



Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Accountability Fail

1 message

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 9, 2021 at 1:51 PM

To: International Fact-Checking Network <factchecknet@poynter.org>, Baybars Orsek <baybars@poynter.org>, ctardaguila@poynter.org, ferdi@poynter.org
Cc: Neil Brown <nbrown@poynter.org>

Dear International Fact-Checking Network (cc Neil Brown),

Your March 8, 2021 re-verification of PolitiFact betrays an unserious system of accountability.

The re-verification document says complaints about PolitiFact did not add up to a pattern ("petter") showing any failure to live up to the IFCN's "Code of Principles."

The complaints that this applicant has received are not substantiated in showing a petter [sic] on violating any criteria, therefore do not constitute a violation of the Code of Principles.

The document does not state the number of complaints received, the category of the complaints or whether the IFCN found the individual complaints valid. The statement offers no indication of how many individual violations of the Code would constitute a pattern.

In short, the statement's lack of transparency is nearly total.

Compounding the appearance of unseriousness, the IFCN requires signatories to offer proof of their non-partisanship and adherence to the Code's requirements for open and honest corrections.

The unseriousness stems from the nature of the proof required.

In the case of non-partisanship, the IFCN asks signatories to choose 10 fact checks that show their non-partisanship. That shows the IFCN believes that 10 examples can show a pattern of non-partisanship, regardless of the total number of fact checks the organization published.

To prove adherence to the policy on corrections, the IFCN asks for two examples of corrections performed over the past year. Two such examples would show a pattern of compliance with policy, by the IFCN's lights.

One may well wonder why two examples of corrections can show compliance with a corrections policy while **no fewer than four** complaints* centered on its failed corrections policy cannot show a pattern of failure.

I would argue that **a single failure to correct an obvious error** (about which the fact checker was informed) all by itself shows a pattern of failure. Every day the mistake remains uncorrected reinforces the pattern.

Such inconsistency is unbecoming on the part of professional journalists, as well as for an internationally known journalism school.

The practices of the IFCN as documented above deserve zero credibility. Radical transparency is needed to start remedying the problem.

An organization with integrity would address this situation with a detailed reply.

*I have sent more than four complaints about PolitiFact's failures to follow an open and honest corrections policy, but the IFCN has not approved them for reasons apparently known only to itself.

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Sincerely,

Bryan W. White

3/14/2021

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editor

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