates are interested in winning elections, not in educating their audience. As a consequence, they may use manipulative rhetoric to deny unpopular positions or to reinterpret facts speaking against their own positions. In this case, the strong

learning effects of televised debates may cause beliefs that happen to be wrong. Debate viewers may not get informed but rather get misinformed (492).

Using data and televised debates from the 2002 national election in Germany, Maurer and Reinemann found that debate viewers were confused by one particular candidate's selective presentation of facts. Their analysis of the debate shows that while people learned from the debate, viewer's knowledge of the facts decreased rather than increased from watching. In this example, misinformation led German voters to believe that the German economy was better off than it actually was- misinformation that was spread by an incumbent candidate seeking to retain office (the incumbent, Gerhard Schröder, prevailed in the 2002 election). Misinformation led voters to have incorrect views about the state of the German economy, resulting in reelection for a candidate who was initially looking at certain defeat (Burns, 2002).

The preceding paragraphs have focused on the consequences of misinformation for the public, but have also briefly discussed the role of the media in creating or transmitting misinformation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss irrational voting behavior without discussing the role of the news media in creating and /or transmitting misinformation. Even with the increase of direct communication from candidates to voters, the media still plays a significant role in political communication. Maurer and Reinemann note the crucial role the new media plays in transmitting political information:

In modern democracies, most people learn about candidates and issue positions in election campaigns from the mass media. Voters do not know politicians personally, and most political issues are too complex to understand without the interpretations given by journalists or experts cited by the media (490)

While previous examples noted the role of the news media in transmitting misinformation, many studies have explicitly looked at the ability of the news media to influence public views and preferences. These studies demonstrate the media's role in transmitting information to the public.

A 1999 study by Hofstetter et al. looked at how talk radio impacted levels of information and misinformation among listeners. Exposure to talk radio has been linked to high levels of political information among the listening public; However, Hofstetter et al. note that listening to talk radio may also increase misinformation while increasing levels of information. In their study of listeners and non-listeners of talk radio, Hofstetter et al. found that listeners were able to answer more political information questions correctly than non-listeners. They also found that more exposure to conservative

talk radio corresponded independently to greater levels of misinformation. While all talk radio has the ability to increase political knowledge, conservative talk radio also has the ability to misinform. Greater exposure to moderate talk radio was associated with being less misinformed. In this study, exposure to conservative talk radio resulted in greater levels of misinformation. It should be noted that Hofstetter et al. was not able to look at whether liberal or progressive talk radio increased misinformation (due to the research design) and they suggest doing so in the future as an extension of their work.

Stefano Dellavigna and Ethan Kaplan also looked at how partisan media impacts voting patterns (2007). Instead of talk radio, Dellavigna and Kaplan looked at how the entrance of Fox News into new markets affected local voting patterns and preferences. Since Fox News was adopted by different cable companies in different years, it allowed the authors to look at how access to Fox News impacted voting patterns and preferences. In towns that broadcast Fox News, Republicans gained 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points between the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections. The authors estimate that Fox News convinced 3 to 28 percent of its viewers to vote Republican. While not able to determine if the effect was temporary or more permanent, the authors were still able to show that the introduction of Fox News into a cable market has a significant effect on available political information and actively altered voting patterns in that market. While this study does not directly address the issue of misinformation, it demonstrates the ability of the news media to alter voting patterns and policy preferences. If the media has the ability to influence public views and preferences, then the transmission of misinformation by the media has the potential to distort public views and preferences.

In a study published in 2000, Kuklinski et al. demonstrate that there are widespread, inaccurate beliefs about the realities of welfare (public assistance and income maintenance for low-income families). Through the use of a survey instrument that included information questions (questions where there is a single correct response), Kuklinski et al. found a great deal of misinformation related to welfare policy. Sixty percent of respondents overestimated at least two fold the number of American families on welfare (797). Some forty percent of respondents overestimated the annual payments received by welfare recipients. A further two thirds 'grossly overestimated' the amount of the federal budget spent on welfare. A second study, which unlike the first did not limit the range of answers, found an even greater range of mistaken beliefs about welfare (797-798). Misinformation on welfare was skewed towards what the authors call anti-welfare errors: overestimating the amount of money received by a welfare family, the percentage of welfare families who are black or the proportion of the national budget that goes to welfare. Participants were confident in their beliefs- a majority of participants were

fairly confident or very confident in their answers to the 6 information questions asked in the survey. Kuklinski et al. also demonstrate that those with the least accurate responses had the most confidence in their beliefs. The authors conclude that widespread misinformation can lead to very different collective preferences than the public would hold if correctly informed.

In this section, literature was reviewed that demonstrated the problems of misinformation. Bartels and Maurer & Reinemann discussed how misinformation can be transmitted directly from candidates and elected officials to the public, distorting policy preferences and altering voting patterns. Hofstetter et al. and Dellavigna & Kaplan were able to show that the news media has the ability to influence the voting patterns and preferences of their audiences and in the case of talk radio were able to demonstrate that the news media can and does transmit misinformation to its viewing audience. Finally, Kuklinski et al. documented widespread misinformation among the public about welfare, leading to very different views and collective preferences about welfare programs than the public would hold if they had perfect information.

While the literature reviewed here has demonstrated that elected officials transmit misinformation to the public through the media, and that the public is influenced by that misinformation- it has done so in a fragmented way. In order to better understand the transmission of misinformation from elected officials and the news media to the public, it may be helpful to look at a single issue that ties the elements of misinformation transmission together. The contemporary debate over global climate change is one such issue. Regarding climate change, there is general scientific consensus on the issue. However, media coverage and elite discourse do not reflect the general scientific consensus. Opinion polls consistently show that the public is misinformed about the scientific consensus on this issue- misinformation which is not equally distributed across ideological lines. The next section will discuss misinformation in relation to global climate change.

### **Misinformation and the Debate on Global Climate Change**

Climate change is a contentious issue- not for scientists, but for the news media and the public. In a 2001 report, the national academy of science states that:

Greenhouse gases are accumulating in Earth's atmosphere as a result of human activities, causing surface air temperatures and subsurface ocean temperatures to rise. Temperatures are, in fact, rising. The changes observed over the last several decades are likely mostly due to human activities...Human-induced warming and associated sea level rises are expected to

continue through the 21st century (Committee on the Science of Climate Change, National Research Council, 2001).

The December 3, 2004 issue of Science magazine contained an article by Naomi Oreskes which looked at peer-reviewed articles on climate change published in scientific journals between 1993 and 2003. Articles were divided into a number of categories, most notably if the paper endorsed the consensus position (Greenhouse gases are accumulating in Earth's atmosphere as a result of human activities...) or if it rejected that opinion. Oreskes reviewed 928 papers, and found that 75 percent either explicitly or implicitly endorsed the consensus view; the other 25 percent took no position. In this study, not one paper out of 928 reviewed rejected the consensus position on anthropogenic climate change. The science on climate change is solid- and consensus in the scientific community is high.

The news media presents a very different picture of climate change. In 2004, Boykoff and Boykoff conducted a study of how climate change issues were reported in major newspapers such the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. In a majority of coverage (52.7 percent), the 'balance frame' was used- the articles gave roughly equal attention to those arguing the view that humans were contributing to global warming and those disputing that view (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004). Thirty-five percent of stories emphasized anthropogenic contributions to global warming, but also presented alternative views. Boykoff and Boykoff conclude that there is a significant gap between scientific consensus and the public's perception of two issues: human contributions to climate changes, and actions that should be taken to address climate change. A gap that persists because of balanced coverage from the media:

The continuous juggling act that journalists engage in often mitigates against meaningful, accurate, and urgent coverage of the issue of global warming....through the filter of balanced reporting –popular discourse has significantly diverged from the scientific consensus. (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004)

A similar study by Boykoff in 2005 found that 70 percent of U.S. television news segments provided balanced coverage of the causes of global climate change. Pew's Project for Excellence in Journalism studied media coverage of climate change in 2009 during an international summit in Copenhagen, and found that the balance frame dominated coverage (Hitlin, Sartor, and Rosenstiel 2009).

In 2010, Pew conducted polls on the public's opinion of global warming. Only 34 percent said global warming is occurring mostly because of human activity, while 32 percent said that there wasn't solid evidence that the earth is warming (Pew Research Center, 2010). When asked whether scientists

themselves agree that the earth is warming because of human activity, 44 percent said scientists agree, and 44 percent said that they do not.

Public opinion polls not only reveal public doubt about climate change, but also a significant ideological split in views on climate change. It was previously mentioned that 32 percent of respondents said that there wasn't solid evidence that the earth is warming. When responses from the pew survey discussed above are examined along party lines, 53 percent of self-identified Republicans said that there was not solid evidence that the earth is warming, compared to only 14 percent of Democrats. When asked whether scientists agree that the earth is getting warmer, 59 percent of Democrats said yes compared to only 30 percent of Republicans. A slight majority of self-identified independents felt that there was solid evidence that the earth was warming, but only 41 percent said that scientists were in agreement that the earth was getting warmer because of human activity.

In 2008, Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman published an article which looked at sources of environmental skepticism (a term that can be applied to a number of issues, but in this instance it refers to doubt about climate change and the authenticity of climate science). Jacques et al. specifically look at 141 English language books that promote environmental skepticism. Using quantitative analysis, the authors found that 92 percent of books promoting environmental skepticism were linked in some way to conservative think tanks. Jacques et al. then look at conservative think tanks that are involved in environmental issues and find that 90 percent of them promote environmental skepticism. The authors conclude that environmental skepticism is an elite-driven counter movement created to combat environmentalism and undermine the American commitment to environmental protection (Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman, 2009, p 364-365).

The climate change issue helps demonstrate how misinformation operates. First, there is significant scientific consensus on the issue of global climate change, which is the result of extensive empirical study and peer review. The relatively high level of scientific consensus is not reflected in the discourse of political elites, especially among conservative elites who have sought to challenge the consensus on global climate change. Coverage of climate change in the news media has been more reflective of the disagreement among political elites than of the consensus among scientists. Public opinion of climate change also reflects the disagreement among elites, and doubts about climate change are especially strong among the portion of the American public that is politically aligned with the elites who promote environmental skepticism. Public opinion on climate change is shaped not by scientific censuses derived from empirical observation, but rather by political elites seeking to undermine views on environmental

protection and preferences on environmental protection policy. On the issue of climate change, misinformation from political elites and the news media have had a significant effect on public opinion and policy preferences regarding environmental protection.

Boykoff and Boykoff, among others, have demonstrated that media coverage of climate change reflects disagreements among political elites and not the strong scientific consensus on the issue. However, this does not explain why media coverage reflects elite discourse instead of empirically-derived scientific consensus. In order to understand why the news media fails to correct misinformation (or, in some cases, actively transmits misinformation) the contemporary news media environment will be briefly examined, primarily using the work of prominent media scholars Shanto Iyengar and W. Lance Bennett.

### **The State of the News Media**

Prominent media scholar Shanto Iyengar recently observed that “historically, where Americans get their news has depended on the development of new technologies for transmitting information (Iyengar, 2011). In 1969, network television was the dominant method for transmitting news to the American public, and the evening news casts of the big three networks: CBS, ABC, and NBC reached three quarters of American households combined. The proliferation of cable news in the 1980’s and 1990’s dramatically reduced the nightly news audience, and by 2009 the big three’s audience share had decreased to 31 percent. Media outlets no longer compete for large audiences; instead, they fight for relevance in a vast sea of news media outlets that deliver content 24 hours a day.

In the 24 hour news cycle the pressure is on news organizations to be first in breaking the news. This race to be first requires a loosening of traditional journalistic norms about sources, methods and depth of coverage (Bennett, 2012; Iyengar, 2011). This loosening of journalistic norms creates a situation where the news media is more likely to transmit misinformation to the public.

In addition, the economics of journalism has changed. Audiences geared towards traditional news media- newspapers, network TV, and local TV news are smaller, and the proliferation of the internet and new media technology has meant more competition from free sources of news- blogs, news aggregators, RSS feeds and email lists (among others). According to media scholar W. Lance Bennett, the new economics of journalism lead to a 25 percent decline in journalism-related jobs between 2001 and 2010. Traditional journalists were no longer the gatekeepers of information. The loss of so many journalism-related jobs meant that there were fewer individuals practicing and enforcing journalistic norms.



