



Mis/Disinformation:  
a Focus on Elections

**WELCOME!**

# Introductions

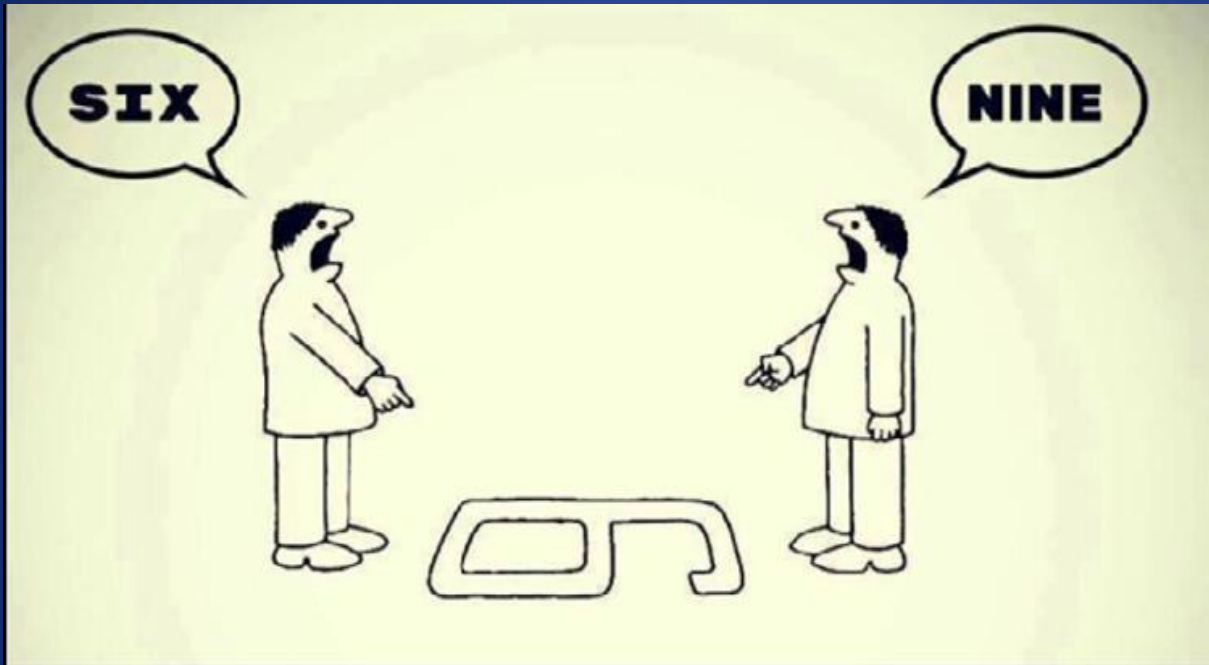
- Janet Hoy
- Paul Derksen

# League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley

A non-partisan organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. The League never endorses or opposes candidates or political parties. We influence public policy through education and advocacy.

We invite you to join us!

# The Problem



6 is definitely not 9

What happens when someone knows the number is 6, but they say it's a 9 in order to harm you in some way?

