

1. (65 points) Misinformation and the Media. Read the report on Misinformation and the Media and focus your answers on the problem of misinformation in the United States.

1.1 (5 points) What are the issues of greatest importance in this case? What are the relevant interests? Which institutions are important? And what information is necessary to understand policy in this area?

This is a 4I's problem where we care about the issues, interests, institutions, and information surrounding this problem.

Issues: the growing increase of American distrust in major media outlets and the corresponding rise in trust in singular figureheads (Trump). Rise in misinformation. Regulation of social media.

Interests: The American people, media companies, journalists/reporters, politicians, and social media companies.

Institutions: Congress, the executive branch, courts, government agencies (namely the FCC), and presidential task forces.

Information: The amount of false information being spread, the increased political polarization of the American people, and the causes of Jan 6th attack and anti-vaccination beliefs. People most at threat due to misinformation.

1.2 (5 points) Construct an effective problem statement for the main issue in this case.

Due to the disrepute of American mass media outlets by politicians and the advent of sensationalized media outlets (ratings-based news and social media), trust in American mass media outlets has fallen to new lows in the past five years, leading to Americans consuming too much radicalized, often misleading, information.

1.3 (10 points) Based on class frameworks, make the case for government involvement in addressing misinformation, including potential market failures; and make the case against such government involvement, including potential government failures. You should make two arguments for government involvement and two arguments against government involvement. To conclude, explain which case you find more compelling and why.

Two reasons for government involvement are externalities and information failure (Market failure)

What externalities are produced by misinformation? The fundamental problem with Democracy is that it relies on the fact that voting constituencies are fed valid and accurate information. In the case of media misinformation, voting constituencies are not fed true information and can therefore be enabled to make incorrect decisions when voting or otherwise. A key example of this is in COVID-19 Vaccine misinformation. When people choose not to get vaccinated, due to anti-vaccination misinformation campaigns, third parties that neither produce nor consume media are negatively

affected due to an increased chance of getting sick. This includes children (who were previously ineligible for the vaccine), the elderly, and others who were unable to have the vaccine.

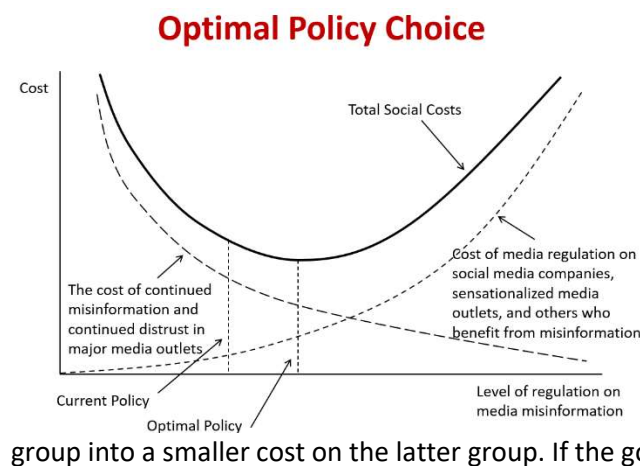
The second case for government intervention is due to the information failure that occurs in the media dissemination market. The first reason is that media producers most likely have access to accurate information and instead choose to disseminate false or misleading information. Media companies have an incentive to conceal or discount facts that flow against the narrative that they are selling. But the consumers have no such inclination and assume that the information that they are presented is an accurate representation of the objective facts of the situation. This information asymmetry incentivizes government action.

Cases against government involvement include Crowding out other actors and abuse of power/favoritism

Government action has the potential to crowd out other actors who could do a better job of regulating the media industry. Industry watch dogs such as those discussed in the reading may have more and better resources to dedicate to properly fact-checking statements issued by the media. This includes non-profit organizations, think tanks, and smaller (local) news stations that have both the ability and incentive to police major media outlets.

Abuse of power/favoritism can occur when those in control of the government use the government to stop information that goes against the narrative proposed by those in control. An example of this is if left-leaning media outlets suddenly have far more stringent standards on their output as compared to right-leaning outlets due to the government being controlled by a right-leaning party. Depending on how the legislation is structured, this effect can definitely happen.