The factors described above created a perfect storm in journalism: declining audiences, reduced staff capacity despite the move to a 24 hour news cycle, and charges of bias levied against in-depth reporting. In 1999, for example, more than half of all news stories had zero public policy content (Bennett, 2012). Instead of serious reporting, audiences were increasingly exposed to soft news and human interest stories.

In order to preserve their autonomy, reputation for objectivity, and provide interesting content, journalists began to use the horse race frame to cover serious issues in politics and policy. The horse race frame (also called the balance frame) covers politics like a sport: there are competing teams, who at various times are able to pull ahead in the race- eventually, one team wins this race and then both sides prepare to do it all over again in the next contest. Almost any type of news item can be framed as a horse race. If Republicans introduce a key piece of legislation in Congress, a journalist could take the time to evaluate the legislation on its own- or they could simply quote Democrats who oppose the legislation. Journalists could also evaluate the content of a candidate's stump speech, or they can invite one person from each 'side' to comment on how the event helped or hurt the candidate. Nearly any type of news coverage can reflect the balance frame by using a quote, paraphrase, or piece of information from the candidate making news; a quote, paraphrase or piece of information from the 'other' side; and then discussing how the piece of news affects which side is scoring points or winning the race.

In the horse race frame, the questions being asked are "whose winning?" and "how does this event affect their chances?" Articles written in the horse race frame are easy to write and read much like a story from the sports page. Complex issues, like health care reform, are reduced to discussions of which side is scoring points in the debate and which side is going to 'win'. The use of the horse race frame does not require the reporter to know anything substantive about the policy topic, only requiring that the reporter is able to quote to each side's respective position on the issue. While the horse race frame may make for compelling stories, it tends to obscure discussions over policy and what *should* be done. Earlier a series of studies by Maxwell Boykoff was discussed that illustrated how the prevalence of the balance frame undermines accurate reporting on global climate change.

During the 2008 Presidential Election, reports on the status of the "horse race" outnumbered reports on candidate's policy positions by more than 2.5 to 1 (Iyengar, 2011). While the 'battle' between candidates Obama and McCain was being discussed in the media, the specific policy proposals of each candidate received much less attention. As Boykoff and Boykoff noted earlier, the widespread use of the

horse race (balance) frame prevents meaningful discussion of differences in candidates' policy positions and precludes in-depth evaluations of the impacts of those policy positions.

The horse races frame also deflects charges of bias. Charges of bias are lessened through the use of counter-sourcing- quoting or paraphrasing the 'other side' instead of evaluating the claim itself (Bennett, 2012) (Iyengar, 2011). If an article simply presents both sides, it is much harder to charge the article's author with bias.

Given the current political economy, journalists and media outlets do not have the capacity to be able to judge the factual accuracy of competing claims, especially those involving technical or especially complex policy options. The public therefore, no longer has an institutional mechanism for filtering political communication for factual accuracy. As seen in areas where policy is especially complex or technical, this has led to gaps between public and expert opinion over the nature of policy problems and the tools for addressing those problems. Given the constraints faced by the news media it seems unlikely that the trends described above- such as the proliferation of the horse race frame and the loosening of traditional journalistic norms- will change in the near future. For now, the media environment will continue to operate in a manner which allows for the transmission of misinformation to the American public.

As illustrated by several studies, misinformation has significant consequences for the American public. Misinformation has the potential to distort voting patterns and policy preferences, causing the misinformed to vote contrary to their actual beliefs. Misinformation has had a large impact on the recent health care reform debate, climate change policy, and on the public's beliefs about welfare. For individuals interested in science-based public policy, misinformation represents a significant barrier to achieving policy change. Misinformation also induces false confidence, making misinformation much more difficult to overcome than the lack of information. Since the news media is unwilling or unable to address the misinformation problem, the public is left without an institutional mechanism for judging competing political claims.

Some individuals and organizations have taken it upon themselves to try and create new institutional mechanisms for judging competing political claims: third party fact-checking organizations. These organizations give the public one possible tool to use in evaluating political claims. Data from these organizations allow for an assessment of who is more likely to transmit misinformation by comparing the accuracy of statements made by various political actors. An inaccurate statement is a demonstrably

false claim or unsubstantiated belief about the world, contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion. Based on the definition of misinformation used above, making inaccurate statements is equivalent to spreading misinformation.

Since political fact checking is a relatively recent phenomenon, the next section will give background on political fact checking before discussing the specific political fact-checking organization used in the paper to evaluate misinformation, Politifact.

### **Political Fact Checking**

A number of internet based fact-checking operations have been created in the last several years, including Factcheck.org, Politifact, Media Matters, and Newbusters.com just to name a few. When asked about the rise of political fact-checking in recent years, Politifact editor Bill Adair offered this insight:

Political Journalists- myself included- have been too timid about fact-checking in the past because we were afraid we would be criticized for being biased. But facts aren't biased. Now, we are finally calling the balls and strikes in the campaign the way we should have in the past (qtd in Glaser, 2008).

Adair also suggests that political journalists have been handcuffed by the idea that being fair means simply reporting both sides, without commenting on the factual accuracy of either side's arguments. This view is consistent with the evidence reviewed previously in the paper which suggests that simply reporting both sides (using the horse-race frame) prevents meaningful assessments of the factual accuracy of claims made by political actors.

In an article for PBS.org, Mark Glaser notes that fact checking statements made by politicians began in the 1980's in Texas with the work of Carole Kneeland. Contemporary political fact-checking on the internet has been carried out largely by journalists and concerned citizens. With traditional news organizations reducing staff because of economic pressures and a changing media landscape, it is unlikely that they will be able to hold politicians accountable for their words and actions given the cost of fact-checking statements by political actors.

The Poynter Foundation's Craig Silverman explains why interest in fact-checking has increased in recent years: "I've never seen more smart and talented people interested in fact checking. I've never seen more money and organizations lining up on the side of the debunkers." In December, 2011 Silverman attended a round table discussion of fact-checking hosted by the New America Foundation in

Washington, DC. At the conference, participants expressed several motivations for wanting to fact check- as a way to strengthen democracy, as a way to decode political communication, and as a reaction to high profile press errors, such as the failure to accurately report on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in the lead up to the Iraq war. Silverman notes that several academic papers were discussed at the conference, but could not discuss them in detail since the papers were not yet published.

Eric Ostermeier of the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs conducted an analysis of one such fact checking organization, Politifact, in 2011. In his analysis, Ostermeier looked at 511 statements rated by Politifact between January 1, 2010 and January 31, 2011. The sample contained a roughly equal number of statements by Republicans and Democrats. Less than half of statements by Republican were rated half-true or better, while 75 percent of statements by Democrats were rated half-true or better. What stands out in this analysis is that Ostermeier uses the discrepancy in ratings between Democrats and Republicans as evidence that Politifact is biased against Republicans. He only briefly entertains the notion that the result could be evidence that Republicans are less truthful than Democrats, and then dismissed that possibility without any further investigation. The analysis lacks depth and fails to even try to explain the difference as anything but bias. It could be that Politifact is biased, but it also could be that Republicans are less accurate- something Ostermeier only briefly considers in his analysis.

Chris Mooney and Aviva Meyer analyzed the work of the Washington Post's Fact Checker, which rates claims by assigning "Pinocchios"- the more Pinocchios, the more inaccurate the claim. Mooney and Meyer looked at 263 ratings given by the post between September 2007 (when the Post's operation began) and September 2011- 147 for statements by Republicans and 116 for Democrats. The average rating for Republicans was 2.46 Pinocchios, compared to only 2.09 Pinocchios for Democrats. Republicans were also more likely to be assigned the lowest possible rating- 4 Pinocchios. Republicans were rated more often than Democrats, so again questions about methods and potential bias arise but cannot be answered in this analysis.

The literature on political fact checking assumes that political fact-checking organizations are correct in their assessments of statements by political actors. A careful, qualitative analysis of the judgments made by fact checking organizations would help address this issue, but it appears that none have so far been conducted. A number of questions have been raised about the accuracy of certain judgments however, and various fact checking organizations have been criticized by liberals and conservatives alike. Since these organizations do not reveal the exact methodology used to select and evaluate claims,

they have also been open to charges of bias. The data analyzed below does not allow for an evaluation of the accuracy of judgments made by political fact checking organization, so this analysis will also assume that the judgments of statements by political fact checking organizations is valid.

Academic studies of political fact checking organizations are relatively new, so this study attempts to address questions of statement selection and selection bias by looking first at who is being covered by political fact checking organizations. If there is identifiable bias in how an organization chooses statements or selects individuals to evaluate, then the judgments made by that organization would not be useful in this evaluation of misinformation. While the issue of bias can only be partially addressed in this analysis, it is important to do so in order to advance the discussion of misinformation.

Once an analysis of who is being covered is complete, we will examine which political actors fact-checking organizations indicate are more likely to make inaccurate statements. Since we consider making inaccurate statements equivalent to transmitting misinformation, this will allow us to address which political actors are more likely to transmit misinformation.

Finally, it is important to examine accountability- does it matter if political actors spread misinformation? Given that the data used in this analysis only captures a small fraction of all statements a single political actor is likely to make, this question cannot be addressed to great effect.

The opportunity to address those questions presented itself when data was gathered from the fact-checking website *PolitiFact*. The data was originally compiled by Jarrod Olsson- a graduate student also at Oregon State- and is described in greater detail below.

Several hypotheses were developed based on the research questions above and the relevant literature on political fact-checking and misinformation. All alternative hypotheses are two-sided.

H1<sub>0</sub>: PolitiFact will be equally likely to cover statements made by Republicans and Democrats.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There will be no difference in PolitiFact's judgments of statement accuracy of Republicans and Democrats.

H3<sub>0</sub>: PolitiFact's judgments of statement accuracy will have no effect on election outcome.

## **Politifact Background**

Politifact is a nominally non-partisan political fact checking organization that was founded in 2007 by the Tampa Bay (formerly St. Petersburg) Times newspaper (Politifact.com, 2012). The fact checking is separate from the newspaper, although its judgments appear in the Times and several other newspapers across the U.S. Politifact's primary activity is rating "statements by members of Congress, state legislators, governors, mayors, the president, cabinet secretaries, lobbyists, people who testify before Congress and anyone else who speaks up in American politics". It uses the "Truth-o-Meter" to rate claims. In order of most accurate to least accurate, claims can be rated true, mostly true, half-true, mostly-false, and pants-on-fire. Claims rated pants on fire (from the childhood staple "liar, liar, pants on fire!") are judged to be making an especially ridiculous claim. Politifact also tracks promises made by candidates, among other activities- but the primary focus is on the truth-o-meter.

In 2009, Politifact was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for its coverage of the 2008 national elections (Adair, 2009). Since then, it has expanded its operation to include ten state Politifact operations in Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The organization rates claims by first asking the candidate or organization who made the claim where it got the information from. Politifact then tracks down the original sources of information used to make the claim, and works backwards to evaluate its factual accuracy. The organization tries to rely on non-partisan sources as much as possible, such as the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) or the Congressional research service (CRS). The individual who has done the fact checking then writes a column describing the original claim, the sources of information used, and the accuracy of the claim itself. Politifact then assigns the claim a rating, and publishes the judgment on Politifact.com.

Politifact has not been immune to controversy. There is a conservative-minded website which claims to demonstrate bias in Politifact's coverage, [Politifactbias.blogspot.com](http://Politifactbias.blogspot.com). In December, 2011 Politifact found itself the target of considerable ire from liberal new media websites for calling the Democrat's claim that Republicans wanted to end Medicare as its 2011 "lie of the year" (MediaMatter.org, 2011).

Unfortunately, a detailed content analysis of Politifact judgments will have to be left for future consideration. We recognize that Politifact's judgments are occasionally controversial, but are of the opinion that being criticized by partisans on each side is not necessarily evidence of a flawed judgment methodology.

## Data

The data from Politifact was gathered using a web-scraping tool which automatically collects data from the internet. The data mining tool identified 2981 statements which were evaluated by Politifact between June 2007 and October 2011. The statements represent a wide array of voices and interests, including members of Congress, persons running for elected office, White House officials, interest groups, media figures and political pundits, and even a political campaign yard sign.

