

# **Selective Exposure to Misinformation**

## **Evidence from the consumption of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign**

Andrew M. Guess  
Dept. of Politics  
Princeton University

Brendan Nyhan  
Dept. of Government  
Dartmouth College

Jason Reifler  
Dept. of Politics  
University of Exeter

Funding support: The Poynter Institute, Knight Foundation, American Press Institute, and EU Horizon 2020

## Research questions

How prevalent was “fake news” during the 2016 U.S. presidential election?

- ▶ Who visited “fake news” websites?
- ▶ How did they end up there?
- ▶ Did fact checks reach “fake news” consumers?

## Research questions

How prevalent was “fake news” during the 2016 U.S. presidential election?

- ▶ Who visited “fake news” websites?
- ▶ How did they end up there?
- ▶ Did fact checks reach “fake news” consumers?

Do we live in echo chambers that reinforce not just our opinions but our factual beliefs?

# The rise of “fake news”



**JUST READ THE LAW: HILLARY IS DISQUALIFIED FROM HOLDING ANY FEDERAL OFFICE**

Joker | October 29, 2016 | News, Politics, USA, World | 604 Views



**POLITICAL INSIDER**



Subscribe

Log

## WikiLeaks CONFIRMS Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS... Then Drops Another BOMBHELL!



**Kosar**  
Breaking News Editor  
August 4, 2016

**ET**  
news

HOME POLITICS HEALTH TECH SCIENCE SPORTS LIFESTYLE WORLD

## IT'S OVER: Hillary's ISIS Email Just Leaked & It's Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined...

POLITICS | October 11, 2016

PRINT

EMAIL

## Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement

TOPICS: Pope Francis Endorses Donald Trump



FRANCIS CARDINALS AMBIGUOUS DUBAI TRUMP NEWS

## FBI AGENT SUSPECTED IN HILLARY EMAIL LEAKS FOUND DEAD IN APPARENT MURDER-SUICIDE

DC STATE

SHARE ON f t+ g+ e



Waldersville, MD - An FBI agent believed to be responsible for the latest email leaks "pertinent to the investigation" into Hillary Clinton's private email server while she was Secretary of State, was found dead in an apparent murder-suicide early Saturday morning, according to police.

# “Fake news” distribution

## Total Facebook Engagements for Top 20 Election Stories



ENGAGEMENT REFERS TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SHARES, REACTIONS, AND COMMENTS FOR A PIECE OF CONTENT ON FACEBOOK SOURCE: FACEBOOK DATA VIA BUZZSUMO

(Silverman 2016)

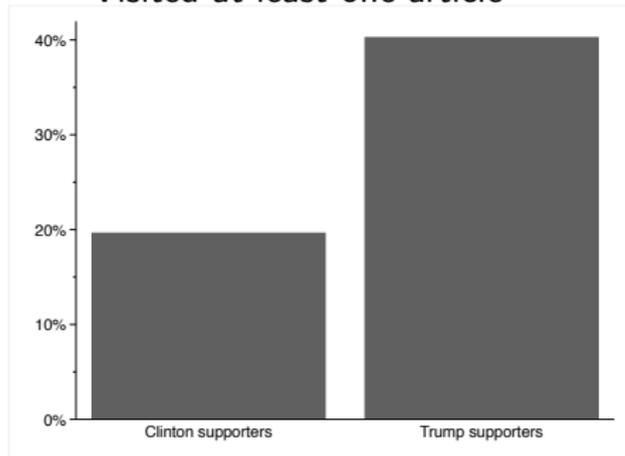
# Data overview

- ▶ YouGov Pulse panel ( $n = 3251$ )
  - ▶ Sample period: October 21–31, 2016
- ▶ Passive web tracking data
  - ▶ Sample period: October 7–November 14 ( $n = 2525$ )
  - ▶ Laptop/desktop only (mobile data partial/limited)
  - ▶ Captures fact-checking and fake news consumption
- ▶ Fake news definition
  - ▶ Fact-checked “fake news” + top shared (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017)
  - ▶ Excluding “hard news” domains (Bakshy et al. 2015)
  - ▶ Classify domains if  $> 1$  article and  $\geq 80\%$  pro-Trump/Clinton

