

# Facts won't fix this: experts on how to fight America's disinformation crisis | The Guardian

By Lois Beckett

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At the beginning of 2021, millions of Americans appear to disagree about one of the most basic facts of their democracy: that Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election.

The consequences of Donald Trump's repeated, baseless claims of voter fraud will come in several waves, researchers who study disinformation say, even if Trump ultimately hands over power and leaves the White House. And there is no quick or easy way to fix this crisis, they warn. Because when it comes to dealing with disinformation, simply repeating the facts doesn't do much to change anyone's mind.

In the short term, Trump's false claims about election fraud have weakened Biden's ability to address the coronavirus pandemic. "If only 20% of the population is like, 'You're not my president, I'm going to double down on my mask resistance,' or 'I'm going to continue to have parties over the holidays,' that means we are going to be even less likely to bring this thing under control," said Whitney Phillips, a professor of communications at Syracuse University.

Over the longer term, the president's falsehoods may also undermine Biden's overall governing capability, just as the racist "birther" conspiracy theory, another false claim spread by Trump, helped fuel political resistance to Barack Obama's presidency. And the damage to Americans' basic trust in their democracy may have effects far beyond electoral politics.

"What does it look like if we don't have a shared sense of reality?" said Claire Wardle, the executive director of First Draft, a group that researches and combats disinformation. "We've seen more conspiracy theories moving mainstream. There's an increasing number of people who do not believe in the critical infrastructure of a society. Where does that end?"

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