The initial data set from Politifact was then merged with election data from the Federal Election Commission (FEC) from 2008, 2010, and preliminary data for 2012. This produced a sample of the data gathered from Politifact which contained persons who 1) ran for office in 2008 or 2010 or are running for office in 2012 and 2) had at least one statement evaluated by Politifact.

After the Politifact data was merged with the election data from the FEC, the sample contained 474 statements made by 150 members of Congress, candidates for Congress, and candidates for President.

The data gathered from Politifact and merged with the FEC election data treated each statement as a separate case. If an individual had more than one statement covered by Politifact, each statement was treated as a unique case.

In addition to actual statement and the name of the person who made the statement, each case contained the following information: the State where the person had run or is currently running for election, their party identification (Republican, Democrat, or Independent), the office sought (House, Senate, or President), the congressional district in which an individual was running, their status in the race (as incumbent, challenger, or running for an open seat), the date that Politifact published its judgment of the statement made, and the judgment of the statement itself.

Politifact also issues a rating when it appears that an elected official may have “flip-flopped” on a previous position, among other activities; however, since we are concerned with the factual accuracy of statements made by elected officials and those seeking office, the data only includes statements where Politifact made a judgment on statement accuracy.

It was then decided that some demographic information should be added to the current data, so that we might both control for, and better understand, other factors that impact the factual accuracy of statements made by members of Congress and persons running for Congress. Using information from Project Vote Smart- a non-partisan website that gathers information about candidates and their voting

records- information on gender, age, race, religion, when an individual was first elected to the office they current hold, and the result of their 2010 election bid (if applicable). In cases where data was not available from Project Vote Smart- such as for race and religion- the candidate's official web site was used to fill in the missing information.

At that point, there were two different ways of looking at the data: first, each individual statement can be treated as a case, which results in 474 cases where a statement by a member of Congress or person running for Congress was judged by Politifact. Second, each individual can be looked at as a case, which gives us 150 persons who had one or more statements evaluated by Politifact.

One of the more difficult aspects of using Politifact to evaluate the accuracy of statements made by elected officials and those seeking office was the lack of information the organization provides about how it chooses statements for evaluation. The official website, Politifact.com, offers no information on how they choose which statements to evaluate. What we do know about Politifact's methods has largely come from interviews with senior members of the organization. In August of 2009, Politifact Editor Bill Adair appeared on C-SPAN's Washington Journal, and offered this insight into how the fact checking operation works:

What we do is look into these claims, we fact-check them. We fact check what people say, whether it's President Obama or Senate Majority Leader Reid, or John Boehner, the Republican Leader of the House or Glen Beck and Keith Olbermann. And we fact-check them, we're thorough journalists and I think.... We're really needed because there's so much chaos in the political discourse, I think Politifact's a place where people can come and sort it out and see if it's true or not.

Later in the interview, Adair is asked by callers to discuss the way that Politifact is checking certain claims, from the accuracy of Rush Limbaugh to the controversy over President Obama's birth certificate. He offers these insights into the modus operandi of Politifact:

We choose to checking things that we're curious about. If we look at something and we think an elected official or talk show host is wrong, we will fact check it.

We want to fact check everybody and everything that's out there- so that's why we fact check Twitter messages and Facebook posts and whatever comes up.



We are really creating a tremendous database of independent journalism that is assessing these things and it's valuable for people to see, well how often President Obama is right and how often Senator McCain was right. I think of it like the back of a baseball card, that it's sort of someone's career statistics- what's someone's batting average?

It does not appear that Politifact is taking a systematic approach to checking the accuracy of statements made by various political actors. It does not, for instance, check every single statement a candidate makes, or every single claim repeated but not checked through various media outlets. Instead, Politifact's coverage is reflective of what the organization thinks is relevant in our national political discourse.

Since the precise methodology used by Politifact in selecting statements could not be ascertained, it was important to try and understand who Politifact was choosing to cover and who they could have covered but did not. In order to answer the question of who is being covered by Politifact, a data set consisting of candidates for Congress in 2010 was created. Using election data from the New York Times, 995 people who were candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, or were current members of the U.S. Senate but were not facing election in 2010 were identified. The last group was included because although they were not running for reelection, they still participated in election activities, such as campaigning and fundraising, and Senators are always relevant to the national political discourse.

When combined with the previously discussed data, the election data from the Times helped to produce a picture of Politifact's coverage of the 2010 election. The '2010 election dataset' included a number of variables: a candidate's opponent or opponents, the margin of victory (or defeat), the state they were running in, the congressional district in which they were running, the office they were seeking (House or Senate), their party identification, their gender, their status in the race (incumbent, challenger, running for an open seat), whether they occupied a leadership position in the party or were a committee chair, the result of their 2010 election bid, the number of statements they had judged by Politifact, when each statements were made, and the number of statements for each judgment category (True, mostly true, etc.).

Included in the 2010 election data were judgments of statements made from December, 2008 (right after the 2008 elections) to October, 2010 (right before the 2010 elections). This allowed for the examination of coverage by Politifact in one election cycle.

## Methods

The data was analyzed using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW, formerly SPSS), a program that allows for the use of several different types of statistical analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were used to understand the distribution of demographic characteristics- the number of women compared to men, the number of statements by Democrats vs. the number of statements by Republicans, or the number of open seats won by Democrats in 2010, among others.

To understand the relationships between statement coverage (by Politifact), statement accuracy, election outcomes and the explanatory variables gathered, ordinal logistical regression (ordinal logit), Poisson, and logistical regression (logit) analysis techniques were used. Poisson regression is modeling technique, used to model “count” dependent variables (Larget, 2007), which is appropriate when looking at the number of statements a candidate had judged. Logistical regression is yet another technique for modeling data, except the outcome variable is dichotomous (Newsom, 2011). This is useful for analyzing the data gathered, since outcome variables such as being covered by Politifact can be expressed as a binary choice- either a person was covered or was not. It can also be used to look at statement accuracy, since statements can be grouped into two categories- accurate and not accurate.

Ordinal logistical regression is useful when the outcome variable is categorical and the categories have a rank-order- which is how judgments from Politifact are organized.

At this point it seems useful to define a number of variables used in the analysis, and in some cases provide more information about how that information was obtained:

**Statements:** The number of statements a candidate for Congress had judged by Politifact in a given time period. For the 2010 election, it represents the number of statements judged by Politifact between December 2008 and October, 2010. For the full data set, it represents the number of statements an individual had judged by Politifact between 2007 and September, 2011.

**Coverage:** A dummy variable for number of statements. Coverage = 1, if an individual had at least one statement judged by Politifact during the observation period, Coverage=0 if they had no statements covered during the observation period.

**Women:** A dummy variable for gender. Women = 1 if an individual is a female, Women = 0 if an individual is a male.

**Republican:** A dummy variable for party identification. Republican = 1 if a candidate was Republican, and Republican = 0 if a candidate was a Democrat or Independent. There was zero coverage of Independent candidates by Politifact, and only 9 independents ran for Congress in 2010.

**Incumbent:** A dummy variable for race status. Incumbent = 1 if a candidate was running for re-election, and incumbent = 0 if a candidate was challenging an incumbent or running in an open race.

**Leadership:** A variable indicating whether or not a person held a leadership position in the One Hundred Eleventh United States Congress. A person was considered a leader if they were chair of a standing committee in the House or the Senate, the Senate Majority Leader, The Speaker of the House, House Minority leader, or Party Whip.

**Senate:** A dummy variable indicating whether a person was a member of the House or Senate or running for the House or Senate. Senate= 1 for members of and candidates for Senate, and Senate =0 for members of and candidates for the U.S. House.

**Margin of Victory / Defeat:** For the 2010 election, the percentage point difference between candidates running for the same seat. The margin was converted to absolute decimal values, and made into dummy variables with 4 categories: election with absolute margins less than .10, elections with margins between .10 and .19, elections with margins between .20 and .29, and elections with margins greater than .30.

**State Politifact:** A variable which indicates the presence of a state Politifact operation in the state a candidate was running. Politifact is headquartered in Florida and has state operations in Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

**Presidential Candidate:** Indicates an individual who was running for the Republican nomination for President in 2012 or the President himself, Barack Obama.

**Politifact Judgment:** The factual accuracy of a statement, as judged by Politifact. Politifact rates claims on a 6 point scale: True, mostly true, half-true, mostly false, false, and pants on fire (a particularly egregious statement). For Analysis, the scale was converted to a likert scale ranging from 0 (pants on fire) to 5 (true).

**Election Outcome:** A dummy variable used in the 2010 election data set. Election outcome = 1 if a candidate won his or her 2010 election bid and election outcome = 0 if a person lost his or her 2010 election bid. The variable is sometimes labeled victory, but the values are interpreted the same.

**Months Before:** A variable for the 2010 election data set which indicates the number of months before the 2010 election a Politifact judgment of an individual statement is published.

## **Results**

### Politifact's Coverage of the 2010 Election:

The vast majority of individuals running for Congress in 2010 were seeking a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. This is unsurprising, especially when considering that all 435 seats in the House were up for election (and are every two years) compared to only 35 seats in the Senate (7). Women, who make up slightly more than half of the U.S. population, comprised just over 16 percent of the population of candidates running for Congress in 2010. Democratic women outnumbered their Republican counterparts almost 2:1- women accounted for 21.9 percent of Democrats who ran for Congress in 2010, but only 11.2 percent of Republicans.

The candidate pool was split roughly evenly between Republicans and Democrats, with only a handful of independents, 9, running for Congress. Prior to the 2010 election, Democrats had majorities in both the House and Senate. This is reflected the election data- 59 percent of incumbents running in 2010 were Democrats, while Republicans comprised 59 percent of the individuals challenging incumbents.

Republicans were able to win a majority of seats during the 2010 election, winning 56.7 percent of the races they contested, compared to Democrats, who only won 46.8 percent of the races they contested.

As expected, incumbent candidates were far more successful in the 2010 elections, despite the gains made by Republican challengers in the House. Incumbents won 87.5 percent of the races they contested, while challengers only successfully defeated incumbents in 16.4 percent of contested elections.

During the 2010 election cycle, Politifact judged 179 statements by 80 candidates, or about 8 percent of major candidates for Congress during that time. Of candidates covered, 70 were running for the U.S. House and 10 were running for the U.S. Senate. While women comprised just over 16 percent of candidates for Congress in 2010, statements by women made up 22.5 percent of Politifact judgments

during the 2010 election cycle. The 18 women covered had an average of 1.5 statements judged each, compared with an average of 2.45 for men. When looking at the number of statements covered for each individual, 72.2 percent of women had only 1 statement covered; by comparison, 56.5 percent of men had only one statement covered by Politifact.

Republicans received slightly more coverage from Politifact than Democrats during the 2010 election cycle, both in terms of number of candidates covered (44 to 36) and statements judged (99 to 80).

The number of individuals from each party who had a single statement covered was more evenly distributed, with 27 Republicans (61.3 percent of all Republicans covered) and 21 Democrats (58.3 percent) being evaluated only once.

At this point, it makes sense to employ the regression techniques (Poisson, logit, and ordinal logit) described in the methods section to explore the relationship between the demographic variables and coverage from Politifact.

The logistical regression model (Logit) can be employed now to give more insight into the question: Who is being fact-checked by Politifact? The Logit model is appropriate because coverage can (and is) modeled as a binary variable- individuals running for congress were either covered ( $y=1$ ) or not ( $y=0$ ). The results of the logit model are displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1.

**Logistical Regression Model of Coverage**

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)
Women	.717	.324	.027	2.048
Republican	.506	.284	.075	1.659
Incumbent	1.473	.312	.000	4.364
Leadership	1.049	.480	.029	2.854
Senate	-.993	.755	.188	.370
Margin0-10	.599	.351	.088	1.821
Margin10-19	.042	.362	.909	1.042
Margin20-29	.014	.393	.971	1.014
State Politifact	1.069	.262	.000	2.913
Constant	-4.337	.435	.000	.013

Variable(s) entered on step 1: Women, Republican, Incumbent, Leadership, Senate, Margin0-10, Margin10-19, Margin20-29, and State Politifact.

