

Disinformation

In Arkansas

Arkansas is a battleground for disinformation

Topics such as COVID-19, gender affirming health care, abortion, and Critical Race Theory are breeding grounds for opposition disinformation in AR



State Senator Trent Garner
@Garner4Senate · Follow

The Mask Mandate ban in Arkansas was one of the most important laws we passed. The left wants more control over YOU and your children's lives. Masking is now about power, not public safety. The left is attacking because they know we are winning. [#arpx](#) [#arleg](#) [#ARNews](#) [#NoMasks](#)

8:17 AM · Jul 21, 2021



'Kids can't drink beer but they can be chemically castrated?': Tucker Carlson rips into Arkansas Gov Asa Hutchinson for vetoing bill to ban hormone treatments for transgender children



Tom Cotton
@SenTomCotton

Activists in schools want to teach our kids to hate America and hate each other using discredited, Critical Race Theory curricula like the 1619 Project. Federal funds should not pay for activists to masquerade as teachers and indoctrinate our youth.

cotton.senate.gov/news/press-rel...

"Many of us have supported legislation to stop human trafficking," said Rapert, president of the National Association of Christian Lawmakers. "So why is there a pass on people trafficking women in order to make money off of aborting their babies?"

While many hold responsibility, a few actors have outsized influence

Whether a platform or an individual, the spread of disinformation is often triggered by a singular source

Major Outlets of Disinformation



Fox News
@FoxNews
Followers: 20,075,113



PragerU
@PragerU
Followers: 562,600



Breitbart News
@BreitbartNews
Followers: 1,467,661

Key influencers of Disinfo reaching AR



AR Sen. Tom Cotton
@SenTomCotton
Followers: 620,481



Tucker Carlson
@TuckerCarlson
Followers: 5,382,952



AR State Sen. Jason Rapert
@jasonrapert
Followers: 9,279

Fortunately, Arkansas is on the forefront of the fight against disinformation

*“Americans may not remember where they were the first time they heard “**flattening the curve**,” but they’ll forever remember the reason — COVID-19. There’s an information curve that follows this epidemiological one like a shadow. It’s less predictable, but treatable, and **University of Arkansas Little Rock Prof. Nitin Agarwal** and his students are experts.*

*Agarwal, the Jerry L. Maulden-Entergy endowed chair and a professor of information science at the university, has partnered with the Office of the Arkansas Attorney General. He and his team of about 30 students — from undergraduates to postdocs — are charged with **identifying and tracking coronavirus-related scam websites and social media disinformation** that’s spreading alongside the pandemic.*

*“For any academic institution, but especially here at UA Little Rock, students are the heart and soul of the research,” Agarwal said. “I have 30 students and postdocs. Whenever we have a project, the students drive the research, and students can see its impact, not just in a publication. This research affects our daily lives. **Our work goes out into the world.**”*

