

Fact Checker Publishing Opinion as Fact?

Dear International Fact-Checking Network,

On [Nov. 14, 2022](#), PolitiFact published an article proclaiming Donald Trump “the least accurate politician we've ever covered.”

The problem?

PolitiFact's claim places it on the horns of dilemma. If intended as a statement of fact, PolitiFact needs to make its case based on some objective criterion or criteria. PolitiFact failed to do that, given that the justifications it gave for its claim allow other political figures to lay legitimate claim to the title of “least accurate.” On the other hand, if the article was intended as opinion then fact checkers presenting themselves as unbiased are offering a negative *opinion* about a political candidate. That neatly fits the definition of political bias.

Neither option passes muster according to IFCN standards. And PolitiFact has compounded the problem by electing not to fix the problem after I pointed it out [on Nov. 16, 2022](#).

Making matters even worse, PolitiFact's stance counts as flatly hypocritical. [PolitiFact's statement of principles](#) enshrines a “burden of proof” criterion in judging the truth of political claims. The claimant, PolitiFact says, bears the burden of proof. PolitiFact [can and will](#) issue a negative “Truth-O-Meter” rating based simply on the lack of evidence offered in support of a claim. We'll overlook for purposes of this complaint that the principle amounts to the fallacy of appeal to silence. If PolitiFact presents it and uses it as a principle then it should apply it consistently.

The unprincipled judgment of Mr. Trump violates the IFCN principle of non-partisanship and fairness.

The Impossibility of Objective Support

It bears mention that PolitiFact can never adequately produce objective support for the proposition that Trump is the least accurate politician it has ever covered. Setting aside the fact that figures [like Mark Finchem](#) have worse records than Trump, the “Truth-O-Meter” itself is not a scientific instrument. It operates on a non-random set of political claims and its ratings are [substantially if not “entirely subjective.”](#)

Objective ratings tainted by selection bias can never serve as an adequate determinant for an objective “least accurate” judgment, and *subjective* ratings move any mirage of objective verification well beyond the horizon.

In a word: Impossible.

This type of inconsistency contributes greatly to the [lack of trust](#) people place in the modern fact-checking movement. The IFCN should do what it can to reduce this type of self-inflicted damage. Assuming PolitiFact cannot support its claim objectively, it should retract its political opinion article with an apology or align itself with a fact-checking oversight organization that permits fact checkers to offer political opinions.

Thanks for your attention to this matter. Feel free to contact me for further explanation if needed.

Sincerely,

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