1.4 (5 points) What is the optimal policy choice in terms of the extent of government regulation to combat misinformation? Construct a figure to illustrate the tradeoffs across the various “costs” and advance an argument about the social optimum’s location relative to the status quo policy. It’s acceptable to hand-draw your graph and insert the photo into the doc. It just needs to be legible. (There’s also a template available on the front page of Collab.)



The current costs of continued misinformation provided the current policy choice are levied too heavily on those that are hurt by continued distrust in media and misinformation in general and not sufficiently on actors that benefit from low regulation on misinformation such as sensationalized media outlets and social media companies. Therefore, the optimal policy choice is an increase on the regulation on misinformation. By increasing the level of policy, we shift a large amount of costs on the prior group into a smaller cost on the latter group. If the government is to increase regulation to combat

misinformation, then the group that benefits from misinformation perceives greater costs and the group that loses due to misinformation perceives lower costs.

1.5 (10 points) Describe three policy options that address the problem statement you provided above. Which evaluative criteria should be used to compare these policy proposals – and why? How well does each option perform on those criteria? What is the best policy option and why? (Put simply: Describe policy alternatives; construct – and discuss – an outcomes matrix for this case; and select a preferred policy proposal, noting the tradeoffs involved.)

Three policy proposals are as follows:

1. Maintain the status quo, make no changes to the current landscape of news media
2. Place greater regulation on media outlets that forces them to have better content regulation policies, including greater transparency in social media companies that forces them to be transparent with their algorithms and use of data
3. Bring back local news outlets that commonly function as mass media watchdogs funded by the wholly by the government from taxes that come from larger media conglomerates

The evaluative criteria are as follows:

1. Costliness: How costly is this policy compared to its peers (economically and politically)
2. Heavy-handedness: how likely is this policy to encroach on the freedom of speech as well as other rights?
3. Effectiveness: How effective is this policy at ensuring that citizens will have access to reliable, truthful information?

Why are these evaluative criteria the most relevant to the problem at hand? These evaluative criteria were selected because they capture the opposing elements of this problem most efficiently. Costliness is a classic evaluative criterion because it represents the real-world finite-resources and is therefore always something to consider before proposing any criteria. The other two criteria (heavy-handedness and effectiveness) are directly opposed to one another as in this case, the government directly regulates speech and encroaches on the freedom of speech. Greater regulation in this area is assumed to be more effective but will also be more heavy-handed. So generating a policy that balances heavy-handedness with true effectiveness is crucial.

	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: More regulation	Option 3: Support local news outlets
Costliness (1-3)	1	3	2
Heavy-Handedness(1-3)	1	3	2
Effectiveness (1-3) x2	3	2	1
Total:	8	7	6

Note that a lower score is better, so a policy with a cost score of 1 will be the least costly compared to the alternatives. Also note that Effectiveness' rating is doubled so its twice as important as all the other

criteria. This is because this problem is time-sensitive and having a highly effective solution right now is more important than the other criteria.

Our policy matrix indicates that option 3 is the most recommended. Option 3 has a middling ranking in costliness because the Status Quo has the lowest cost while Option 2 would be the costliest as it would require a massive upfront investment in increasing the government’s role in policing social media companies and other media outlets. Further, the government would need to maintain such regulatory capabilities indefinitely. This is significantly costlier than increasing taxes on a subset of businesses and rerouting said tax revenue to local media companies.

In terms of heavy-handedness, the status quo, having the least amount of regulation will be the least heavy-handed. But option 2 becomes more heavy-handed than that of option 3 as it allows the government to almost levy anti-misinformation policies arbitrarily on companies. Whereas option 3 relies on the indirect effect of propping up local news agencies as watch dogs for said mass-media companies. This is nuanced point. The difference between Option 2 and Option 3 is that Option 3 outsources watch-dog responsibilities to local news agencies while Option 2 retains that responsibility within the government. This decentralization of responsibility represented by Option 3 is crucial to maintaining the integrity of said policy.

In terms of effectiveness, the Status Quo is what has led us to this point so it will not be highly effective. Option 2 is less effective than Option 3 because having a decentralized agent fact-check is far more convincing than having the government effectively fact-check itself. If we assume that media outlets will be discussing the actions of the current government, enabling media regulators to be part of the current government seems to introduce an obvious conflict of interest. If instead we were to have a third-party fact-check (as in Option 3), the American people would be far more trusting of said process. Further, introducing small, independent players into a primarily monopoly dominated industry would prove effective in disrupting the market and prevent misinformation simply by providing news outlet alternatives that are not rating or sensationalism dependent (local news outlets). Therefore, according to the given criteria and the subsequent outcomes matrix, Policy Option 3 is the best policy option.