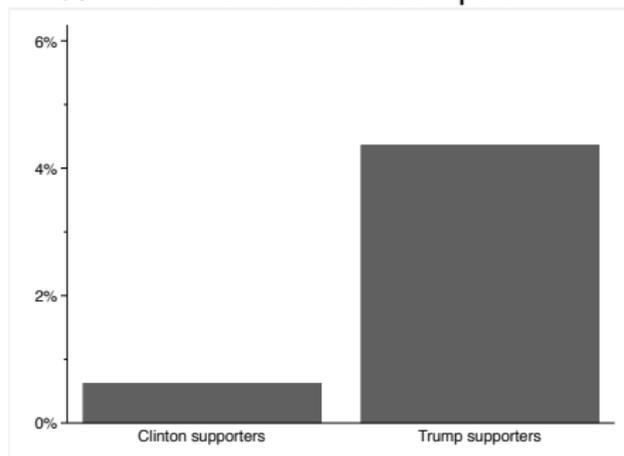
# Prevalence of fake news

- ▶ 27.4% read an article from a fake news site
- ▶ Mean of 5 pro-Trump articles (out of 5.45 total)
- ▶ Total: 2.6% of pages visited on hard news topics

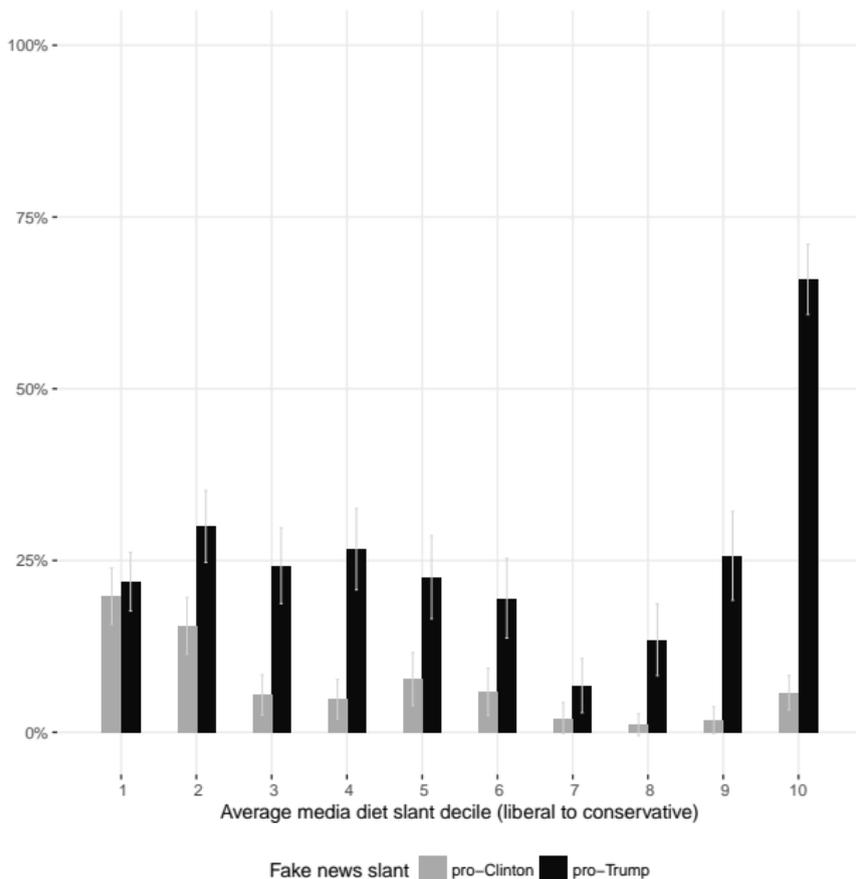
Visited at least one article



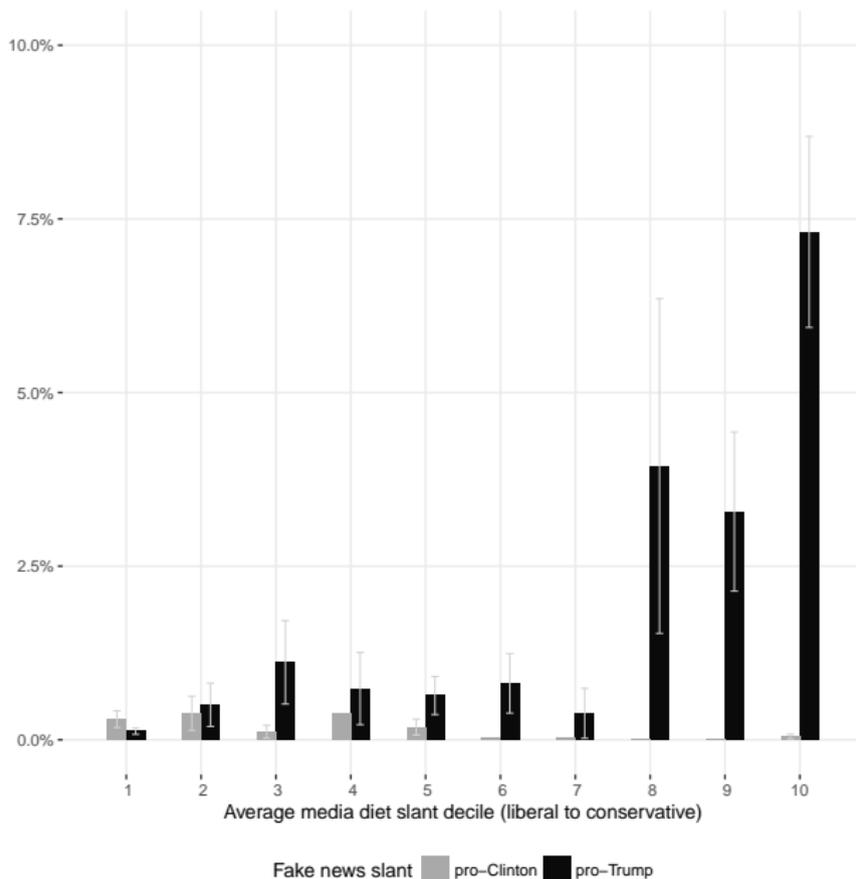
% of online news consumption



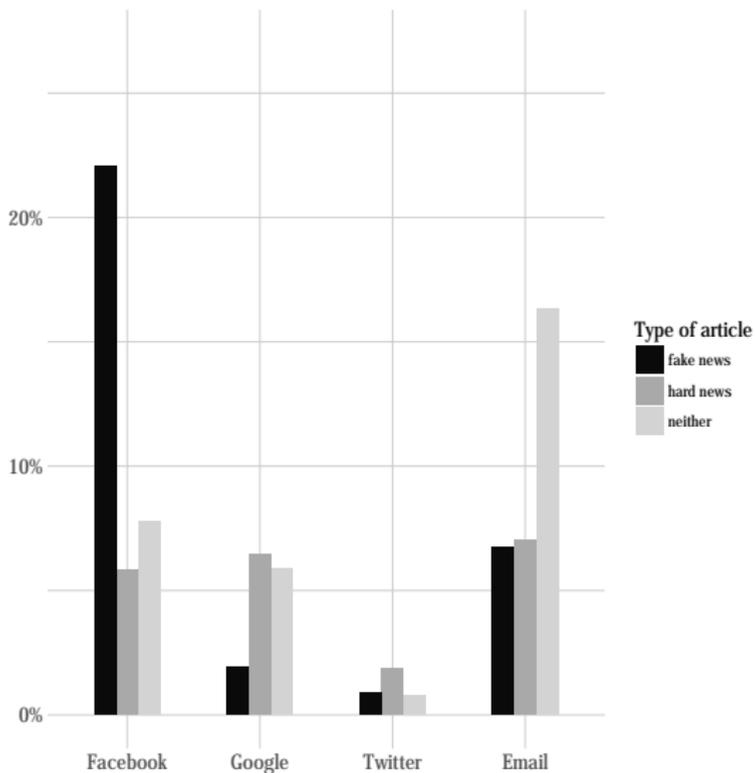
# Fake news consumption by media diet (binary)