# Definitions

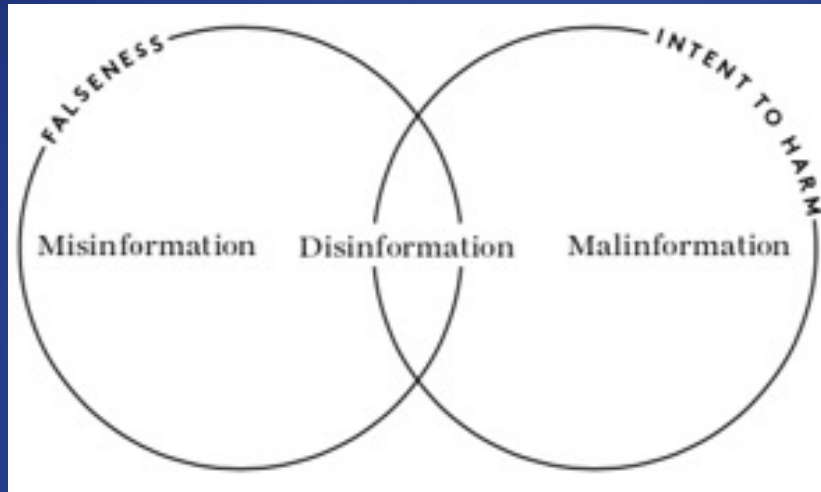


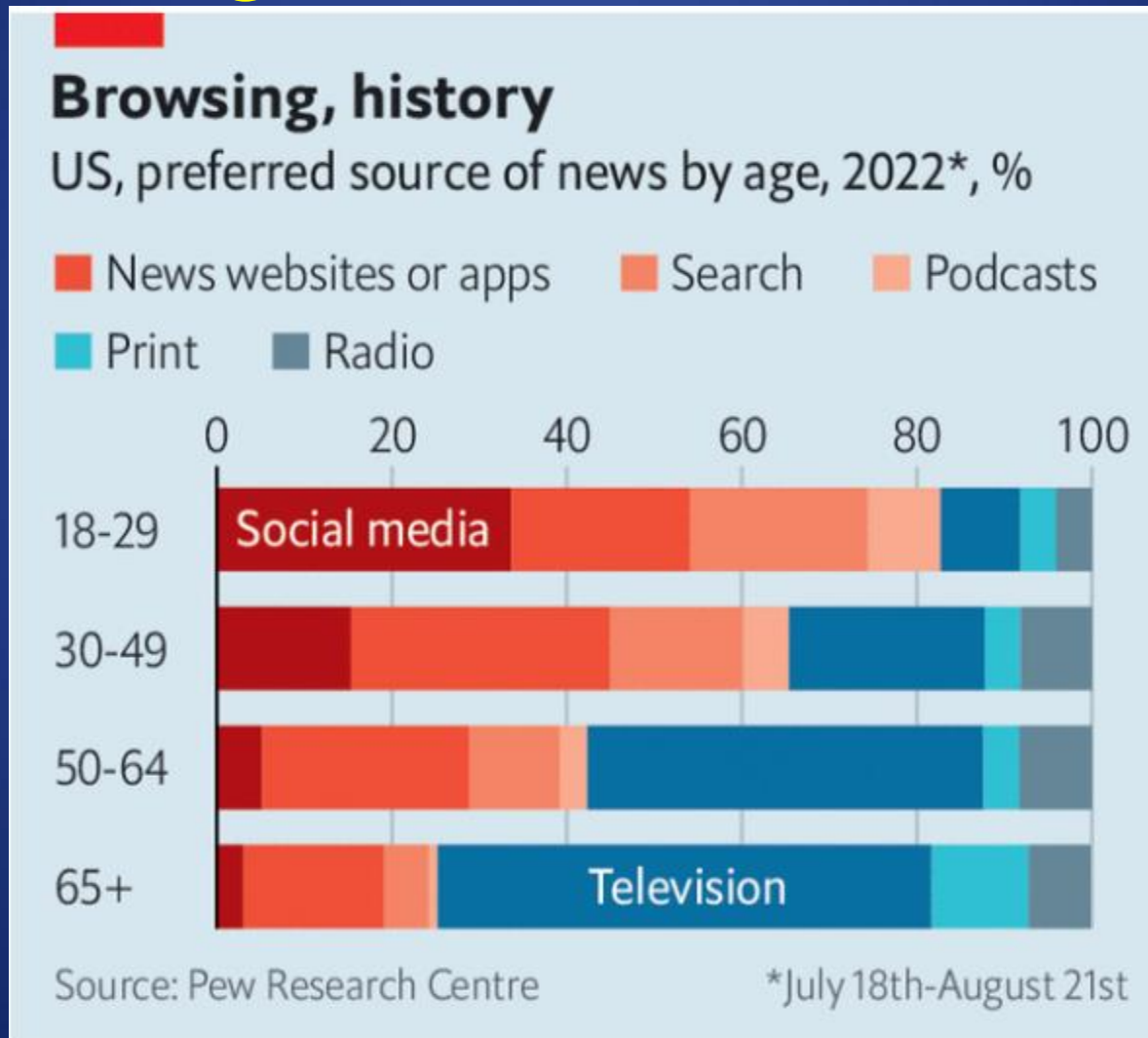
Image Credit: First Draft News "Understanding Information Disorder," <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/>

**Artificial intelligence** (AI) is the intelligence of machines or software, as opposed to the intelligence of humans or animals (Wikipedia).

