

Questioning PolitiFact's Policy on Corrections

Having followed and critiqued PolitiFact for years, I have noticed PolitiFact's adherence to its stated policies is spotty at best.

[The 2018 independent assessment](#) under the International Fact-Checking Network said this of PolitiFact's commitment to scrupulous compliance with an open and honest corrections policy:

The site does an admirable job of defining different categories of correction and the policies for dealing with each of them. Laudably, there is a Corrections and Updates RSS feed as well

(feed://www.politifact.com/feeds/statementsbysubject/corrections-and-updates/).

This is pretty close to a gold standard for corrections.

The assessment added the caveat that readers have no means of knowing whether the list of corrections is comprehensive.

I devised an unscientific survey of PolitiFact's compliance with its statement of principles. The strategy searched for [instances of the terms "correction" and "2018* on pages under the "politifact.com" domain](#). The search returned 12 pages of hits. I looked at each page to confirm it had a "Correction" appended, then looked for the "Corrections and Updates" tag PolitiFact says it applies to flag items for its Corrections and Updates RSS feed.

- 32 corrections had no "Corrections and Updates" tag added
- 35 corrections had a "Corrections and Updates" tag added

The URLs for the respective items reveal a significant pattern. PolitiFact categorizes items as "article," "statement" or "promise." PolitiFact pages for articles and promises do not carry tags. Only stories categorized as "statements" carry tags, therefore only corrected statements occur on PolitiFact's RSS feed for corrections and updates.

Technically, this procedure meets PolitiFact's commitment in its policy statement if PolitiFact considers stories under the "articles" and "promises" categories something other than fact checks. [That statement of principles](#) says "Corrected fact-checks receive a tag of 'Corrections and Updates.'" It also says "Updated fact-checks receive a tag of 'Corrections and updates.'"

Still, some of the items the survey turned up were fact check stories (cat.: statements) that were

corrected but did not receive the promised tag.

Shouldn't it concern the IFCN when an "open and honest" corrections policy leaves an apparently deliberate loophole in its system for alerting readers to corrected items? The stories categorized as "article" or "promise" tend to have the same character as the fact checks. All the categories tend to feature explanatory journalism. The major distinguishing feature of the "statements" category is the accompanying "Truth-O-Meter" rating.

It is unlikely that nobody at PolitiFact has participated in correcting an article and then noted the difference between correcting an article and correcting a statement: "Why don't we tag these as 'Corrections and Updates'? Shouldn't we do something about this?"

Yet PolitiFact Editor Angie Drobic Holan, during a [Reddit AMA in early April 2019](#) said "Everything that gets a correction or an update gets tagged ([see all tagged items](#))."

PolitiFact communicates the message that it tags all corrected items with its "Corrections and Updates" tag. That's simply false. And it's hard to imagine that the people who run PolitiFact fail to realize that it's false.

Sincerely,

Bryan W. White
Editor, Zebra Fact Check

The following URLs feature corrections but no "Corrections and Updates" tag.

1

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/sep/07/fact-checking-brett-kavanaughs-senate-confirmation/>

2

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/jan/18/fact-checking-donald-trumps-fake-news-awards/>

3

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/jul/23/treason-trumps-actions-russian-putin-meeting/>

4

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/may/17/robert-mueller-investigation-one-year/>

5

<https://www.politifact.com/ohio/statements/2018/aug/20/americanjournalreviewcom/no-evidence-anyone-over-116-years-old-was-voting-o/>

6

<https://www.politifact.com/missouri/article/2018/oct/25/claire-mccaskill-josh-hawley-argue-over-immigratio/>

7

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/dec/21/man-behind-viral-border-wall-gofundme-fundraiser-a/>

8

<https://www.politifact.com/ohio/article/2018/oct/08/abuse-office-claim-ohios-chabot-pureval-race-raise/>

9

<https://www.politifact.com/virginia/statements/2018/sep/11/corey-stewart/corey-stewart-wrongly-says-trump-made-us-top-oil-a/>

10

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/jul/31/fact-checking-donald-trumps-rally-tampa/>

11

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2019/jan/14/blog-posting/henry-kissinger-did-not-say-what-you-think-he-said/>

12

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/trumpometer/promise/1341/take-no-salary/>

13

<https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/apr/10/john-e-sununu/john-sununu-says-just-14-million-americans-insured/>

14

<https://www.politifact.com/florida/article/2018/jul/10/what-trumps-supreme-court-nominee-brett-kavanaugh-/>

15

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/oct/18/new-york-john-fasos-health-care-promise-has-raised/>

16

<https://www.politifact.com/north-carolina/statements/2018/may/25/sydney-batch/nc-democrat-said-nc-budget-had-passed-it-hadnt/>

17

<https://www.politifact.com/texas/article/2016/nov/01/austin-newspaper-still-not-endorsing-candidates-no/>

18

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/mar/29/facts-donald-trump-amazon-taxes-usps-retail/>

19

<https://www.politifact.com/illinois/statements/2018/feb/12/jeanne-ives/campaign-ad-falsely-claims-rauner-made-taxpayers-f/>

20

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2019/jan/16/halftime-donald-trump-promises-hit-roadblocks/>

21

<https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/jun/24/facebook-posts/facebook-meme-iraq-war-dollars-could-have-ended-wo/>

22

<https://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2019/jan/31/jose-oliva/health-care-top-reason-bank-ruptcies-florida-gop-le/>

