

Fact-checking may be important, but it won't help Americans learn to disagree better | The Conversation

By Taylor Dotson

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Entering the new year, Americans are increasingly divided. They clash not only over differing opinions on COVID-19 risk or abortion, but basic facts like election counts and whether vaccines work. Surveying rising political antagonism, journalist George Packer recently wondered in *The Atlantic*, “Are we doomed?”

It is common to blame people who are intentionally distributing false information for these divisions. Nobel Prize-winning journalist Maria Ressa says Facebook’s “[bias] against facts” threatens democracy. Others lament losing the “shared sense of reality” and “common baseline of fact” thought to be a prerequisite for democracy.

Fact-checking, the rigorous independent verification of claims, is often presented as vital for fighting falsehoods. Elena Hernandez, a spokesperson for YouTube, states that “Fact checking is a crucial tool to help viewers make their own informed decisions” and “to address the spread of misinformation.” Ariel Riera, head of Argentina-based fact-checking organization Chequeado, argues that fact checking and “quality information” are key in the fight against “the COVID-19 ‘infodemic.’”

[...]

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