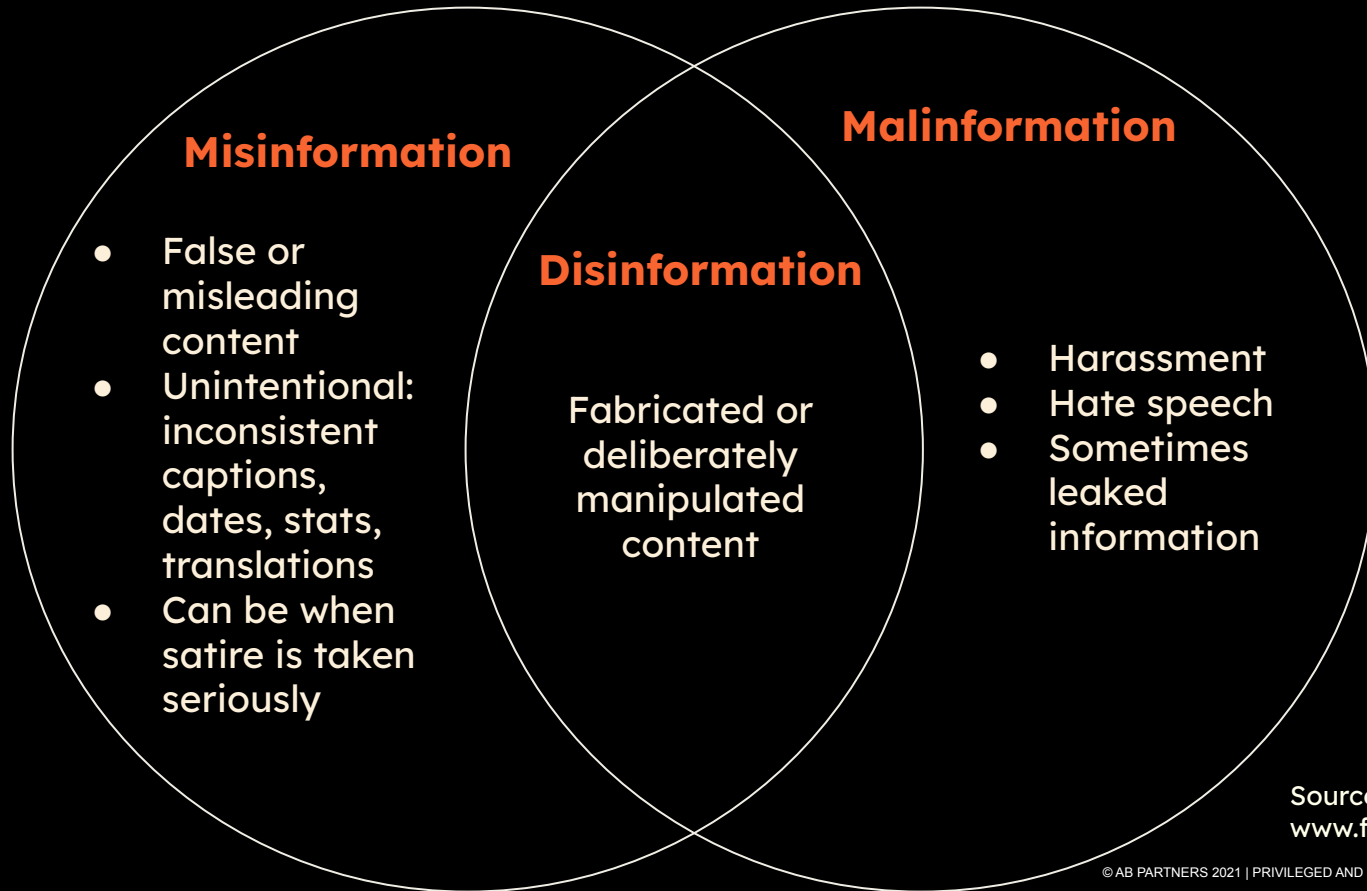
~Source: UA Little Rock

**And with the
right tools,
anyone can join
the fight to tamp it
down**

1. **Thinking**: Disinformation 101: Classifications, Strategies, and Tactics
2. **Tracking**: Threat Monitoring and Assessment
3. **Training**: Strategies to Curb Disinformation
4. **Tackling**: Direct Actions and Best Practices

1. **Thinking:** Disinformation 101 and Doubt, Derision, Division, Downplaying

Types of Information Spread in the Infodemic



Disinformation Strategies

Doubt
Diversion
Derision
Downplaying

Sample Tweets:

The #covidvaccine is dangerous!! People are dying from the mandated vax not from covid!! (**doubt**)

#AbortionIsMurder! Instead of killing babies we need to focus on adopting children and providing them with loving homes (**diversion**)

These critical race theorists are just a bunch of #racebaiters who want to divide us! They should be ashamed of themselves for trying to bring their hate and division into our children's schools (**derision**)

I've got an AR-15 and thousands of rounds, for defense against that #GlobalWarming threat #Trump2024 (**downplaying**)

Disinformation Tactics

Fearmongering
Conspiracy Theories
Impersonating experts
Polarization
Trolling
Discrediting

"Illegal immigrants are flooding across our border and bringing crime and disease with them!"

(Fearmongering)

"The World Health Organization (WHO) uses vaccinations to indoctrinate people." **(Conspiracy Theories)**

Someone poses as Dr. Fauci on Twitter, by copying his profile and only slightly altering the username, and tweets lies about COVID-19 **(Impersonating experts)**

"If you support Conservatives, you are a patriot. If you support Liberals, you are un-American and a threat to our country." **(Polarization)**

Commenting on someone's Facebook post about climate change activism: "Anyone who believes in this is a sheep being led to the slaughter by the mainstream media." **(Trolling)**

"Beware of the Washington Post! They have been caught spreading fake news and have a clear bias against those of us who are Pro-America. Don't believe a word they say, they can't be trusted to report the truth!" **(Discrediting)**

2. **Tracking**: Threat Monitoring

Disinformation Topics

Know the hot button topics and
check your sources

We know the topics that are frequently targeted by disinformation in Arkansas, so keep alert on when these topics are trending and make sure you're getting your information from a trusted news source.

