

Informed Democracy: An Online Tool for Better Communication Between  
the People and Politicians  
(Technical Report)

Fact-checking Websites: The Struggle over Their Credibility  
(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis Portfolio  
Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Engineering and Applied Science  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Science in Computer Science

by

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May 9, 2021

## Preface

To evaluate candidates for elective office, voters can study their records, their platforms, and their stories online. However, such an effort can be difficult. Voters seeking information may find propaganda instead; the content presented may be selective, inaccurate, or unverifiable. Websites characterizing themselves as sources of impartial information may have political agendas to advance.

How can the people and politicians better communicate their ideas to each other? The U.S. has long been politically divided. Because a digital platform can keep users informed and engaged, a consensus-building platform was developed that can support debate and face-to-face discussions among stakeholders. The platform is intended to facilitate constructive conversation and consensus-building among diverse opinion groups. To design the web application, we applied frameworks and design patterns, and used cloud computing.

How have critics and proponents of PolitiFact, OpenSecrets, FactCheck.org, and Snopes attacked or defended the validity of these sites as sources of guidance for voters? The reliability of fact checking websites is contested. To their defenders, fact checkers are a valuable check on the proliferation of misinformation. To their critics, however, fact checking websites interfere with the free exchange of information and ideas, and disproportionately reinforce liberal biases in the media.

## **List of Contents**

1. Technical Report: Informed Democracy: An Online Tool for Better Communication  
Between the People and Politicians
2. Sociotechnical Research Paper: Fact-checking Websites: The Struggle over Their  
Credibility
3. Prospectus