In the Logit model for coverage, incumbency has the largest magnitude effect on coverage by Politifact. Since the B coefficients are log-transformed, they can be difficult to interpret. The odds ratio (listed under the column Exp(B) ) will instead be discussed since it is easier to understand. In the logit model, the odds of an incumbent being covered are 4.364 times larger than the odds for a challenger or a person running for an open seat.

Being in a leadership position was again a significant factor in coverage by Politifact. Individuals in leadership positions in Congress were 2.854 times more likely to be covered than their rank-and-file counterparts.

The presence of a state Politifact operation also had a significant effect on coverage. Candidates running for Congress in a state that had a state Politifact operation were 2.913 times more likely to be covered than candidates who ran in states without a state Politifact operation.

Gender had a significant effect on coverage by Politifact in the logit model. Women were 2.048 times more likely to be covered than their male counterparts.

Leadership, gender (being female), and the presence of a state Politifact operation were all significant predictors of coverage at the .05 level.

Party identification was also a significant factor in coverage by Politifact. Republicans were 1.66 times more likely to be covered than Democrats or Independents. In this model, party identification (being a Republican) was only significant at the .10 level.

There is a significant relationship between coverage and margin of victory (which is a proxy for close races). The results for margin of victory are relative to the omitted category, which in this instance was races with an absolute election margin of .30 or greater. Individuals who were in very close races- defined here as an absolute margin of less than 10 percent- were 1.821 times more likely to be covered by Politifact than those in races with an absolute margin of more than 30 percent. Margin of victory was significant at the .10 level for races in which the margin was less than 10 percent. There was no significant difference between coverage of races with absolute margins of .10 to .19 and .20 to .29 and races with a margin of .30 or more.

While the model identified several significant variables which influence coverage, the model itself had little predictive capacity. Compared to the null model (that is, the same dependent with no independent variables yet factored in) the full model was only about 0.1 percent more accurate in predicting coverage (the null model was able to predict about 92.2 of cases correctly, while the full model was able to predict 92.3 percent of cases correctly). While several significant factors affecting coverage have been identified, those factors only explain a small amount of the variation in coverage.

Logit was used to construct a model that looked at coverage, but it does not allow for us to look at number of statements in the same way. A Poisson regression can be used to construct another model

where the outcome variable is number of statements judged by Politifact, and selected output from the Poisson regression model is included below as Table 2.

Table 2

**Poisson Regression Model for Number of Statements Judged by Politifact**

Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test	
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	Sig.
(Intercept)	1.588	0.6341	0.345	2.831	6.271	0.012
[Women=.00]	-0.471	0.2109	-0.884	-0.058	4.988	0.026
[Republican=.00]	-0.05	0.1814	-0.405	0.306	0.075	0.784
[Incumbent=.00]	-0.648	0.1884	-1.018	-0.279	11.844	0.001
[Leadership=0]	-1.265	0.28	-1.814	-0.716	20.422	0
[Senate=.00]	0.105	0.3569	-0.595	0.804	0.086	0.77
[Margin0-10=.00]	-0.679	0.2221	-1.114	-0.243	9.339	0.002
[Margin10-19=.00]	-0.174	0.2359	-0.636	0.288	0.544	0.461
[Margin20-29=.00]	-0.35	0.2426	-0.825	0.126	2.078	0.149
[State Politifact=0]	-1.236	0.1719	-1.573	-0.899	51.715	0
(Scale)	1b					
Dependent Variable: Statements						

Model: (Intercept), Women, Republican, Incumbent, Leadership, Senate, Margin0\_10, Margin10\_19, Margin20\_29, State Politifact

It is important to remember when looking at a Poisson regression model that it is log-transformed. The econometric equation for the model can be written as:

$$\text{Log}(E(Y)) = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3$$

In this model, leadership is the most significant effect in terms of magnitude. A one unit change in leadership (from 0 to 1) results in a change in the log-odds of statements by 1.265. Interpreting changes



in log-odds is difficult, so it makes sense to transform them into odds ratios for each predictor variable. Assuming all other factors equal, individuals in leadership position in Congress is 3.54 more statements than individuals who do not occupy leadership positions in Congress.

Having a state Politifact operation also had a large magnitude effect on the number of statements an individual had judged. Candidates who ran for Congress in states that had a state Politifact operation had 3.44 more statements judged than candidates from states without a Politifact presence, assuming all other factors are equal.

Incumbency had a significant influence on the number of statements a candidate had judged by Politifact. If we again assume that all other factors are equal, an incumbent would have 1.91 more statements judged than a challenger or candidates running in an open race.

Here we see some more evidence that margin of victory (our proxy for close races) plays a significant role in the number of statements a Candidate has judged by Politifact. Compared to individuals in elections with a margin of greater than .30, individuals in close elections (those with a margin of less than 10 percent) had 1.91 more statements judged.

The gender identification of candidates for Congress also played a role in the number of statements an individual had judged. If there are two candidates, and the only difference between the two is gender, than the female candidate would have 1.60 more statements judged than here male counterpart.

Leadership, the presence of a state Politifact operation, incumbency, margin of victory and gender were all significant at the .05 level in the Poisson regression model.

For the first time, office sought was a significant predictor of number of statements judged. The expectation was that individuals running for Senate would have more statements judged than individuals running for the House. The evidence here suggests that all other factors being equal, a candidate for the House would have 0.90 more statements judged than a candidate running for the Senate. There are some caveats to this finding however. The result was only significant at the .10 level, and the 95 percent confidence interval ranges from -0.595 to 0.804. Since the interval ranges from positive to negative (and includes 0) the effect of race status cannot be properly determined with the amount of data available.

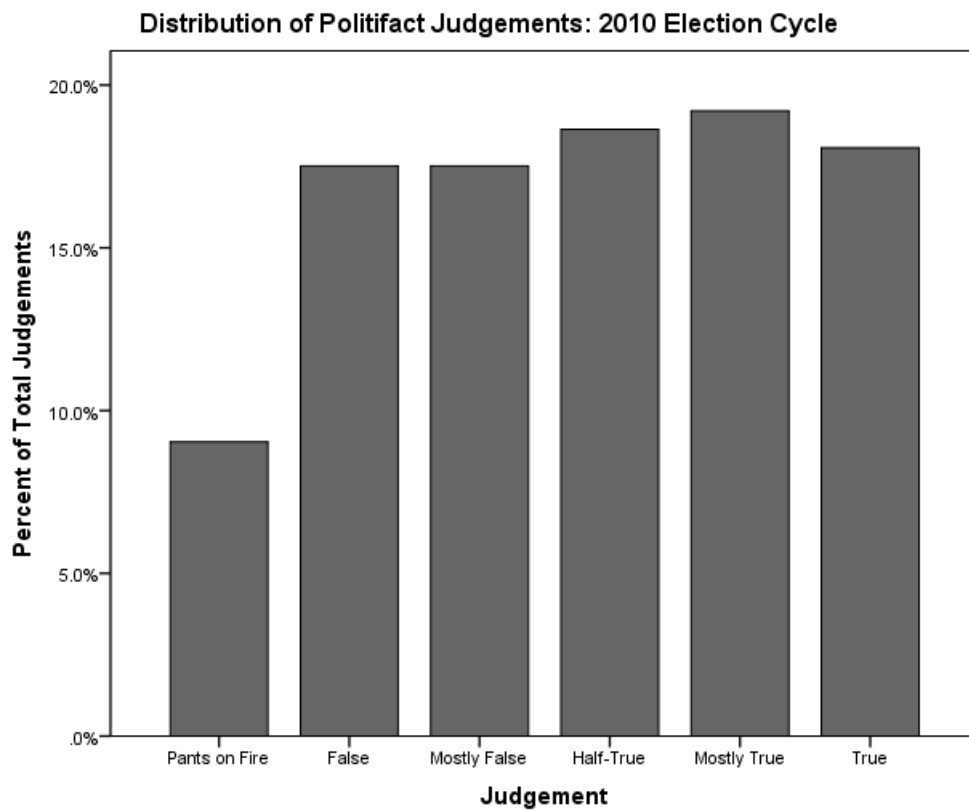
Party identification did not have a significant impact on the number of statements a candidate had judged by Politifact. In the Poisson model, the 95 percent confidence interval for the effect of party

identification ranges from -0.405 to 0.306, indicating that effect of a candidate being a Republican could lead to more statements being judged, or less.

### STATEMENT ACCURACY

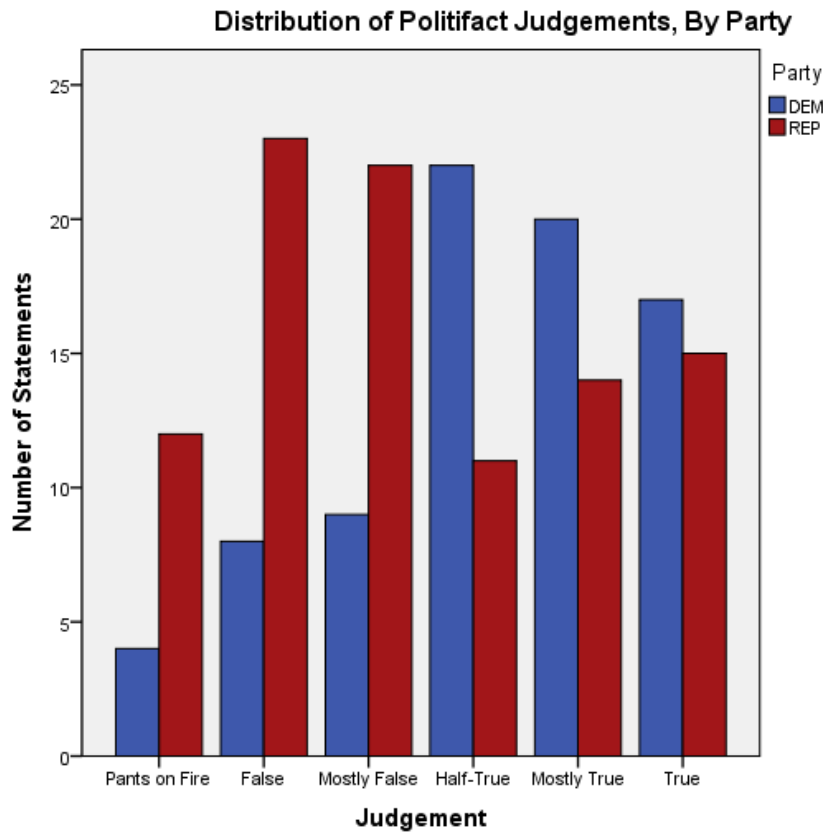
Having examined who Politifact covered during the 2010 election cycle, it now makes sense to examine Politifact's judgments of statement accuracy by candidates for Congress in 2010. Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of statement judgments for the 2010 election cycle.

Figure 1



The judgments were roughly evenly distributed across the judgment categories, except for the pants on fire category. Of the 179 statements judged, only 16 (about 9 percent) received the pants-on fire rating. The other five categories all had between 31 and 34 statements. Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of statements based on party identification.

Figure 2



Separating judgments by party affiliation reveals an interesting difference in statement accuracy. Of the 99 statements by Republicans judged, 58 percent were less than half-true (that is, they were judged as mostly false, false, or pants on fire). For Democrats, only 26 percent of the statements judged were less than half-true. Slightly less than half (46 percent) of all statements by Democrats were rate rated half-true or true, compared to only 30 percent of statements by Republicans being rated half-true or true.

As previously discussed, Politifact uses a categorical ranking system to judge claims, from Pants on fire to True. Because of the way Politifact's judgments are organized, it makes sense to model statement accuracy using ordinal logistic regression (ordinal logit). The use of ordinal logit presented some issues- not all variables can be retain in all binary logits, and we were unable to carry out a brant test so the data might violate the parallel regression assumption. These issues were not significant enough to

invalidate the use of ordinal logit, however. Output from the ordinal logit model is displayed below as table 3.