Disinformation **Actors**

Keep an eye on spreaders of
disinformation

**We must continue to
identify key influencers
who spread
disinformation AND
identify key influencers
who spread credible
information or curb
disinformation**

Disinformation Patterns

Identify repeated
disinformation strategies

Where disinformation happens once, it's likely to happen again. Notice sources, tactics, funders who follow a scripted path of escalation.

3. **Training**: Inoculating Against Disinformation with the Fact-Myth-Fallacy Structure

2 Ways to Combat Disinformation

Debunking: deeming an incorrect claim to be, non-factual, false, or just plain untrue

- **Prebunking:** debunking BEFORE an incorrect claim reaches an audience
- **Postbunking:** debunking AFTER an incorrect claim reaches an audience





Prebunking is the only scientifically-proven antidote: **Fact-Myth-Fallacy Framework**

Researchers found that disinformation spreads much like a real virus. Just as with real viruses, **once you become infected, there isn't much you can do in the way of treatment.** That's why inoculation *works*.

Research scientists have proven that **prebunking using the fact-myth-fallacy framework** is more effective than postbunking (Roozenbeek, et. al., 2020 and Banas & Rains, 2010).

How to pre-bunk disinformation?

Experts agree that using the **fact-myth-fallacy framework** is the best way to inoculate against disinformation.

1. **Fact:** provide a plausible explanation that replaces one's mental model of the topic.
2. **Myth:** Mention the myth, but first warn that the myth is false.
3. **Fallacy:** Explain the fallacy or rhetorical technique used to mislead.

Direct Refutation: Prebunking Disinformation Communication Strategies

Disinfo: the COVID vaccine causes infertility

Disinfo Strategy: Diversion

Disinfo Tactic: Conspiracy Theorizing

Fact-Myth-Fallacy Counter Message:

- **Fact:** The COVID vaccine is safe, has been given to lots of people safely, and presents no danger to reproductive health.
- **Myth:** But some people want you to think that normal side effects, like minor changes to menstrual cycles, are indicative of foul-play
- **Fallacy:** Imposing a pattern on everyday changes in our body/ occurrences is one of the ways disinformation spreads and fake conspiracy theorists rise.

TACKLING DISINFORMATION

Direct Refutation: Prebunking Disinformation Communication Strategies

Disinfo: If you support gender affirming bathroom, you support dangerous school environments

Disinfo Strategy: Doubt

Disinfo Tactic: Polarization

Fact-Myth-Fallacy Counter Message:

- **Fact:** In over 300 cities with nondiscrimination protections, allowing students to use the bathroom that most affirms their identity has caused no increase whatsoever in public safety incidents in restrooms.
- **Myth:** Yet the lie that protecting the mental health of transgendered and non-binary students puts cis-gendered students at risk continues to spread.
- **Fallacy:** Transphobic actors use polarizing tactics to pit communities against each other and instill doubt on a proven collective approach to greater mental health in our schools.

Direct Refutation: Prebunking Disinformation Communication Strategies

Disinfo: We need more prisons to keep crime out of our communities

Disinfo Strategy: Derision

Disinfo Tactic: Fearmongering

Fact-Myth-Fallacy Counter Message:

- **Fact:** Incarceration rates does not reduce crime rates (and even sometimes raises it), but does cost taxpayers a lot of money that could go to other measures that increase safety
- **Myth:** Despite that, some people want you to believe that the only way to ensure your safety is to support building more prisons.
- **Fallacy:** In reality, the private prison industry is using fear-mongering to get more taxpayer money for their own profit.

4. **Tackling**: Direct and Indirect Refutation Using Influencers, Storytelling & Fact-Myth-Fallacy Framework

Indirect Refutation: Fighting Back on Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms are used to create, amplify and proliferate disinformation. Arkansans must actively demand reform from social media platforms.

What you can do:

- Constantly post fact-myth-fallacy messages
- Identify key influencers to spread fact-myth-fallacy messages
- Use SEO to place fact-myth-fallacy messages and paid advertisements in fact-checking sources like Google Search
- Create reports to inform supporters about key disinformers
- The messenger matters as much as the message; BIPOC must lead the way

Conclusion

DO NOT

Chase after misinformation that is already spread (postbunking could further legitimize and proliferate disinfo)

Respond with a purely factual counter-argument

State the fact along side the myth (because the myth will be remembered)



DO

Prebunk anticipated disinformation before it spreads

Explain the flaws underpinning associated misinformation (it can help weaken its effect and increase public acceptance of the facts)

Adopt a fact-myth-fallacy debunking framework

A—B

Thank
You