23

<https://www.politifact.com/rhode-island/statements/2015/feb/01/rhode-island-center-freedom-and-prosperity/do-common-welfare-programs-pay-equivalent-2083-hour/>

24

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/sep/14/fact-checkers-guide-hillary-clintons-new-book/>

25

<https://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2019/feb/28/kamala-harris/kamala-harris-tries-re-write-history-false-claim-sa/>

26

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2012/feb/10/health-care-law-catholics-birth-control/>

27

<https://www.politifact.com/virginia/statements/2019/feb/13/bobby-scott/bobby-scott-right-about-falling-value-minimum-wage/>

28

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/jun/22/fact-checking-nine-things-trump-overstated-got-wro/>

29

<https://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2016/may/17/pat-buchanan/pat-buchanans-mostly-false-claim-about-language-ca/>

30

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/trumpometer/promise/1345/appoint-special-prosecutor-investigate-hillary-clinton/>

31

<https://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2016/apr/04/californians-lower-drug-prices/big-pharma-not-king-ballot-spending-california-its/>

32

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/feb/20/what-statistics-say-about-immigration-and-sweden/>

This set of URLs features corrections and the “Corrections and Updates” tag

1

<https://www.politifact.com/missouri/statements/2018/oct/17/senate-leadership-fund/did-claire-mc-caskill-say-normal-people-can/>

2

<https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2018/jun/07/blog-posting/it-illegal-shower-and-d-o-laundry-same-day-californ/>

3

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2018/oct/26/blog-posting/bloggers-trump-gaetz-offer-no-evidence-caravan-was/>

4

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/mar/21/donald-trump/fact-checking-donald-trumps-claims-about-Mueller/>

5

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/apr/19/donald-trump/donald-trump-correct-about-size-us-trade-deficit-j/>

6

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2018/nov/05/blog-posting/viral-image-supposedly-depicting-caravan-members-r/>

7

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/sep/13/donald-trump/puerto-ricos-power-grid-was-weak-not-dead-hurricane/>

8

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/aug/24/donald-trump/trump-tweets-incorrect-south-african-land-seizures/>

9

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/jun/05/mitch-mcconnell/how-strong-have-job-gains-been-tax-bill-passed/>

10

<https://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2018/jan/17/delaine-eastin/does-california-rank-41st-student-spending-no-1-pr/>

11

<https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2018/aug/28/rush-limbaugh/rush-limbaugh-falsely-claims-jacksonville-shooter-/>

12

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2018/oct/24/blog-posting/no-democratic-party-didnt-create-klu-klux-klan/>

13

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/apr/24/ro-khanna/are-most-our-taxes-spent-war-terror-no/>

14

<https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2018/jul/06/patrick-kennedy/has-marijuana-caused-emergency-room-visits-skyrock/>

15

<https://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2018/aug/29/kevin-mccarthy/wildfires-or-cars-which-produces-more-emissions/>

16

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/mar/23/national-rifle-association/nra-says-violent-radicals-are-behind-march-our-liv/>

17

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/apr/05/ruben-gallego/arizona-rep-cost-2-national-guard-border-arrests-w/>

18

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2018/dec/06/blog-posting/yes-ann-coulter-said-she-descended-settlers-not-im/>

19

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/jun/01/protect-our-care/did-republican-sabotage-cost-32-million-their-heal/>

20

<https://www.politifact.com/north-carolina/statements/2018/sep/27/north-carolina-republican-party/nc-gop-mostly-wrong-about-secret-dmv-created-coope/>

21

<https://www.politifact.com/texas/statements/2016/sep/15/greg-abbott/greg-abbott-says-if-texas-were-country-its-economy/>

22

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/jun/20/corey-stewart/corey-stewarts-history-far-right-explained/>

23

<https://www.politifact.com/north-carolina/statements/2019/feb/05/civitas-institute/civitas-institute-mostly-correct-school-choice-wai/>

24

<https://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2018/mar/16/cory-booker/are-1-percent-gun-retailers-responsible-more-half/>

25

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2019/mar/06/facebook-posts/yes-jk-rowling-was-knocked-forbes-billionaires-lis/>

26

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2015/apr/08/rick-santorum/70-americans-do-not-have-college-degree-rick-santoru/>

27

<https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/sep/02/larry-elder/larry-elder-if-black-america-were-country-itd-be-1/>

28

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2017/nov/07/dianne-feinstein/closer-look-classroom-expenses-deduction-teachers-/>

29

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2014/aug/08/facebook-posts/1978-someone-minimum-wage-could-earn-enough-summer/>

30

(this item only had the tag added after I pointed out the problem to PolitiFact)

<https://www.politifact.com/california/statements/2016/dec/02/gavin-newsom/pences-support-conversion-therapy-not-settled-matt/>

31

<https://www.politifact.com/texas/statements/2017/apr/14/sara-stevenson/sara-stevenson-austin-says-texas-senate-panel-rand/>

32

<https://www.politifact.com/north-carolina/statements/2019/apr/04/mark-meadows/meadows-wrongly-claims-obama-removed-census-citize/>

33

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2019/jan/04/donald-trump/no-usmca-trade-deal-wont-pay-border-wall-despite-d/>

34

<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2019/mar/15/joe-cunningham/yes-airguns-used-oil-gas-exploration-are-16000-tim/>

35

<https://www.politifact.com/facebook-fact-checks/statements/2019/mar/05/viral-image/no-isnt-photo-sundance-kid/>