To accomplish this policy I suggest the following:

1. Levy taxes on the profits of major media conglomerates
2. Provide avenues for local media organizations to apply and obtain the resultant tax funding
3. Allocate tax revenue to local media organizations with stipulation that they work to provide objective journalism

1.6 (5 points) Construct the Wilson Matrix. For your preferred policy alternative, which type of politics do you expect to ensue? Justify your answer by referring to the nature of the costs. What are the implications of the type of politics you identify for the likely success of your proposal? Explain.

		Benefits	
		Concentrated	Widely distributed
Costs	Concentrated	Interests group politics	Entrepreneurial politics

	Widely Distributed	Client politics	Majoritarian politics
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For the selected policy alternative, we have widely distributed benefits, as it is expected that the policy will benefit a great majority of people and concentrated costs as we are taxing a minority of media companies. Therefore, I expect Entrepreneurial Politics to be the most prevalent in determining the success of said policy.

Unfortunately, Entrepreneurial politics have a low success rate as the defenders of the status quo tend to be highly organized and the beneficiaries would rather free ride so policy adoption is politically difficult. A highly driven policy entrepreneur or entrepreneurs are required so that policy can be pushed through and implemented.

1.7 (5 points) What is a specific collective action problem that must be overcome to adopt or implement your policy solution? Explain how it is a collective action problem, then explain which strategies to overcome collective action problems apply and which are inappropriate. (Make sure to reference all potential strategies and explain your reasoning.)

A collective action problem that is relevant here is free riding. People will want others to do the work of properly regulating misinformation or bringing said policy about without conducting any of the work themselves. This is because the benefits of said policy are widely distributed to almost all people and this significantly decreases the individual urge to contribute. This is a collective action problem because we have a large group of people and with no other incentives no one will directly assume the costs of pushing a policy because they are rational, self-interested consumers.

Strategies to combat said problem include finding entrepreneurs, coordination, selective incentives, and repeated interactions. Of the strategies here, only selective incentives are inappropriate. If any of the strategies here were implemented, we would be able to solve the collective action problem of free riding.

Entrepreneurs apply because this is entrepreneurial politics where the beneficiaries are vast, and the costs are narrow so having an entrepreneur willing to tank the cost of pushing the policy to adoption is highly advantageous. Coordination between the beneficiaries to the ends of generating a concerted effort to deliver said policy to fruition would work overcome the free-riding problem. Selective Incentives would not work well here because this is a vast problem and the monitoring costs to properly apply selective incentives may outweigh the benefits of enforcing said strategy. Repeated interactions apply here because this policy will most likely happen through congress and repeated interactions between policymakers is crucial to even adopting this policy. So as part of adopting this policy, repeated interactions will occur which will solve the collective action problem of free riding.

1.8 (5 points) Identify and define the three challenges of policy implementation we covered in lecture. Which of these are relevant for your policy solution? Explain why (or why not). What are potential solutions to these challenges (if any)? If there are no solutions, explain why.

The three challenges of policy implementation are agency problems, regulatory policymaking, and administrative burden. All these challenges are relevant to my policy solution.

A big agency problem prevalent here is the difference between the principal (the central government) and the agent (local media companies) there is potential for agency loss to occur. Addressing this is difficult because of the nature of the problem (freedom of speech) as well as the scale of the problem (national) so a big part of addressing this problem would be to simply select agents whose motives align closely with those of the principal. This would require a stringent application process in the initial application phase because a good selection process would allow us to avoid using suboptimal tools such as specificity (can't use due to freedom of speech) and monitoring (thousands of local news agencies).

Regulatory policymaking is a lot less relevant to this problem because much of the decision making by the government is done at the application level, when the media company applies for government backing. Therefore, the application process must be well-designed as it is the most significant moving part that is subject to regulatory policymaking. So, by placing stringent set of guidelines along which agencies are bound, we can avoid the challenge of regulatory policymaking.