Table 3  
Ordered logistic regression

Judgments	Coef.	Standard Error	z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Women	0.681	0.768	0.890	0.375	-0.824	2.187
Republican	-1.297	0.575	-2.260	0.024	-2.422	-0.171
Incumbent	-0.495	0.634	-0.780	0.436	-1.738	0.749
Leadership	-1.126	0.762	-1.480	0.140	-2.619	0.368
Senate	0.000	(omitted)				
Margin <.10	-0.695	0.619	-1.120	0.261	-1.908	0.518
Margin .10- .19	0.202	0.682	0.300	0.767	-1.135	1.539
Margin .20-.29	-0.648	0.828	-0.780	0.434	-2.272	0.975
State Politifact	0.391	0.485	0.810	0.420	-0.559	1.292
Months Before	0.067	0.045	1.400	0.161	-0.027	0.161
Age	-0.033	0.027	-1.230	0.220	-0.086	0.020

In the ordinal logit model, the only significant variable was party identification. From the log-odds we can see that Republicans are less likely to have statements judged in the higher coded categories. In other words, Republicans were less likely to Democrats to have statements rated true or mostly true. Ordinal logit also allows us to tabulate significant differences between Republicans and Democrats, which are displayed below as table 4

Table 4

Judgment	Democrats	Republicans	Difference	95% CI for Change	
Pants on Fire	0.044	0.144	-0.100	-0.204	0.005
False	0.096	0.229	-0.133	-0.255	-0.001
Mostly-False	0.120	0.189	-0.069	-0.141	0.003
Half-True	0.266	0.240	0.026	-0.044	0.095
Mostly-True	0.235	0.119	0.116	0.007	0.225
True	0.240	0.080	0.161	0.011	0.310

The respective columns for Democrats and Republicans contain the probability that a statement by a member of the party will be rated in a given judgment category. The difference column simply

represents the difference between probabilities for Democrats and Republicans for each judgment category. The last column provides the 95 percent confidence interval for differences between Democrats and Republicans. The confidence intervals indicate that the differences in probability are significant for three categories: false, mostly-true, and true. Republicans were significantly more likely to make statements rated false and significantly less likely to make statements rated mostly-true or true.

A logistical regression model can also be used here to investigate the factors which affect statement accuracy. Logit requires a binary outcome variable, so a dummy variable was developed where true and mostly true statements = 1 and half true, mostly false, false, and pants on fire statements = 0. The output from this model is displayed below as table 5.

Table 5

**Logit: Outcome Variable = True or Mostly True =1, else 0**

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Women	.437	.606	.520	1	.471	1.548
Republican	-.893	.477	3.504	1	.061	.409
Incumbent	.086	.611	.020	1	.889	1.089
Leadership	-1.096	.809	1.837	1	.175	.334
House	-1.253	1.138	1.214	1	.271	.286
Margin0_10	-1.449	.616	5.541	1	.019	.235
Margin10_19	-.146	.611	.057	1	.811	.864
Margin20_29	-1.396	.784	3.172	1	.075	.248
State Politifact	.708	.512	1.914	1	.166	2.031
Constant	1.093	1.100	.987	1	.320	2.983

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Women, Republican, Incumbent, Leadership, House, Margin0\_10, Margin10\_19, Margin20\_29, State Politifact.

The most striking effect on statement accuracy in the logit model was party identification. Democrats were 2.44 times more likely to have a statement rated true or mostly true than Republicans, assuming all other factors are equal. The impact of party identification on statement accuracy was only significant at the .10 level.

Election margin also had a significant impact on statement accuracy. Candidates in races decided by 10 points or fewer were 4.2 times as likely to make false statements, compared to persons in races where the margin was 30 points or more. A similar result was observed in elections with a margin between 20 and 29.9 points, but the result was only significant at the .10 level.

The full model was able to correctly predict whether a statement would be judged true or false in 69.8 percent of cases. This represented a 5.5 percent increase in the predictive accuracy of the full model compared to the null model.

Finally, a series of Poisson regression models were constructed in which the outcome variables were the number of statements in a given judgment category, such as “false”, or “mostly true”. The results are shown below in table 6.

Table 6

## Poisson Regression Coefficients for Judgment Categories

Variables:	Pants on Fire!		FALSE		Mostly False		Half True		Mostly True		TRUE	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Women	1.26	0.042									1.02	0.025
Republican	1.27	0.055	1.53	0.005			-1.23	0.015	-0.87	0.056		
Incumbent	1.39	0.042	0.996	0.052					0.73	0.097		
Leadership			1.24	0.041	1.397	0.02	1.75	0.018	1.48	0.034		
Senate												
Margin 0-.10			1.812	0								
Margin .10-.19												
Margin .20-29					0.955	0.061						
State Politifact	1.429	0.012	1.271	0.002	1.55	0			0.757	0.051	1.89	0

Gender was significant at the respective ends of the accuracy scale- being a woman was positively associated with making more statements rated pants on fire and making more statements rated true. A one unit change in the variable “women” (that is, being a female compared to being a male) resulted in a difference of the log of the expected count of pants on fire statements by 1.26, and the log of the expected count of true statements by 1.02 (assuming all other factors are equal).

The results for party identification were particularly interesting. Being republicans was positively associated with pants on fire and false statements, but negatively associated with half-true and mostly-true statements. A one unit change in party identification (that is, being a Republican compared to being a Democrat) resulted in an increase in the log of the expected count of pants on fire statements of 1.27, and an increase in the log of expected counts of false statements by 1.53, assuming all other factors are equal. For half-true and mostly true statements, the opposite effect was observed: a one unit change in party identification (being Republican) result in a decrease in the log of the expected count of half-true statements of 1.23 and a decrease in the log of the expected count of mostly true statements of 0.87.

Being an incumbent and being in a leadership position both were positively associated with several categories of accuracy. This suggests that being an incumbent or being in a leadership position results in an increase in judgments across the board.

A similar observation can be made about the effect of a state Politifact operation on statement accuracy. The presence of a state Politifact operation results in more statements classified in each category.

Margin of victory had a significant impact on false statements. Compared to an individual in a race decided by more than 30 percent, an individual in a race with a margin of less than 10 percent increased the log of the expected count of false statements by 1.812, holding all other factors equal.

One factor not yet considered in the analysis so far is the effect of timing on statement accuracy. As Election Day gets closer, does statement accuracy change? Timing was added to the OLS and Logit models for accuracy- it is measured by computing the number of months before the election, based on when Politifact published its judgment of the statement. There is some time lag between when a statement is made and when Politifact's judgment (if the statement was judged) is published, so months before was used instead of days before.

In the logit regression model, however, the number of months before an election did have a significant impact on statement accuracy. In this model, true and mostly-true statements = 1 and all other judgment categories = 0. Interestingly, as the numbers of months before the 2010 election increased, so did statement accuracy. For each additional month before the 2010 election, the likelihood of making a true or mostly true statement increase by 1.072, or by about 7.2 percent. As the election gets closer, however, the likelihood of making true statements decreases.

A similar model can be constructed with pants on fire, false and mostly false statements = 1, and all other judgment categories = 0. In this model, the months before an election had no significant impact on the likelihood of making false statements.



## ELECTION OUTCOMES

The data gathered for the 2010 election allows for the examination of factors that impact election outcomes. Does having a statement judged true or false by Politifact impact election results? It is important to note here that the data only captures a very small number of all statements made by political actors, and so care should be taken when interpreting the impact of statement accuracy on election outcomes.

A Logit regression model was constructed with election outcome as the outcome variable. Output from the model is listed below as table 7.

Table 7

### Logit: Election Outcomes:

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Women	.152	.256	.355	1	.551	1.164
Republican	2.385	.307	60.299	1	.000	10.861
Incumbent	4.506	.317	202.506	1	.000	90.595
Leadership	18.176	6835.499	.000	1	.998	78259288.169
Senate	.770	.373	4.267	1	.039	2.159
True	.261	.542	.231	1	.631	1.298
Mostly True	-.327	.608	.289	1	.591	.721
Half True	1.764	.921	3.670	1	.055	5.838
Mostly False	-.745	.639	1.356	1	.244	.475
False	.603	.668	.815	1	.367	1.828
Pants on Fire	1.483	1.132	1.718	1	.190	4.408
Constant	-3.233	.305	111.978	1	.000	.039

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Women, Republican, Incumbent, Leadership, Senate, True, Mostly-True, Half-True, Mostly-False, False, Pants on Fire.

Incumbency was the most significant factor in terms of magnitude affecting election outcomes. Being an incumbent resulted in a change in the log odds of victory by 4.50. Similarly, being a Republican resulted in a change of the log odds of victory by 2.39. Both results were significant at the .01 level.

The only judgment category that was significant in the above regression was half-true. Having a statement rated half true by Politifact was significantly associated with positive election outcomes.

The logit regression model was able to correctly predict election outcomes 82.7 percent of the time. The step 0 model, with no variables entered, only correctly predicted election outcomes 51.7 percent of the time. The variables entered in the logit model were significant in predicting election outcomes. Each additional half true statement increased the log odds of victory by 1.764. Again, these results should be interpreted with caution, since the data captures a relatively small amount of statements made by an individual running for Congress.

### Discussion and Analysis

The first research question posed in this paper was: Who is being covered by Politifact? In order to answer that question, two models were constructed using various statistical analysis techniques. The results are summarized in the table below.

Table 8

Variable:				
	Logit : Coverage		Poisson : Statements	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Women	0.717	0.027	0.471	0.026
Republican	0.506	0.075		
Incumbent	1.473	0	0.648	0.001
Leadership	1.049	0.029	1.265	0
Senate				
Margin0-10	0.599	0.088	0.679	0.002
Margin10-19				
Margin20-29				
State Politifact	1.069	0	1.236	0

The relationship between coverage, number of statements and gender was surprising, especially since it was not expected that coverage or number of statements would vary by gender. In the coverage model, being a woman increased the likelihood that a candidate would have at least one statement covered by Politifact. Gender (being female) also increased the number of statements a candidate had judged by Politifact in the Poisson regression for number of statements. Why would Politifact over-cover women?

One explanation could be that women are more likely to make false statements, and are therefore more likely to make statements that Politifact would be interested in judging for accuracy. As we saw in the Poisson models for accuracy, gender (in this case, being female) was significant in predicting an increase in the log of the expected counts of both Pants on Fire and False statements. In other words, Women were more likely to make statements rated either True or Pants on Fire than their male counterparts. Examining the Politifact judgments closer, we can see that 18.5 percent of statements by women during the 2010 election cycle were rated Pants on Fire, compared to only 7.3 percent for men.

A similar effect was observed at the other end of the accuracy scale. Of the statements covered during the 2010 election cycle, 29.6 percent of statements by women were rated true, compared to only 15.2 percent for statements by men.

Women also had a significantly higher proportion of candidates who had only a single statement covered than men did: 72.2 percent of women had only 1 statement covered by Politifact, compared to 56.5 percent of men.

According to the judgments of Politifact, women were more likely to make extreme statements- that is, statements that are judged to fall on the respective ends of the accuracy scale; they were also more likely to have only one statement judged.

It appears that women are more likely to make statements which 'catch the eye' of Politifact. If Politifact does have some sort of selection criteria used to choose which statements to evaluate, statements by women are more likely to meet that criteria. From our investigation of Politifact, there seems to be little evidence that statements are selected based on set criteria- in fact, the opposite seems to be true: the organization selects statements based on what they find interesting. Politifact editor Bill Adair said as much in a 2009 interview with *The Washington Journal*: "We choose to checking things that we're

curious about. If we look at something and we think an elected official or talk show host is wrong, we will fact check it” (C-Span, 2009).

While we cannot ascertain their motives, for whatever reason Politifact seems to be more curious about statements made by female candidates. It is possible that women are more likely to make extreme statements, especially given the difficulty of women in achieving any sort of parity in Congress, but all that can be said here is that Politifact is more likely to be curious about statements by female candidates than statements by male candidates.

Party identification was significant in our model of coverage, but not in the model for number of statements. Republicans were more likely to be covered, but did not significantly differ from Democrats in the number of statements covered. Similar to what was found in respect to women; Republicans were much more likely to have claims rated false and pants on fire. Roughly 12 percent of statements by Republicans were rated pants on fire and 23 percent were rated false; only 5 percent of statements by Democrats were rated pants on fire and 10 percent were rated false.

