

PolitiFact's inconsistency on the gender wage gap and dubious evidence

Dear International Fact-Checking Network,

PolitiFact has established a remarkably inconsistent record on claims involving the gender wage gap. That record continued late last year with [a December 16, 2022 PolitiFact Wisconsin fact check](#) of Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.).

Baldwin used the raw gap to argue for equal work for equal pay. Of course the raw gap serves exceptionally poorly to illustrate unequal work for unequal pay because it does not measure differences for doing the same work. Though PolitiFact regularly admits that truth, still it will treat a citation of the raw wage gap as part of an argument for equal pay for equal work as "[Half True](#)," "[Mostly True](#)" or simply "[True](#)." Baldwin was the recipient of a "True" rating.

What good is a true stat used in a misleading way?

What's wrong with accurately citing the raw wage gap while arguing for equal pay for equal work? As noted above, it's misleading. There's nothing in the raw wage gap that shows unequal pay for unequal work. The raw gap shows different pay for different work and different hours worked.

PolitiFact issues a variety of ratings for structurally identical gender pay gap claims (gender wage gap from factors xyz shows need to fill gender wage gap from d). Such inconsistency should count as anathema for fact checkers, and for that reason any difference in ratings for these similar claims should carry clear justifications for those differences. We simply don't see them in PolitiFact's work.

Compounding the problem, examples abound of PolitiFact laying the hammer on those who similarly misuse statistics on other topics. Republican Sarah Palin, for example, received a "[Mostly False](#)" rating for correctly citing the U.S. ranking for military spending as a percentage of GDP. PolitiFact's justification? Experts said GDP was not the best way to rank military spending. If gender discrimination experts think the raw wage gap is the best way to measure gender pay discrimination then we clearly need better experts on gender discrimination. And clearly PolitiFact lacks consistency in its approach to claims involving accurate citations of statistics.

I sent PolitiFact a correction request on Dec. 20, 2022, pointing out its inconsistency and the way its reporting encourages misinformed views about the gender wage gap ([anchoring bias](#)). As of this date, PolitiFact has made no apparent effort to correct its error.

This complaint jointly touches on corrections policy and fairness. It is not fair to use differing standards to check different claims, particularly while falsely claiming the same standards apply

at all times. And it's worse when one political party tends to confront tougher standards than another.

“Signatory organizations fact-check claims using the same standard for every fact check.”

That's supposedly IFCN principle No. 1. If the IFCN allows signatories such as PolitiFact to use differing standards on different fact checks then you make liars of yourselves.

You can avoid the dilemma by not allowing the application of shifting standards. Or you can change the IFCN Code to permit signatories to apply differing standards for different fact checks.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

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