

Voters must wade through political information for accuracy

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Voters can easily find endless information about political issues and candidates from various sources, from the internet to media outlets.

The challenge, however, is determining the information's accuracy and the reason why the content is shared, said Arthur Lupia, the Gerald R. Ford Distinguished University Professor at the University of Michigan.

Lupia, who wrote the book "Uninformed: Why People Know So Little About Politics and What We Can Do About It," examines how people make decisions when they lack information and how they manage

complex information flows.

In this Q&A, he talks about the political environment and how voters seek information before going to the polls.

Since 2015 when your book was published, is it easier or harder for people to become more informed about politics?

Today, there are more ways than ever to become informed about politics and policy. On the internet, you can read specific laws, learn about candidates, engage with them on social media, watch legislative hearings, school board meetings and so much more. It has never been easier than now to get this kind of information. At the same time, if a person never wants to read about politics, there are lots of other things they can do with their time, including playing thousands of video games or watching the billions of videos that are available online.

What kinds of information do people look for?

Some people want to learn facts about policies to learn how to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities. Some people are interested in learning about, and connecting with, others who care about the same things that they do. Some people are more interested in learning how to defend certain points of view, with less interest in whether what they are saying is accurate. So, to answer your question, some people are very interested in getting the most accurate information that they can find, some seek information that supports their views, and many do a little of both.

You teach political communication. How can people understand each other during a polarized election

year?

During an election year, news channels and [social media platforms](#) tend to focus on controversial topics where people disagree. These controversies draw viewers, which helps news and [social media](#) companies make money. But they are not always great for truly understanding other people. I teach students about the importance of listening, even when what they really want to do is talk. Listening is important because you can learn about other people's values and concerns. Learning about these things can create new ways to find common ground. When it comes to solving a community's real problems, finding common ground usually produces better results than talking without listening. Students learn how to do this and it changes their lives—even during election years.

Communication can also be found through polls, as voters gain insights about an issue or candidate. But why should voters trust them?

There are great polls and terrible polls. What I mean by that is great polls are done by people who are very careful to measure all points of view and to ask unbiased questions. The University of Michigan has an incredible survey research center that does great work. There are also professional organizations like Pew Research Center and Gallup Inc. who not only put high quality polling information out for everyone to see, but will also give you a lot of information about how they ran the poll—so you can judge for yourself if you like it or not. Great polls can teach us a lot. They can show us how and why people have different preferences. If you want to know whether a [poll](#) is worth trusting, check if they are transparent about their methodology. If they are, then they are giving you reasons to trust them. If they're hiding that stuff, find someone else to trust.

Provided by University of Michigan

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