Given the higher proportion of claims rated pants on fire and false, it is again not surprising that Politifact would be more likely to be ‘curious’ about statements made by Republicans and therefore more likely to cover Republicans. If this is the case, then why is party identification not significant in number of statements covered? While party identification influences coverage, other variables have a significant impact on the number of statements covered. The results show that having a state Politifact operation significantly increases coverage, regardless of party identification. The impact of party identification on number of statements covered is not as significant as its impact on coverage. When changing the outcome variable from coverage to number of statements, the magnitude of the effect of party is lessened considerably while the magnitudes of other factors are increased.

Incumbency was significant in the model for coverage and the model for number of statements. Being an incumbent increased both the likelihood that a candidate will be covered and the likelihood that a candidate will have multiple statements judged. The magnitude of the effect of incumbency was relatively small, but it was enough to have a significant effect on coverage and number of statements.

Being in a leadership position was also significant in the model for coverage and the model for number of statements. In terms of magnitude, the impact of being in a leadership position on coverage and number of statements covered was much larger the impact on incumbency. Individuals in leadership

positions were more likely to be covered by Politifact and more likely to have multiple statements judged compared to persons not in leadership positions.

The presence of a state Politifact operation also had a significant effect on coverage and number of statements covered. The presence of a State Politifact operation significantly increased the likelihood that a candidate will be covered and increased the number of statements a candidate had judged by Politifact.

Margin of victory was significant in the Logit regression model for coverage and the Poisson regression model for number of statements. Compared to candidates in elections decided by more than 30 percent, candidates in races decided by less than 10 percent were somewhat more likely to have a statement covered and had slightly more statements judged by Politifact.

After reviewing the evidence, several conclusions can be drawn:

First, Politifact coverage of a candidate depends on the 'national profile' of the candidate and the office they are seeking. In the models presented above, incumbents and party leaders were more likely to be covered and more likely to have multiple statements judged. Close elections were also given increased coverage, and candidates in close elections were more likely to have statements judged by Politifact.

Individuals in leadership positions received more attention from Politifact than lay members of Congress, again reflecting national profile. The Speaker of the House is much more visible than rank-and-file members of the House, so too is the Senate Majority Leader much more visible than the average Senator.

Unsurprisingly, incumbents also received more attention from Politifact than challengers and persons running for an open seat. Of course those already in Congress would have an advantage over their respective challengers- they have a certain national profile by simply being a member of Congress. The only time we would not expect an incumbent advantage in coverage is if a well-known individual, such as a former Governor or Congressman, was contesting the election.

It was expected that a difference in coverage would emerge between Senators and members of the U.S. House. The Senate is considered the 'upper' legislative body, and there are far fewer Senators than members of the House (100, compared to 435 members of the House). Given those factors, it was

assumed that Senators would be more likely to be covered and have more statements judged. Instead, we found no difference in Politifact's coverage of Senators and Members of the House.

Second, Politifact's coverage of candidates for Congress was constrained by the resources available to the organization. The presence of a state Politifact operation increased the likelihood that a candidate would be covered and a candidate having more statements judged. The presence of a state Politifact operation also increased the log of expected counts in each judgment category. State Politifact operations increase Politifact's ability to cover candidates and judge statements made by those candidates. We would expect that expanding the number of state Politifact operations would improve coverage of candidates in that state.

Third, Politifact is somewhat more likely to cover statements by women and Republicans. Statements by women were, on the whole, judged to be more extreme- they were usually rated true or pants on fire. Statement by Republicans were more likely to be rated false and pants on fire than statements by Democrats. It is possible that women make statements more likely to be judged on the extreme end of the accuracy scale; it is also possible that Republicans make more incorrect statements. The data presented here is not able to provide evidence for or against that possibility. It is also possible that Politifact is choosing to judge statements by Republicans and women that seem *prima facie* untrue. While that possibility was not specifically explored here, we have found no evidence that Politifact only chooses to rate untrue statements by Republicans and true statements by Democrats. However, it could be that Politifact's judgments have reinforced their own biases about statements by women and Republicans- as they rated more and more statements by each group, they begin to expect that future statements by that group will be incorrect. Unless Politifact reveals the exact methodology used to select and judge statements, we will never be able to fully eliminate questions of bias. Even so, we feel that the conclusions drawn in this section are valid assessments of who is being covered by Politifact.

Now that a thorough examination of *who* is being covered has taken place, an examination of the factors that affect statement accuracy can be conducted. The table below summarizes the results of the various models constructed to examine statement accuracy.

Table 9A

Variable Name:	Ordinal Logit		Logit: Mostly True	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Women				
Republican	-1.297	0.024	-0.893	0.061
Incumbent				
Leadership				
Senate				
Margin0-10			-1.449	0.019
Margin10-19				
Margin20-29			-1.396	0.075
State Politifact				

Table 9B

Variable Name:	Pants on Fire!		FALSE		Mostly False		Half True		Mostly True		TRUE	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Women	1.26	0.042									1.02	0.025
Republican	1.27	0.055	1.53	0.005			-1.23	0.015	-0.87	0.056		
Incumbent	1.39	0.042	0.996	0.052					0.73	0.097		
Leadership			1.24	0.041	1.397	0.02	1.75	0.018	1.48	0.034		
Senate												
Margin0-10			1.812	0								
Margin10-19												
Margin20-29					0.955	0.061						
State Politifact	1.429	0.012	1.271	0.002	1.55	0			0.757	0.051	1.89	0

There was no significant difference in accuracy between male and female candidates, but female candidates were more likely to make statements judged to be true or pants on fire. This is certainly an interesting interaction: on average, the accuracy of male and female candidates is not significantly different; when looked at by judgment category we see that women are more likely to make statements on the ends of the scale- true and pants on fire. Previously, this was discussed as a possible factor in the over coverage of women- Politifact is likely to be more perceptive of 'extreme' statements and judge them.

As for explaining the phenomena seen here, consider the realities of being a woman in U.S. politics. As we saw in the 2010 election, only roughly 16 percent of candidates were female. It might be that for female politicians to increase their profile and media coverage, they might have to make bolder statements- statements that would have stand out in a crowded web of messages from political actors. One might choose to be unscrupulously honest, or to maximize the impact of a statement by eschewing accuracy, or a mix of both in an attempt to have their message stand out. This is certainly speculative, but the gender effect seen here was one that was not expected. The literature on fact checking and political psychology has not, to my knowledge, discussed the possibility that women make more extreme political statements than men. Despite the differences in 'extreme' statements, it is important to reiterate that on average, statements by women and men did not significantly differ in their accuracy.

A sort of inverse effect was observed in the statement accuracy of party leadership. Party leaders did not differ in average statement accuracy from rank-and-file party members, but were less likely to have their statements judged to be either true or pants on fire. Based on the literature, we would expect that a party leader, being somewhat more visible than a non-leader, would be more accurate. Instead what we see is that party leaders tended to make less absolute statements- that is, more likely to be rated false through mostly true and not pants on fire or true.

The results for incumbents were more difficult to interpret. We did not see a difference in the average statement accuracy of incumbents, challengers, and candidates in open races. Compared to candidates in open races and challengers, however, incumbents made more statements rated false, pants on fire, and mostly true. One possible explanation is that incumbency increases coverage, and therefore the expected number of statements in each judgment category- this is consistent with the incumbency effect discussed in the analysis of coverage. It may be that there is not enough data to fully flesh out the interaction of incumbency and accuracy. As with the effect of gender, it is important to note that we found no difference in the average statement accuracy between incumbents, challengers, and candidates in open races.

Close races seemed to have an interesting effect on statement accuracy. Compared to candidates in elections decided by more than 30 percent, statements by candidates in races decided by less than 10 percent were judged to be significantly less accurate. The Poisson regression models also showed that the log of expected counts of false statements increased by 1.82 for candidates in races decided by less



than 10 percent. Compared to candidates in non-competitive races, statements by candidates in close races were significantly less accurate. A similar result was observed in races with a margin between 20 and 29 percent- except that the magnitude of the effect on average statement accuracy was less than the effect seen in races decided by less than 10 percent. The log of the expected count of *mostly false* statements was .955 higher in races with a margin on 20 to 29 percent than in races with margins of 30 percent or more. The evidence here suggests that as races get closer, statements by candidates become less accurate. It probably won't surprise anyone that close races can get nasty, or that they foster a win-at-all costs mentality, but this is a result that we would like to see investigated further at some point.

The models showed a significant difference in statement accuracy based on party identification. Republicans were significantly less likely to make statements rated true or mostly true in the ordinal logit model. A similar result was obtained in the logit model for statement accuracy- Republicans were significantly less likely to have statements rated true or mostly true. In the Poisson models for accuracy, Republicans were significantly more likely to make statements rated pants on fire and false, and significantly less likely to make statements rated half-true and mostly true. This analysis finds a significant gap in statement accuracy based on party identification: statements by Republicans were rated as significantly less accurate than statements by Democrats.

Based on the literature reviewed, we had expected a difference in statement accuracy based on party identification. There is some evidence that Politifact is more likely to cover Republicans than Democrats, so our examination of differences between statement accuracy of Republicans and Democrats needs to account for the over-coverage of Republicans. In order to understand the 'accuracy gap' between the two parties, we will look at political psychology and Jonathan Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory.

### **IS ONE PARTY MORE RIGHT THAN THE OTHER?**

It has been demonstrated that according to Politifact, Republicans are less accurate than Democrats. It could be said that Republicans are more willing to lie in order to win elections, or they are more willing to deceive the voting public into voting against their own self-interest. It is not that Republicans are evil and Democrats are good- that is far too normative for an academic research paper, and besides, it seems a little disingenuous. Right or left, we have no reason to believe that the other side is less sincere, or that one side has an exclusive monopoly on what is best. It is plausible that one party intentionally

uses deception more than the other, but for this discussion we will assume that people are sincere in their concerns, regardless of ideology.

If we assume that political parties and interest groups are sincere in their concerns, then it is not difficult to accept Psychologist Jonathan Haidt's proposition that:

Political parties and interest groups strive to make their concerns become current triggers of your moral modules. To get your vote, your money, or your time, they must activate at least one of your moral foundations. (Haidt, 2012).

The moral foundations Haidt is referring to are what he refers to as "concerns beyond narrow self-interest". Implicit in this statement is our suspension in the belief that people only do whatever gets them the most benefit for the lowest cost. To accept this we do not have to reject all forms of rationalism, only to recognize that sometimes an individual's actions cannot be explained by narrow self-interest.

Haidt has identified six moral foundations that produce the diversity of moralities seen across the political spectrum. The Care/Harm foundation has which guides empathy; the fairness/cheating foundation guides our sense of cooperation; the loyalty/betrayal foundation guides our formation of groups and teams; the authority/subversion foundation guides our sense of order, tradition and stability; the sanctity/degradation foundation which guides our views of pollution and purity; and a liberty/oppression foundation that guides our views of group domination.

This assertion is backed up by data from YourMorals.org. The site was launched by Haidt and his colleagues to test moral foundations theory using a number of questions based on the six foundations. Clear differences emerged in the moral matrices of liberals and conservatives. It turns out that liberals, the core of the Democratic party, value care and fairness far more than the other four foundations, while conservatives, the anchors of the Republican party, value all six foundations more or less equally. When conservative are defined as generally resisting societal change and liberals are defined as generally seeking societal change, the same result emerge across cultures.

Along with our moral foundations, psychologists have identified five traits that characterize the human experience: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism- OCEAN (Mooney, 2012). It turns out that liberals and conservatives differ quite a bit on two traits: openness to experience and conscientiousness. Liberals rate high on openness to experience- a personality trait that speaks to an individual's intellectual flexibility, curiosity, and enjoyment of the arts and creativity (openness should not be confused with intelligence). Conservatives are much more conscientious- a trait associated with being orderly, working hard, and staying organized. This is not to say all liberals are open or all conservatives are conscientious, but they are good predictors of liberalism and conservatism.