The challenges of administrative burden that apply here are learning costs and compliance costs. To address these costs, some funding can be allocated to alleviating said costs, namely by starting initiatives to spread information about said program and providing a streamlined mode of complying with the requirements of said program. This way, we can alleviate the associated Learning costs.

1.9 (5 points) Based on your previous answers and at least two course frameworks (different from those referenced in previous questions), what do you expect future policy will be regarding misinformation in the U.S. over the next decade? Which frameworks were most helpful in reaching your conclusion and why?

I will be using the frameworks of mechanisms of policy diffusion and determinants of policy diffusion to inform this question. The EU is the current leader in combating the harms of Social Media disinformation so any diffusion must come from the EU. The most logical course of policy diffusion between the US and the EU is learning. Using other nations as a petri-dish is advantageous because it allows the US to test out a policy without expending many resources. And depending on the outcomes of said policy in the EU, the US's policy will also be informed. These outcomes can range from social media giants either conforming to said policy or submitting to said policy, further the effects of political polarization are of great importance as well. The effects of this policy on political polarization will help either add or remove credibility to the idea that social media is a main driver of political polarization.

The likeliness of this policy is dependent mostly on the idea that the Digital Services Act is relatively simple and highly observable. The combination of these two factors, as well as the learning mechanism of policy diffusion make it highly likely that the US's misinformation policy will reflect that of the EU's. Although the Digital Services Act targets social media giants, it makes sense that the US can modify said policy so that it extends to social media conglomerates as well.

1.10 (5 points) There is considerable debate about whether social media is responsible for the spread of misinformation. Misinformation seems to have increased with the rise of social media in recent years, but some scholars suggest that this relationship is misleading. What is the fundamental problem of causal inference and how does it apply here? Given unlimited power

and resources, how would you design a study to determine whether social media use increases misinformation? What are potential drawbacks to this approach?

The fundamental problem of causal inference is that it is impossible to observe the effect of a policy intervention on any single unit because we can never know the counterfactual. In this case the problem is that we can never know whether political polarization was caused by the rise of social media or not.

Given unlimited power/resources I would design a study that randomly assigned all countries to either a social media/no social media group and observe both sets of countries over a period. Whether or not political polarization increases or decreases within the no social media group would allow me to determine whether social media causes political polarization. Potential drawbacks to this approach are that there are significant ethical concerns to preventing people from using social media especially after it has become such a crucial part of people's lives. Further, the control set, and experimental set may not be completely identical, some confounding variable could result in the results of the experiment being impossible to generalize. This includes specific interactions within the control set such as Russia (presumed to be the main driver of troll farms) continuing to be able to manipulate other countries through Social Media

2. (25 points) Criminalizing anti-vaccine misinformation. Read "Head to Head: Should spreading anti-vaccine misinformation be criminalized?" in The BMJ. Focus your answers on the narrow question of whether anti-vaccine misinformation should be criminalized.

2.1 (5 points) What are the four conflicting policy goals covered in the Deborah Stone reading that we discussed in class? Which goals are relevant for the criminalization of anti-vaccine misinformation (and why)? How do you weigh the goals relative to one another in this issue area? Justify your answer.

The four conflicting policy goals presented by Deborah Stone are efficiency, liberty, security, and equity. The relevant and opposing goals in the case of criminalizing anti-vaccine misinformation are liberty and security. Liberty is relevant here because criminalizing anti-vaccine misinformation may encroach on people's free speech which is a part of liberty. Security is important here because by enacting such policy, we protect people's security of health and information. People deserve security in the health of their community and gaining herd-immunity, which promotes community health is essential to promoting security. Further, people deserve informational security, or the idea that the information that they are consuming is valid and an accurate representation of the world. This is an especially important topic when we consider the complexity of vaccines and diseases and the fact that most people don't have the abilities to properly verify such esoteric information.

In this case the security goal outweighs the liberty goal. While people do deserve the liberty of free speech, people also deserve the liberty of life, being able to live their lives without fear of death or sickness. Which is essentially what security protects. Further, due to the advanced nature of the topic, and difficulty in ratifying truthfulness (for the common person) it is dangerous to spread anti-vaccine rhetoric, especially due to the real cost in lives that such rhetoric demands.