# Fake news consumption by media diet (%)



# Visits in 30 seconds prior to fake news exposure

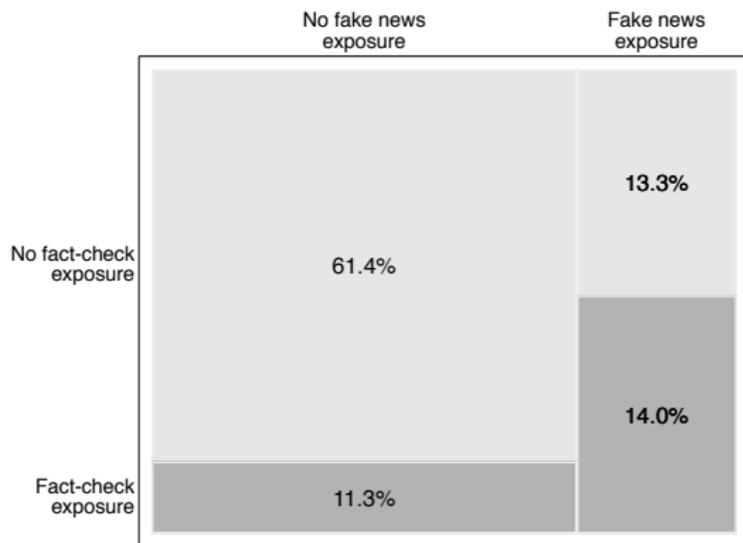


## Fact-checking vs. fake news

25.3% read a fact-check at least once but....

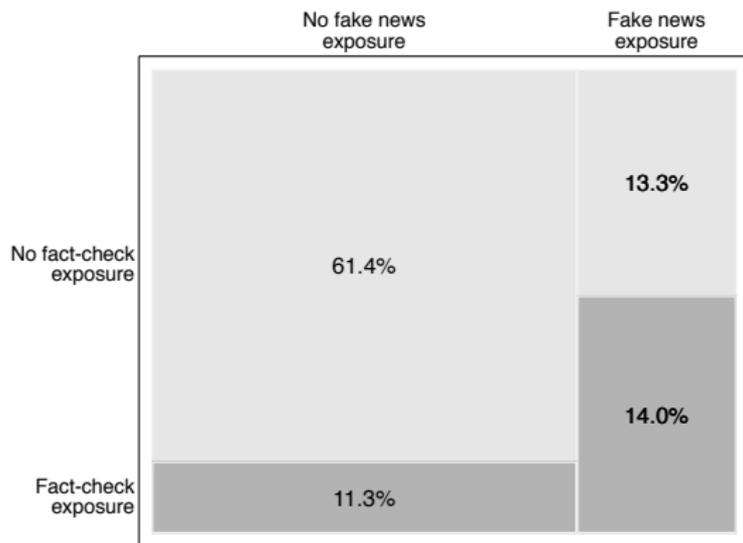
# Fact-checking vs. fake news

25.3% read a fact-check at least once but....



# Fact-checking vs. fake news

25.3% read a fact-check at least once but....



No one saw a fact-check of a false claim in a fake news article they read.

# Conclusions

- ▶ Substantial fake news consumption
- ▶ Convincing evidence of selective exposure
- ▶ Facebook key vector of transmission
- ▶ Fact checks almost entirely ineffective