This paper has focused on misinformation, and the data showed that Republicans were significantly less accurate than Democrats. Cognitive Linguist George Lakoff asserts that conservatives and liberals (the respective cores of each party) will have a different relationship with science and the facts due to the differences in personality traits described above (qtd in Mooney, 2012). Lakoff contends that conservatives will have no problem with science or factual information when it supports their moral foundations. However, as Lakoff notes, scientific and factual information can be highly destabilizing, threatening conservative values and potentially undermining traditional sources of authority and respect. For liberals, scientific information and facts rarely run contrary to their moral foundations. Finding the best information to improve society supports the liberal moral foundations of harm and fairness. Occasionally, scientific or factual information will run counter to liberal moral foundations- in those cases we can expect that liberals will be less open to information which would threaten their sense of harm and fairness (consider nuclear power, for example). Conscientiousness also encourages team unity- so conservatives are less likely than liberals to correct members of their own team, less motivated to call out questionable assertions, and more willing to ostracize dissent (Mooney, 2012, p 81-84). For the reasons discussed above, liberals are much more likely to emphasize getting the facts right, while conservatives are much more likely to defer to leaders and to question those who challenge traditional authority.

Both Mooney and Haidt point to a body of evidence which shows that when we counter new information, we judge it using the parts of our brain that govern emotion and passion, not reason (Mooney, 2012; Haidt, 2012). In a 2004 study, Westin et al. exposed strong partisans- both Democrats and Republicans- to contradictory statements from each party's presidential candidate. Democrats saw

the statements by George W. Bush as hypocritical, but did not apply the same judgment to statements by John Kerry. Republicans did the opposite- recognized Kerry as hypocritical but did not see hypocrisy in statements by President Bush. While being exposed to the information, participants had their brains scanned using a functional MRI machine (fMRI). When presented with contradictions, participants did not use the parts of the brain associated with logic- instead, the parts of the brain associated with emotion and psychological defense were activated! Participants were engaged in motivated reasoning: a form of implicit emotion regulation in which the brain converges on judgments that minimize negative and maximize positive affect states associated with threat to or attainment of motives (Westin et al, 2004).

Take the evidence together, and something like this emerges: As we develop into adults, we develop personality traits and moral foundations that shape who we are, and lead us to be more likely to be receptive to certain messages. Some people- those who have especially strong harm and fairness foundations and are open to experience become liberals; others, who are very conscientious and have more balanced moral foundations become conservative; and most of us end up having a mix of personality traits and moral foundations that are somewhere in between. Most of us then, are open to appeals based on all six foundations.

Information which violates our moral matrix, or threatens to compromise it in some way, is processed in a way that avoids cognitive dissonance. If you've been a staunch conservative your whole life, you will process information which confirms your beliefs and your brain will ignore information that conflicts with those beliefs- the same process is at work if you're a very liberal.

Republicans have been very successful in shaping opinions on topics like global warming, as discussed earlier in this paper. Some of that credit should go to Frank Luntz- of whom media scholar W. Lance Bennett said "few communication professionals have been more effective at changing the way Americans think about issue, politicians and parties than Frank Luntz" (Bennett, 2011). His advice, which has been sought by Republicans for many years, for getting what you want is:

1. Figure out who your audience is
2. Learn what they already think about your candidate or problem
3. Find a language which brings your issue into the acceptance zone of their thoughts and feelings

Frank Luntz clearly understands moral foundations theory- he knows that you have to appeal to people's emotions, and you have to do it in a way that doesn't threaten what they already believe about the topic.

It is my contention that we can understand the difference in statement accuracy between Republicans and Democrats by employing the moral foundation framework and political psychology. The difference in accuracy is a manifestation of a difference in appeal- Democrats emphasizes harm and care, while Republicans use all six moral foundations. This is why we see a perception gap in our understanding of climate change- scientific and factual information generally advances liberal moral foundations while running afoul of conservative moral foundations.

Is it surprising then that a fact checking organization- comprised on individuals who are open to seeking out the truth and care about fairness in journalism and the potential harm of misinformation in politics- would find statements by Republicans more curious than statements by Democrats? Of course they would wonder about the factual accuracy of statements by Republicans more- but Republicans aren't making statements to maximize factual accuracy. Like Democrats, they are making statements to appeal to the largest possible constituency. The difference is that liberals and Democrats are more open to scientific and factual information because it is likely to advance their moral foundations.

### **Recommendations for Politifact**

This paper has primarily examined Politifact's judgments of the accuracy of statements made by persons running for Congress during the 2010 election cycle while also briefly exploring Politifact as a fact-checking organization. The analysis conducted here assumes that Politifact is unbiased in its selection and judgment of political statements. However, Politifact has been roundly criticized by groups on both the 'left' and 'right' of the American political spectrum for both statement selection and judgments of accuracy. Being criticized by 'both sides' could be seen as positive- the pushback could be the result of both sides being held accountable for the accuracy of statements made. In this sense, Politifact may simply be undermining the messages being transmitted by various political groups by giving the public accurate information on the claims being made. The political 'left' and 'right' seem to have very different complaints about Politifact however, and instead of being a positive, the complaints by both

sides bring into question the legitimacy of the organization, its methods for selecting statements to judge, and the validity of the judgments themselves.

The criticism of Politifact by Republicans has tended to focus on the imbalance of statement selection. In this analysis and others discussed previously on this paper, Republicans were judged more often by Politifact than Democrats (in both individuals and number of statements covered). In addition to being covered more often, Republicans were found to be significantly less accurate than their democratic counterparts. Politifact has previously said that it aims to be a scorekeeper of sorts- the organization keeps track of true and false statements in much the same way a baseball statistician tracks balls and strikes, and produces something akin to a batting average for political actors and the 'teams' (Democrat or Republican) they represent.

The problem with this approach is that while baseball statisticians are able to track every at bat, it is unlikely that Politifact could cover every statement made by a politician in an election cycle or over a political career given its resources. Politicians and political actors can and do make many statements over the course of an election cycle, and fact checking every claim made during stump speeches, private fundraisers, media interviews, public meetings, legislative sessions, and other political events would require enormous amounts of time and resources. Politifact is in reality only capturing a sample of statements made by political actors- a perfectly reasonable approach given the amount of statements that are made during an election cycle and the resources required to fact-check each claim. Given that Politifact is taking a sample, it would be prudent to have a sampling strategy that accounts for possible selection bias. Given that Politifact judgments are intended to help sort out truth in politics it would also make sense for Politifact to detail its sampling strategy to the public and to the political actors it covers. Public statements by individuals representing Politifact seem to indicate that statement selection is based more on which statements are of interest to members of the organization than an objective sampling strategy. While the analysis conducted here found no evidence of selection bias, the lack of an objective sampling strategy for statement selection leaves Politifact open to accusations of bias.

Democrats, on the other hand, have criticized Politifact for the accuracy of judgments made by the organization. In 2011, Politifact rated claims by Democrats that U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-WI) proposed budget would "end Medicare" as false and pants on fire (the budget was passed by House Republicans but was never likely to be passed by the Senate) (Adair & Drobic-Holan, 2011). Politifact then selected the claim as its 2011 'lie of the year', chosen over two false claims made by Republicans in a reader's

poll on the Politifact.com website (Drobnic-Holan, 2011). Democrats and liberals countered Politifact's judgment of the claim by arguing that Ryan's plan would in fact end Medicare in its current form and House Republicans did vote to end Medicare (Christopher, 2011; Lewison, 2011). Politifact does give some insight into how it judges statements in a video posted to YouTube and on the Politifact.com website. Politifact also wrote an article attempting to explain why the Democrats Medicare claim was chosen as the lie of the year despite finishing third in the reader's poll (Adair, 2011). The claim which finished first was not considered because it was originally made in 2010 (although the claim was repeated throughout 2011) while Politifact did not feel that the claim which finished second in the readers' poll "was repeated enough to be the most significant".

When Politifact rates a claim, it issues a judgment ranging from pants on fire to true- its rating system does not, however, does not make a judgment on the magnitude or significance of the claim being evaluated. The article in which the claim is evaluated often discusses the evolution of the claim- where it began, where it has been repeated, and by whom- but it does not usually look at how salient the claim is or how many people believe it to be true (which is difficult to do immediately after a claim is made). Politifact seemingly has no mechanism in place to judge the significance or magnitude of a claim- its selection of a 'lie of the year' appears to be an editorial decision, aided by voting from readers in a convince poll on the Politifact website. While designating a lie of the year may make for good copy, increase traffic to the site, and generate discussion about Politifact and fact-checking it undermines the work Politifact does to sort out truth in politics.

Politifact has the potential to be a valuable asset for the American public, fact-checking statements by political actors and separating truth from political rhetoric. Fact checking organizations will always invite criticism- especially from those who are fact-checked and found to be less than accurate. If Politifact aspires to be an objective and trustworthy source which separates fact from fiction in American politics, the organization should consider the following recommendations:

- 1.) *Develop a set of criteria for selecting which statements or other forms of political communication are fact-checked by Politifact.*

Bill Adair, editor of Politifact, has said during interviews that the organization "[chooses] to checking things that we're curious about. If we look at something and we think an elected

official or talk show host is wrong, we will fact check it” (Washington Journal, 2009). The problem with this approach, of course, is that choosing statements to fact-check based on curiosity leaves the process open to bias or potential bias. What is curious to one individual or organization may not be curious to another. While this study found no evidence of selection bias, even the appearance of selection bias undermines the ability of Politifact to be an effective fact checking organization.

While it is unlikely that all potential biases could be eliminated, the potential for (and appearance of) selection bias could be greatly reduced by establishing a set of criteria to determine which statements by political actors and other forms of political communication are fact-checked by Politifact. This paper previously discussed claims made about ‘death panels’ during the debate on health care reform; while it is unlikely that Politifact would have the resources to check every claim made on talk radio (where the claim originated), the organization could decide to check claims made during floor speeches by Congressmen and women (as this claim was).

It also seems unlikely that a fixed ‘formula’ could be developed to selected statements given the seemingly endless variety in which political communication is now delivered, but this does not mean that a set of selection guidelines could not be developed to identify particularly salient and relevant political communication.

Finally, the selection process needs to be made highly visible. This will not only serve to reduce potential charges of bias, but to build public trust in Politifact as a non-partisan fact-checking organization.

2.) *Preserve the integrity of the fact-checking operation by eliminating the ‘lie of the year’ and other forms of editorializing from Politifact.*

Politifact fact-checks individual claims, rating them on a scale from pants on fire to true. It does not, however, have any way to measure the impact or salience of a particular claim beyond looking at how often it was repeated in the media prior to being fact-checked. The amount of media coverage a particular claim receives does not necessarily indicate its impact- a claim could



be widely repeated because of how sensational it is, but still fail to resonate with the public. The 'death panel' claim discussed earlier was widely reported by the media, but what was particularly damaging about the claim was that it was widely accepted among the American public. Evidence about the salience of the death panel claim was revealed not in the fact checks of the claim itself, but in public opinion polling done after the claim was vetted. Politifact judges claims not in relation to other competing claims, but on the factual accuracy of the individual claim itself. Politifact has stated that it aims to be a scorekeeper- recording balls and strikes to compile a batting average- but at the same time has tried to assess the significance of each at-bat by awarding a lie of the year to one particular claim. It seems that Politifact has at times tried to be both a scorekeeper and analyst- roles that can and do conflict with each other.

Politifact would be best served by removing the lie of the year from its fact checking operation, or simply removing itself from choosing the lie of the year. Without a process for comparing the impacts of competing false claims, choosing a lie of the year becomes a political exercise- one that undermines the core mission of fact-checking and leads to legitimate questions about the nature of fact-checking itself. Is fact-checking simply another way for the news media to engage in so-called balanced reporting (the problematic nature of which was discussed previously in news coverage of climate change), or is fact-checking a way to address the deficiencies of current media coverage of politics by providing an objective, but not 'balanced', way to understand claims made by political actors.

It appears that Politifact, and fact-checking in general, has a choice to make. Is fact checking simply another tool of contemporary journalism- a way to present accuracy within the balance frame of media coverage? Or is fact checking a way to break away from balance as bias and engage in an objective and meaningful discussion of factual accuracy and misinformation in American political discourse?

If fact checking endeavors to be the latter, it needs to put in place mechanisms to minimize the potential for selection and other biases. The selection of which statements to fact check cannot simply be based on individual curiosity- statement selection should instead be based on a methodology which identifies items to fact checked based on an object set of criteria. Fact checking organizations must do this work without editorializing on or sensationalizing the work in which they perform.

