

# How ‘Big Disinformation’ Can Overcome Its Skeptics | The Atlantic

By Conor Friedersdorf

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During a recent conference at the University of Chicago, former President Barack Obama [reflected](#) on the role disinformation played during his presidency. He was subject to flagrant lies—that he was born in Kenya, for instance, and put “death panels” in his health-care overhaul. But he served relatively early in the era of the smartphone and social-media, and he now believes that he underestimated the vulnerability of democracies to false information that is intended to mislead.

The premise that disinformation is among the biggest threats to democracy is now ubiquitous. The conference where Obama was interviewed by *The Atlantic*’s editor in chief, Jeffrey Goldberg, “Disinformation and the Erosion of Democracy,” was co-hosted by *The Atlantic* and the University of Chicago’s Institute of Politics, which is led by David Axelrod. Various other official events, initiatives, and reports addressing this issue are sponsored by the [European Union](#), [UNESCO](#), [Harvard](#), [Yale](#), [Princeton](#), [Stanford](#), [UC Berkeley](#), the [Brookings Institution](#), [New America](#), the [Center for American Progress](#), the [Clinton Foundation](#), the [Aspen Institute](#), [The New York Times](#), the [Knight Foundation](#), the [Ford Foundation](#), and more.

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