2.2 (5 points) Which option would give the greatest overall societal utility? (Conduct an applied utilitarian analysis.) Explain how you reached this conclusion.

This is a binary choice question where we either criminalize anti-vaccine misinformation or we don't. In the case that we pursue criminalization, we run aground of encroaching people's freedom of speech, a closely held liberty. In the case that we do not pursue criminalization, we run the risk of threatening people's security namely the security of people's health and informational security.

Of the two choices, criminalizing anti-vaccine misinformation generates the greatest overall societal utility because not criminalizing can cause people's deaths and injury. Note that this outcome is only valid when evaluating the criminalization of anti-vaccine *misinformation* not all anti-vaccine rhetoric as such rhetoric pays in maintaining criticisms of vaccines. But in this case criminalizing misinformation produces the most social utility because while it prevents complete freedom of speech, it saves people's lives and health's, which have great societal utility and value. Something that is greater than other people's free speech. Further, the toll that low societal health places on the medical system and medical professionals has an exponential cost as resources that are dedicated to anti-vaccine misinformation caused sicknesses could have been allocated to more efficient ends, such as treating people with less preventable diseases.

2.3 (10 points) Conduct and discuss an applied rights analysis as it pertains to the proposal to criminalize spreading anti-vaccine misinformation. Include an applied rights table and explain the specific policy proposal that arises from conducting this analysis.

Right	Claimed or Granted	Moral Bases	Interests the Right Protects	Priority	Actions Consistent with the Right
Right to health	Claimed	Moral	Freedom from sickness and the associated costs	1	Criminalize anti-vaccine misinformation
Right to free speech	Claimed/Granted	Moral/Legal	Liberty, ability to express opinions	2	Do not criminalize anti-vaccine misinformation
Freedom from discrimination	Claimed/granted	Moral/legal	Liberty, freedom from arbitrary treatment	4	Do not criminalize anti-vaccine misinformation
Right to accurate information	Claimed	Moral	Ability to make well-informed decisions	3	Criminalize anti-vaccine misinformation

From this analysis, we find that criminalizing anti-vaccine misinformation is the proper course of action. Provided that it is only *misinformation* that is criminalized and not all anti-vaccine rhetoric. Note that the rights of health and accurate information come into direct conflict with the right to free speech and freedom from discrimination, but the former supersede the latter because any threat to someone's life is more important than a restriction of speech, especially when the speech is false and harmful.

This conclusion is similar enough to a conclusion by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.'s opinion in *Schenck v US* where he compared the case to yelling fire in a crowded theatre and ruled against freedom of speech. The reasoning behind this was that speech is protected except in the case of speech directed to inciting or producing lawless action. Although the action here is not lawless per se, it does increase the risk of death and sickness on behalf of others. Therefore, from the applied rights analysis and prior historical rulings we can conclude that the correct policy choice is to criminalize anti-vaccine misinformation based on protecting the health and safety of others despite the erosion of freedom of speech.

2.4 (10 points) Draw on at least three course frameworks to explain why it may be difficult to adopt and implement a national law criminalizing the dissemination of anti-vaccine misinformation in the United States today.

Can use three frameworks here:

The Wilson matrix, this falls into entrepreneurial politics

This policy benefits most people because it stops misinformation and in a democratic problem (adopting a vaccine) where the decisions of the individual affect the outcomes of many, the benefits of preventing anti-vaccine misinformation apply to everyone. The costs, on the other hand, apply mostly to a minority because a minority of the population produces much of the anti-vaccine rhetoric. And the costs are demonstrated in a concentrated behavior. Therefore, our problem falls into entrepreneurial politics and has a low success rate.

Collective action problems

Because this policy has widely distributed benefits, it also is subject to collective action problems. Unless there is coercion or some other external force, rational self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests. Because of this it will be highly difficult for politicians to come together and implement such a policy. This is furthered by the fact that the grounds of such a policy are highly tenuous because it encroaches on the Freedom of Speech and can be easily contested at any stage in the policy process.