# Some Statistics

- More than 8 in 10 Americans get news from digital devices (Pew Research Center 2021)
- False stories on Twitter were **70% more likely** to get re-tweeted than accurate news (MIT 2017)
- Globally, 86% of citizens online believe they've been exposed to fake news; of these, 86% report having initially believed that the news was real. (Ipsos 2019)

# Change in News Sources





# What Makes News Newsworthy?

- Timeliness: Is it current?
- Importance: Need to know?
- Unusualness: Out of the ordinary?
- Interest: Unique?

Source: News Literacy Project

# What Makes a News Source Credible?

## 5 Standards of Credible Journalism:

- Uses multiple sources
- Verifies
- Avoids bias
- Provides Context
- Balanced

# Opinion vs Propaganda

- Opinion persuades you to adopt a specific point of view
- Propaganda promotes a single view and IGNORES opposing views
- Opinion can be evaluated rationally and acknowledges other views
- Propaganda relies on emotional response and minimal critical reasoning

Source: News Literacy Project

# How to Spot Mis/Disinformation

- Research the Source
- Cross-Check
- Check the Date
- Read past the headline
- Emotionally charged content = **Red Flag!**
- If story offers links, follow them
  - If no links, no quotations, or references = **Red Flag!**
- Check out the domain
- If a visual looks suspicious use reverse search engine like TinEye to check it out.

# How to Stop Mis/Disinformation

- **DON'T click or share.** Quoting bad information helps spread it.
- **DO share accurate, trustworthy information** without mentioning incorrect info
- **DON'T engage publicly.** Responses boost the post and give it more visibility
- **DO report.** Report inaccurate info to social media platforms, group administrators & election officials
- **DO block.** Block users you don't know who share mis/ disinformation.

# Real Dangers of Mis/Disinformation

## It can:

- Decrease public trust in institutions and democratic processes
- Distort domestic policies and election systems
- Undermine efforts to protect public health, national interests, and national security
- Undermine government's ability to implement policies
- Disenfranchise citizens

# Artificial Intelligence

- Deep Fakes - AI systems that adapt audio, pictures and videos to make people say and do things they never did. (European Commission)
- Deepening the disinformation problem (Axios, July 2023), Generative AI can:
  - generate disinformation quickly
  - aid those who deliberately want to mislead
  - create new targets through its own models

# Artificial Intelligence

- Combat Disinformation (European Commission, April 2019)
  - Use tools and algorithms to determine whether content has been manipulated
  - Link stories that have been proven false to online pages or social media posts with similar words and claims
  - Use AI to quickly respond to fake stories and not waste any time
- Disinformation generated by AI may be more convincing than disinformation written by humans (MIT Technology Review, June 2023).



