# Workshop: What's the future of disinformation research?

Irene Pasquetto, UMD, July 25
@irenepasquetto.bsky.social

# Agenda for today

1  What's the problem? Overview

2  Some inputs to move forward

3  Propose your own ideas / RQs

4  Working groups - generative!

5  Share out!

# Disinformation research: from urgency to confusion

# Not an easy time to research disinformation

Researchers, civil societies, journalists, and academic institutions are often under attack for covering these issues.



Trump Administration Cancels Scores of Grants to Study Online Misinformation

...deral agencies say that by axing the funding they ...otecting the First Amendment. Critics see it as sti... ...entific inquiry into sources of harmful online con...

# The field of disinformation is in crisis

## What's next?

COMMENTARY

## Misinformed about misinformation: On the polarizing discourse on misinformation and its consequences for the field
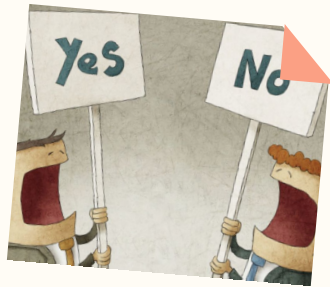
*The field of misinformation is facing several challenges, from attacks on academic freedom to*

Pasquetto, I. V., Lim, G., & Bradshaw, S. (2024). Misinformed about misinformation: On the polarizing discourse on misinformation and its consequences for the field. *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review.* https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-159

# How did we get here?

**Disinformation research is being conducted in a setting that is highly politicized**
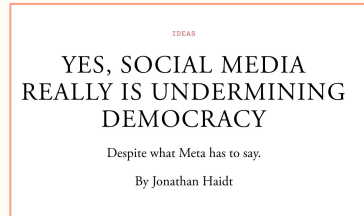
-Findings on impact informs debates on tech regulations
-Researchers want to be part of the debate

**Incentives to frame research projects around broad impact and visibility potential**

-Studies with broad goals conducted on limited samples and limited populations

**Over-reliance on limited studies with partial results to make bold, opposing claims about the nature of disinformation**

IDEAS

YES, SOCIAL MEDIA REALLY IS UNDERMINING DEMOCRACY

Despite what Meta has to say.

By Jonathan Haidt

POLITICO

U-US relations    War in Ukraine    Newsletters    Podcasts    Poll of Polls    Policy news    Events

NEWS  >  TECHNOLOGY UK

'Nobody was tricked into voting for Trump': Why the disinformation panic is over

Eight years ago, Trump and Brexit sparked fears social media was corroding reality. Now, that narrative is crumbling.

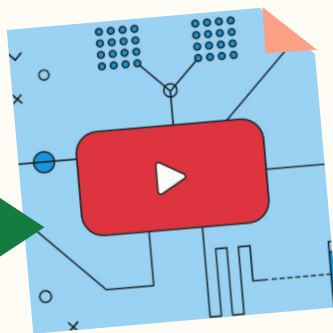# How do we go forward? More contextualized, community-level research on disinformation

**Be specific about the kind of disinformation we study.**

Clarify what aspect of disinformation has been studied in a given research project and the extent to which findings might apply to different kinds of content and processes.
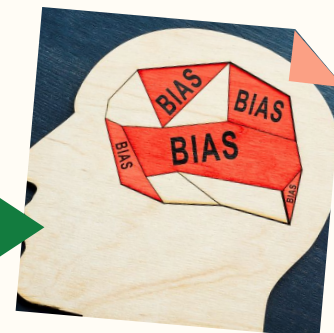
**Avoid  technological determinism.**

Be specific about the local and context-dependent sociotechnical mechanisms that enable or constrain disinformation in that given research process.

**Reflect on your own biases and be transparent about them.**

Be transparent about the epistemological assumptions that motivate researchers to define a specific type of content as misleading and a population as misled.

# Some inputs to move the field forward

- What "kind of" disinformation are we studying?
- Why are we focusing on a specific issue, what difference do we want to make? Who do we want to help? Or who do we want to impress?
- What populations/communities are involved?
- What do we know of their internet habits, practices, and media diets?
- To what extent are our findings generalizable outside our research design?
- How can policy makers and other stakeholders interpret and use our findings?

# Given these inputs, what research questions or research project related to disinformation would you propose?

- …
- …

# Thank you all for participating!