

McGonagle, T. (2017). "Fake news": False fears or real concerns? *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 35(4), 203-209.

### **Synopsis:**

McGonagal discussed the term fake news, which is information that is deliberately fabricated with the intention to mislead, noting that it is a term and process that is complex and can cover a variety of items from, "playful hoaxes to belligerent propaganda or incitement to violence" (p. 204). She referenced ten types of misleading news and the motivations behind them; this list includes: propaganda, clickbait, sponsored content, satire and hoax, error, partisan content, conspiracy theory, pseudoscience, misinformation and bogus content. McGonagal noted that "fake news" is not a new phenomenon; however, the current and ever evolving media and news ecosystem and the increasing use of the Internet promotes the rapid development of fake news. She noted that some factors in this rapid development include the sophistication being employed to produce fake news and the speed and effectiveness on which and with which fakes news content is created and disseminated. She also argued that modern technology makes the creation and dissemination of fake news possible for a "wide range of actors" (p. 206), making it difficult to verify information and sources. In discussing the difficulty of combating fake news and the spread of misinformation, McGonagal argued for the involvement of public watchdog organizations that could both protect freedom of speech and safeguard against misinformation. She also noted the importance of journalists in the news media ecosystem and the dangers of public figures creating a "climate of hostility and aggression towards journalists and the media" (p. 209) as it undermines the principles of a democratic society.

### **Key Concepts:**

- ***Fake News:*** "...information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts; it is disinformation that is presented as, or likely to be perceived as, news" (p 203).
- ***News:*** is supposed to be, "a key source of accurate information about political and societal affairs, which informs public opinion-making and deliberative process" (p. 204).
- ***Satire:*** "a form of artistic expression and social commentary, and by its inherent features of exaggeration and distortion of reality, naturally aims to provoke and agitate" (p. 204).

### **Key Quotes:**

- "Internet intermediaries, such as search engines and social media network operators, perform key gatekeeping functions in the media ecosystem. They determine the availability, accessibility and prominence of content and thus wield enormous power over the dissemination of fake news" (p. 206).
- Facts and opinions or value judgments are not the same: the existence of facts can be demonstrated, but it is not possible to prove the truth of opinions or value judgments" (p. 208).
- "Journalists and the media... are expected to act in good faith in order to provide accurate and reliable information to the public in accordance with the ethics of journalism...Erroneous or untrue reporting can occur even when journalists act in good faith" (p. 208)

### **Essential Question:**

- How has fake news and the term fake news influenced voters in the 2016 and 2020 elections?