## Policy Implications

The analysis of the Politifact data has shown that individuals running for Congress frequently make inaccurate statements, transmitting misinformation to the media and the American public. The transmission of misinformation is asymmetric- Republicans are more likely to transmit misinformation (by making inaccurate statements) than Democrats. The literature review conducted earlier demonstrated that the media also transmits misinformation to the public, and that misinformation alters voting patterns and policy preferences. Misinformation is hard to address, since it induces a false confidence among the misinformed. The misinformation problem has obvious consequences for science-based policy and technical policy issues, as we have seen in the debate over health care reform, policy action regarding climate change, and in public beliefs about welfare. Solutions, on the other hand, are not as obvious.

There are two levels in which the problem of misinformation can be addressed. First, we can look at the media environment and try to design policies which promote traditional journalistic norms and encourage in-depth coverage instead of promoting the balance frame. Second, policy makers can recognize the way that the public processes information to develop policy positions which appeal to moral foundations beyond harm and fairness.

Both Iyengar and Bennett note that compared to most advanced democracies, the United States provides little public service broadcasting. Current funding for public broadcasting in the U.S. is so insufficient that public broadcasting needs commercial sponsors, which undermines their independence.

One solution to the misinformation problem would be to increase public funding, including subsidies, for public broadcasting. Proponents argue that public broadcasting is free from many of the pressures faced by private news media and would be able to enforce traditional journalistic norms. There are two significant problems with this solution, however. First, repeated conservative attacks have left the impression the public broadcasting is liberal (Bennett, 2007, p260). If conservative see public broadcasting as liberal, then they are unlikely to use it as an authoritative source of information. The charges of liberal bias may also pressure public broadcasting to adopt the horse race frame in reporting- making it no more effective than private media in dealing with misinformation. Second, evidence from political psychology suggests that people prefer sources that match their own ideological orientation. If people prefer partisan content, they are unlikely to use public media as a source of political information.

Alternatively, a public fact checking organization similar to Politifact could be developed. Politifact currently publishes their judgments online, but their work is also used by many newspapers and media organizations. Fact-checking columns from Politifact appear regularly in newspapers such as the *Oregonian*. A similar model could be developed using public funding. A publicly funded fact checking operation would be able to provide content for private news media organizations, similar to what Politifact does now. This would allow individuals to access fact-checking information from their own preferred news media source. Public fact-checking could have a significant advantage over private fact checking in that it could establish a systematic method for selecting and evaluating statements. While it would be free of many of the pressures faced by private media, public fact checking, like public broadcasting, would still face possible charges of bias. A systematic approach to statement selection would guard against bias, but the organization may still face political pressure regarding potential bias.

In dealing with misinformation, policymakers (especially those in especially complex or technical policy areas) need to shape arguments which appeal to a wide variety of moral foundations. If misinformation can be readily transmitted using political psychology, then it stands to reason that accurate information can also be readily transmitted. Policymakers are oriented to provide information in a way that appeals to liberals (using scientific information and facts) sense of harm and fairness. Policymakers need to rethink the approaches they use to communicate information to the public so that they can appeal to the full spectrum of moral foundations. Climate change, for example, has been presented primarily as a harm issue- human activity is harming the environment. It could also be presented as a sanctity issue: we need to preserve the planet so that it is useable for the next generation; or as an authority issue- having to preserve the traditional landscapes of the earth- many of which have culture or religious significance for various groups. The above examples may not be particularly compelling, but they demonstrate our capacity to appeal to a variety of moral foundations. Using different moral foundation to address an issue like climate change may also reveal common ground between liberals and conservatives- providing a common moral language through which we can understand and address contentious issues.

### **Limitations**

This study faced a number of practical limitations which will be briefly discussed. First, the data from Politifact does not include all statements made in the course of a campaign- candidates for national office are likely to make many statements over the course of an election, and it would be difficult for Politifact to cover everything said by a given candidate. Given the limited number of statements

captured, it is difficult to assess the relationship between Politifact's judgment of a statement by a candidate and the outcome in that election.

The data was only able to capture a single election cycle. It is possible that the observed differences in judgments of statement accuracy between Republicans and Democrats were an anomaly- we could have captured an election where one party was more or less accurate in the 2010 election cycle than in previous elections. Since political fact checking organizations are fairly new, it is difficult at this point to look at statement accuracy over a long period of time. Subsequent elections and coverage from political fact checking organizations will allow for a study of statement accuracy over time.

This paper assumed that Politifact's judgments of statement accuracy were correct. There have been some concerns over the validity of individual judgments made by political fact checking organizations, but so far there has not been a qualitative study of the accuracy of judgments of political fact checking organizations. For this study, we were comfortable assuming that Politifact's judgments of statement accuracy were valid. This is an opportunity for future research, and would be useful in assessing tools to combat misinformation.

Finally, we were not fully able to address the issue of bias. This study did not reveal any obvious biases, but it was also not able to rule out the possibility that Politifact is biased in the way it selects statements or issues judgments. There is some evidence to suggest Republicans are more likely to be covered by Politifact than Democrats, but this is not necessarily evidence that Politifact is biased against Republicans. Until Politifact reveals the methods used to select statements, the question of bias is likely to remain unanswered.

## **Conclusion**

While liberals and Democrats have factual correctness on their side in the case of climate change, appeals by Republicans have resonated better with voters- who consistently express doubt about the science behind global warming in public opinion polls, such as those presented earlier.

That is not to say that liberals and Democrats should abandon factual accuracy. Issues like climate change demonstrate the importance of having objective information in order to address serious issues. Instead, liberal and Democrats need to understand the importance of all six moral foundations

This means making appeals that combine factual accuracy and an understanding of people's moral foundations. For too long the left has dismissed the right as being disingenuous. Instead, there needs to

be recognition that both sides of the spectrum are genuine in their beliefs- and an understanding that we are not always open to certain appeals and types of political communication.

Turning back to our examination of Politifact and fact checking, a number of areas for additional research have been identified. Aside from further investigation of Political fact-checking and a left-right accuracy gap, the results for statements by women beg further investigation. Do women make more extreme political statements- or do media organizations only pay attention to extreme statements by female politicians? A content analysis of statements made by politicians could provide further evidence for moral foundations theory.

Earlier, several hypotheses were developed, which will be discussed further in this section:

Overall, Politifact covered candidates in terms of national importance, giving more coverage to presidential candidates, party leaders and incumbents. There was some evidence that they were more likely to cover races expected to be close than safe races, and depth of coverage was reflective of the organizations resources- state Politifact operations significantly increased coverage of candidates in that state. There was also evidence that Politifact was more likely to cover statements by Republicans than Democrats, and more likely to cover statements by women.

The evidence suggests that we should reject  $H_{2_0}$ : Politifact will be equally likely to cover statements made by Republicans and Democrats. Politifact was more likely to cover statements by Republicans than to cover statements by Democrats, although this evidence was relatively weak. Further study is needed before we can reject  $H_{2_0}$  with a high level of confidence.

In terms of accuracy, we found significant evidence that statements by Republicans were less accurate than statements by Democrats. We also found evidence that statements by women were judged to be more 'extreme' than statements by men. Close elections also increased the frequency of false statements by candidates.

We also reject  $H_{3_0}$ : There will be no difference in Politifact's judgments of statement accuracy of Republicans and Democrats. Evidence from descriptive statistics and various models suggest that there is a significant difference in statement accuracy between Republicans and Democrats. Since this paper equates inaccurate statements to transmitting misinformation, the evidence suggests that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to transmit misinformation.

The evidence slightly supports the hypothesis H4<sub>o</sub>: statement accuracy will have no effect on election outcomes. We were unable to fully test this proposition, but the available evidence suggests that there was no relationship between Politifact's judgments of statement accuracy and winning or losing a Congressional election.

This analysis has shown that members of Congress and those running for Congress regularly transmit misinformation by making inaccurate statements. Misinformation is not evenly distributed, however, as there was significant evidence to suggest that Republicans were judged by Politifact to be significantly less accurate than Democrats.

It is unlikely that the news media will be able to address concerns over misinformation, for reasons discussed above. The recent interest in fact-checking provides an opportunity for fact-checkers to address the problems of misinformation, but it not clear to what extent they will be able to address the problem.

Policymakers cannot rely on the media or elected officials to accurately disseminate complex or technical policy issues. Instead, Policymakers need to rethink how they communicate various types of information, using all six moral foundations to make accurate information as appealing to the public as misinformation, and not rely on the media and elected officials to make the case for policy change. It is in these arenas that misinformation is particularly problematic- the best way to avoid the misinformation problem is to minimize the chances that information is warped into misinformation. This requires that the truth is as appealing as or more appealing than misinformation and that the facts resonate with as many people as possible.

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## Appendix A: FREQUENCY TABLES

### Frequency Tables

#### Leadership

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non-Leader	945	95.1	95.1	95.1
Leader	49	4.9	4.9	100.0
Total	994	100.0	100.0	

#### Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	9	.9	.9	.9
Female	163	16.4	16.4	17.3
Male	822	82.7	82.7	100.0
Total	994	100.0	100.0	

**Office Sought**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	14	1.4	1.4	1.4
HR	842	84.7	84.7	86.1
S	1	.1	.1	86.2
Sen	137	13.8	13.8	100.0
Total	994	100.0	100.0	

**Party**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	14	1.4	1.4	1.4
Dem	491	49.4	49.4	50.8
Ind	9	.9	.9	51.7
Rep	480	48.3	48.3	100.0
Total	994	100.0	100.0	

**Race Status**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	15	1.5	1.5	1.5
Challenger	417	42.0	42.0	43.5
Incumbent	485	48.8	48.8	92.3
Open	77	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	994	100.0	100.0	

**2010 Result**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	77	7.7	7.7	7.7
Lost	439	44.2	44.2	52.0
Won	477	48.0	48.0	100.0
Total	994	100.0	100.0	

**Coverage (1=covered by Politifact)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	914	92.0	92.0	92.0
	1.00	80	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total		994	100.0	100.0	

Appendix B: 2010 Election Statistics

2010 Election	Number of:	Percent
Individuals Running for the U.S. Senate	72	7.7%
Individuals Running for the U.S. House	856	92.1%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>929</b>	
Women running for Office	163	16.4%
<b>Republicans Running for Office</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>49.5%</b>
<b>Democrats Running for Office</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>49.6%</b>
Incumbents Seeking Re-election	425	45.7%
Challengers	427	46.0%
Individuals Running for Open Seats	77	8.3%

Politifact's Coverage of the 2010 Election

Politifact's Coverage of the 2010 Election	Total	Percent
<b>Number of Candidates With at Least One Statement Covered by Politifact</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
Number of Statements Judged	179	
Average Statements Per Candidate	2.24	
Number of Women Judged	18	22.5%
Number of Statements by Women Judged	27	15.1%
<b>Republicans Covered</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>8.9%</b>
<b>Number of Statements by Republicans</b>	<b>99</b>	
<b>Average:</b>	<b>2.25</b>	
<b>Democrats Covered</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7.3%</b>
<b>Number of Statements by Democrats</b>	<b>80</b>	
<b>Average:</b>	<b>2.22</b>	

Appendix C: Selected Tables

**Party \* Race Status Cross tabulation**

	Status			Total	
		Challenger	Incumbent		Open
Dem		157	251	44	491
Ind		6	0	1	9
Rep		252	172	32	480
Total		427	425	77	994

**Party \* 2010 Result Cross tabulation**

Party	2010 Result			
	Lost	Won	Total	Win Percentage
Democrats	241	212	453	46.8%
Independents	9	0	9	0.0%
Republicans	202	265	467	56.7%
Total	452	477	929	51.3%

**Race Status \* 2010 Result Cross tabulation**

Race Status	2010 Result			
	W	L	Total	Win Percentage
Incumbent	372	53	425	87.5%
Challenger	70	357	427	16.4%
Open	36	41	77	
	478	451	929	



Party \* Statements Cross tabulation

Distribution of Number of Statements

		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	10	Total
Party	Dem	457	21	4	5	3	0	1	1	1	493
	Ind.	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
	Rep	448	27	7	3	4	2	1	0	0	492
Total		914	48	11	8	7	2	2	1	1	994