

Fact checking politicians gets results

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USA flag.

New research indicates that American politicians are affected by the practice of fact-checking, thereby reducing the risk of misinformation and strengthening democratic accountability.

Fact-checkers such as PolitiFact and Factcheck.org scrutinise [politicians](#) in the US by examining the public statements given to and reported by news organisations.

This practice is born out of concern that traditional media rarely evaluates the accuracy of the politicians statements, resulting in political figures being frequently allowed to make misleading comments in the press without challenge.

Social scientists, Professor Jason Reifler from the University of Exeter and Professor Brendan Nyhan, Dartmouth College, USA conducted research on the effects of fact-checkers on candidates and legislators at

lower levels of government. This target group receive relatively little scrutiny and are sensitive to potential threats to re-election. The possibility that fact-checking might help deter politicians from making inaccurate claims that would attract the attention of fact-checkers was tested during the 2012 campaign.

Research was carried out by evaluating the effects of reminding state legislators about the electoral and reputational threat posed by fact-checking. The study compared the behaviour of a group of state legislators who were sent warning letters from fact-checking with a comparable control group of legislators.

Professor Reifler said:"The results suggest that state legislators who are reminded of the electoral and reputational threat from fact-checking do change their behaviour. They are also less likely to receive a negative PolitiFact rating or have the accuracy of their statements questioned publically. These findings suggest that fact-checking can play an important an important role in proving political discourse and increasing democratic accountability."

More information: [www.newamerica.net/publication ...
fact_checking_threat](http://www.newamerica.net/publication...fact_checking_threat)

Provided by University of Exeter

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