

The Washington Post Fact Checker Misreports, and Stands by its Misreport

[A June 22, 2020 fact check](#) by the Washington Post Fact Checker falsely reported an ABC News account of an FBI document related to violence at Black Lives Matter protests. The Post has ignored [a June 25, 2020 tweet](#) alerting it (and its lead “Fact Checker” Glenn Kessler) about the problem, as well as a formal correction request sent on June 26, 2020.

[As of June 29, 2020](#), the Post had made no move to correct its false report, leading toward the conclusion that the Washington Post Fact Checker does not hew scrupulously to an open and honest corrections policy.

The Post’s fact check purported to show that “antifa” anti-fascists were improperly blamed for causing violence at Black Lives Matter protests. It used an ABC News report about an FBI/DHS document to help suggest the FBI did not look at antifa as a precipitating factor for violent acts.

Here’s how the Post’s fact checker reported on the FBI document (bold emphasis added):

An intelligence bulletin issued by the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the National Counterterrorism Center that was [obtained by ABC News](#) warned that **“anarchist extremists continue to pose the most significant threat of targeted assaults against police.”** The bulletin, which was distributed to police departments nationwide, mentions antifa only in a footnote differentiating those who self-identify with the group from anarchists.

Rather, the bulletin said that “the greatest threat of lethal violence continues to emanate from lone offenders with racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist ideologies and [domestic violent extremists] with personalized ideologies,” specifically pointing to [boogaloo](#)-related groups as likely to be “instigating violence” at the protests.

But the bulletin did not mention antifa as “differentiating those who self-identify with the group from anarchists.” On the contrary, [ABC News reported](#) the document said some violent anarchists self-identify as antifa:

“Additionally,” the document notes, “anarchist extremists continue to pose the most significant threat of targeted assaults against police, as well as targeting government buildings and police vehicles for damage, sometimes with improvised incendiary devices.”

While experts [previously told ABC News](#) that the ideology of some antifa adherents includes anarchism -- along with socialism and communism -- mention of the movement itself in the bulletin is relegated to a footnote. It says, "Some anarchist extremists self-identify as 'Antifa,' a moniker for anti-fascist that is also used by non-violent adherents. Identifying with 'Antifa' or using the term without engaging in violent extremism may also be constitutionally protected."

It follows that when the bulletin mentions "violent anarchists" that the term would encompass violent antifa adherents who embrace anarchism ("the ideology of some antifa adherents includes anarchism"). For review, the Washington Post Fact Checker's reporting conveys the opposite impression:

The bulletin ... mentions antifa only in a footnote differentiating those who self-identify with the group from anarchists.

The Fact Checker's report is false and requires a correction.

I would also fault the fact check for irresponsible use of the "burden of proof" principle. Fact checkers should avoid using the burden of proof as an excuse to commit [the fallacy of appeal to ignorance](#). Lack of evidence is not necessarily evidence of lack, but fact checking organizations send the opposite message when they use "burden of proof" to justify saying a claim is either true or false.

The Post's failure to act in response to unequivocal evidence that it erred shows a failure to adhere to an open and honest corrections policy.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Bryan W. White
Editor and publisher, Zebra Fact Check
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