# Public Trust in Government: 1958-2022

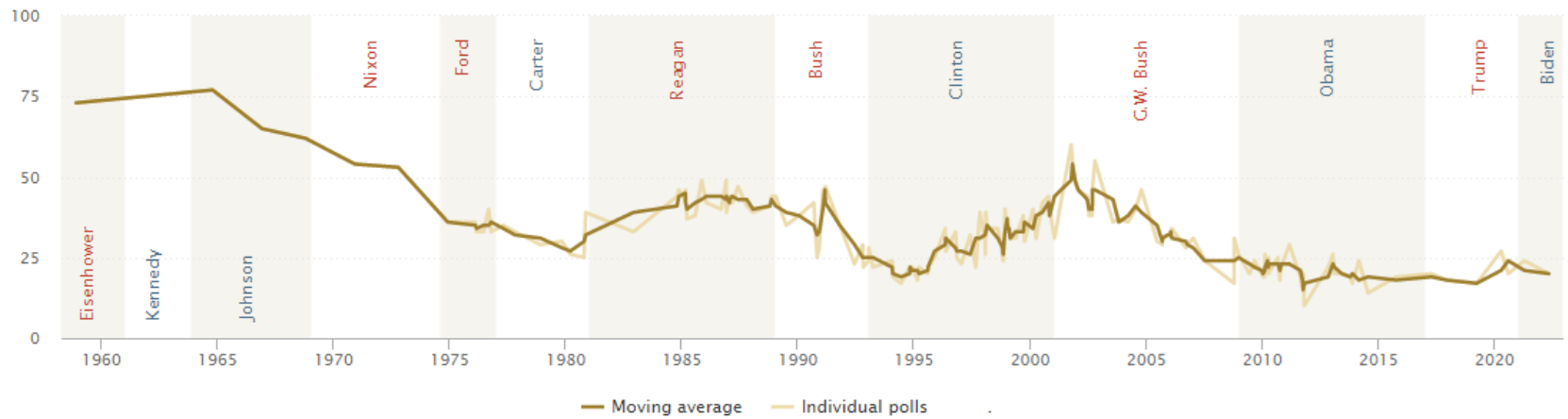
Public [trust in government remains low](#), as it has for much of the 21st century. Only two-in-ten Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (2%) or “most of the time” (19%). Trust in the government has declined somewhat since last year, when 24% said they could trust the government at least most of the time.

## Public trust in government near historic lows

[Chart](#) [Data](#) [Share](#)

CLICK AND DRAG IN THE PLOT AREA TO ZOOM IN

*% who say they trust the government to do what is right just about always/most of the time*



# Our Brains & Disinformation: Why Do We Believe This Stuff?

- Truth Bias
- The Big Lie Rule
- Repetition Builds Acceptance
  - Fake News
  - Election was rigged
  - Covid information

Source: Your Brain and Misinformation; Sander van der Linden; Cambridge University

# Talking to Friends and Family

- Consider the perspective of the sender/believer – be empathic
- Avoid Escalation: Don't join an argument
- Get them involved by searching together
- Employ Civil Discourse skills:
  - Be respectful
  - Listen with an open mind
  - Speak up and share your experiences
  - Find common ground
- Continue being the Trusted Messenger with your family and friends!

# Election Disinformation

Intentional attempts to use false information to affect participation of voters in an election and/or to undermine their faith in the integrity of the electoral process.

# Mis/Disinformation: Impact on Elections

- Voter suppression, intimidation and disinformation is not new for targeted populations, especially voters of color, but social media has created new opportunities and new threats.
  - Speed of transmission + low / no cost for bad actors
  - More platforms to build on, and amplify
  - Contributes to radicalization: stoking fears and tying it to elections

# Examples of Election Misinformation

- False information regarding **how to participate** in the election by communicating incorrect:
  - Voting or election day dates, hours the polls are open
  - Voter ID requirements
  - Voter registration information
- False claims about **the election process** in attempt to create doubt on election security
  - ‘Questionable’ election worker activity
  - Moving ballot boxes
- False claims **after the election**
  - Fraud, double counting, ballot dumping, machine errors, sham audits

# Artificial Intelligence and Elections

Generative AI can not only rapidly produce targeted campaign emails, texts or videos, it also could be used to mislead voters, impersonate candidates and undermine elections on a scale and at a speed not yet seen.

Source: David Klepper & Ali Swenson, Associated

Press

# Trustworthy Elections Information

- Secretary of State: [sos.ca.gov](http://sos.ca.gov)
- County Elections Office:  
[contracostavote.gov](http://contracostavote.gov)
- Vote 411: [vote411.org](http://vote411.org)



# contracostavote.gov

- Rumor Control Page: Poll workers handing out sharpies to certain voters so ballots are rejected.
  - Fact: Tabulator design sorts these types of “unreadable” ballots into separate pile then reviewed manually to determine voter’s intent.
  - Elections Security Safeguards Page: What they’re doing to secure networks, facilities, processes, and people.

# How to Outsmart False Election Information

- Some candidates make election disinformation the center of their campaigns



- Combat this with Vote411 to learn about candidates' priorities, positions and financing from a non-partisan source. Information on ballot propositions is also provided.

# Final Thoughts

- We all share responsibility in challenging this 'infodemic'.
- Practice click-restraint and report.
- Eat a healthy news media diet.