Budget politics

Politicians pursue policies that provide the greatest benefit and lowest cost for themselves, politically. And this policy would most likely not be implemented because it does not show a great benefit and demonstrates a large political cost. Most politicians are very short-sighted and considering that the

likelihood of anti-vaccine misinformation being low in the coming years, politicians are unlikely to want to expend resources on a solution that seemingly solves no problem. Further to pursue such a policy, politicians would have to convince their compatriots that the benefit of said policy (preventing vaccine misinformation) is high and the corresponding costs (the unpopularity associated with even proposing such a controversial policy) is very high. Further, enacting such a policy is unlikely to improve a candidate's chance of reelection because most constituencies are unlikely to perceive the importance of such a policy as suggested by the "democracy for realists" theory.

3. (10 points) Fake news and authoritarian regimes. Read "Inconvenient truths; freedom of speech" from The Economist.

3.1 (5 points) Define the four mechanisms of policy diffusion discussed in class. Which mechanism is most suitable for understanding the recent spread of "fake news" laws in authoritarian regimes – and why? Which is least suitable – and why?

The four mechanisms of policy diffusion are competition, learning, imitation, and coercion. Competition is where inter-governmental competition leads governments to adopt similar (or different) policies from other governments. Learning is where policymakers of one government learn from the successes/failures of other governments. Imitation is where governments copy one another for no reason except to imitate. Coercion is where higher powers coerce lower powers to adopt a policy.

The mechanisms most suitable for "fake news" laws in authoritarian regimes are learning and coercion while competition and imitation are unsuitable. Learning is most prevalent in the spread between Germany's NetzDG to Russia, Turkey and others. These countries must have seen how effective Germany's censorship law was and adopted it for themselves, albeit to suppress online dissent instead of for Germany's original use. Coercion is also applicable considering that in countries such as Egypt, Zimbabwe, and Hungary, higher-ups could coerce legislation to seize the moment and pass censorship laws disguised as anti-misinformation legislation.

The reason competition and imitation are unsuitable is because competition is used to draw citizens across borders. And the introduction of censorship laws wouldn't necessarily give one country a competitive advantage over the other. Similarly, imitation doesn't really apply here because the countries passing said laws are passing said laws due to the utilitarian aspect of being able to arbitrarily censor speech instead of any positive signaling that might arise from such a law being passed.

3.2 (5 points) Drawing on our discussion of the determinants of policy diffusion, identify three characteristics of "fake news" laws that help explain why or where they have been adopted. Provide a justification for each determinant.

Three characteristics of "fake news" laws that explain why such laws have been adopted are observability, compatibility, and low-complexity.

These laws are highly observable because once such a law is passed, national news sources are likely to raise alarm before being promptly silenced, this enables other governments to observe the effectiveness

of said legislation. Provided that said legislation provides the desired effect (particularly in the observable manner stated), it is likely that other governments are willing to adopt said policy as well.

These “fake news” laws are highly compatible as they aren’t specialized to any geography. Particularly in the countries listed, where there are no explicit, strong protections for free-speech (unlike the US) it makes sense that the policy is highly compatible with existing legislation and can be transplanted over.

Finally, these “fake news” laws are very low-complexity considering their effectiveness. They promote a very simple idea and offer proven tools in executing such an idea. The idea is the censoring of various media outlets and the tools are fines, bandwidth restrictions, and levied threats that seem to be effective in other countries. These policies would not require additional infrastructure setup beyond what most governments already have.

4. (5 points) Looking Forward. We’ve covered a lot of ground this semester! What is one idea, concept, or policy area that we’ve touched on that you want to learn more about? What interests you about that idea, concept, or policy area? How could you learn more about it?

One policy area that I am interested in is changing global conflict and warfare. What interests me about this policy area is that conflict, of some sort is largely inevitable. On our world with constrained resources, countries and nations are forced to interact with one another regularly. Over the course of these interactions, it is only natural that some friction arises which leads to conflict. Unfortunately, our methods of waging conflict have vastly outstripped our capacity for understanding and processing the implications of our actions. How can we as a society reconcile our capabilities of warfare with our human capacities. Will we continue to accelerate into an age dominated by computer-controlled warfare or will we decelerate and enter an age of no war, where all conflict is resolved civilly? I can learn more about it by performing my own research into the current state of warfare and generating models of how warfare will progress from that point. I can talk to industry professionals who dedicate their careers to this problem. I can talk to politicians who are in direct charge of guiding our society’s course along this path.