**Introduction:**  Misrepresentation of information can take many forms.  In class, we've talked about how information can be nonfactual for at least 3 reasons:  1) It is correct, but leaves out important information pertinent to the issue at hand;  2) It is correct in a different context (e.g., time period), but is not correct in the context being discussed;  3) It is incorrect, either in part or in whole.  We have also discussed how data plots and other graphics can be created so as to mislead, using factual numbers, but encouraging viewers to interpret the meaning of the data in a way that is not correct.  The result is that viewers leave with wrong conclusions that are not supported by the facts.

Sometimes, incorrect information and misleading data presentations can be shared accidentally, with no intent to deceive the audience.  However, people in general, and political actors in particular, sometimes deceptively provide incorrect information and misleading graphics with full knowledge of what they are doing.

Ultimately, how we use information to influence others is a matter of personal responsibility.

The source article ([https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2015/oct/01/jason-chaffetz/chart-shown-planned-parenthood-hearing-misleading-/Links to an external site.](https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2015/oct/01/jason-chaffetz/chart-shown-planned-parenthood-hearing-misleading-/)) describes when a US Congressional representative presented factual data about Planned Parenthood in a Congressional hearing, but did so in a way that was very, conveniently misleading.

***IMPORTANT NOTE:  None of the prompts below are asking you to share your feelings or position about the issue of abortion.***

***Be sure to answer ALL prompts.***

**Prompt 1:  [1-2 paragraphs]**Describe the dilemma that an individual may face when they have the opportunity to use nonfactual data or misleading data presentations in order to attack and defeat a policy that they feel is wrong, perhaps even immoral?  (A dilemma is when two "good" actions are in conflict, forcing an individual to potentially choose one while sacrificing the other.)

An individual who opposes policies that are immoral may have to face the dilemma of whether to use misleading data to achieve that they might think is the greater good. On one hand, one may believe that attacking and defeating a policy is vital to fight for the greater good or to fight for certain values, which would make using misleading data feel justifiable. But on the other hand, there are sure to be ethical implications for intentionally misleading the public with wrong data, as it would naturally go against one’s integrity. So, there will most definitely be a dilemma here. There continue to be more questions, such as what happens if the individual is caught, or what are the ramifications of not achieving a desired outcome, and these issues and tensions highlight the responsibility an individual may have to hold.

**Prompt 2:  [1-2 paragraphs]**State the position you would take if you were the Congressional representative in the article and were preparing for this very important hearing in which you felt very strongly that Planned Parenthood was a bad organization and should lose federal funding.  Would you use the graphic to justify that choice?  Describe 2-3 pressures you would likely be facing as an elected politician that would make the choice you just made extra difficult.

Here’s the issue. I can understand winning under any circumstances, but ethics must play a part. A respectful fight is a fair one and an equal one, and using this graphic is just wrong. It is intentionally set up to create a spurious correlation between the two and there it is meant to trick viewers and the public into believing something. On the other hand, however, I can understand the pressure a congressional representative would be under to win policy. I can understand wanting to be elected again, so winning would garner support from constituents that would vote for me, and I can also understand facing pressure from political allies that expect undying support and tangible victories, and the probability that rejecting the graphic is equivalent to rejecting them, and shows a lack of commitment to allies, which may hurt me later.

**Prompt 3:  [1-2 paragraphs]**Do you believe that fact-checking organizations such as *Politifact.com,*the source of the article, are effective tools to combat nonfactual information in politics?  Why or why not?  Explain the broader consequences you foresee of increasing use of nonfactual information and misleading data presentations in national, state, and local government.

Websites like Politifact would work and be very effective for intelligent citizens who pay attention to the accuracy of the information that is put out there. It is vital to combat nonfactual information in the political world, with their neutral assessment of claims and holding political statements accountable. If you had a citizen base that cared and wanted to make well informed decisions in voting for legislators and wanted to encourage transparency, Politifact would be very useful. However, the issue is that most people do not care, nor do they spend too much time to pay attention. They take information at face value, which can be very detrimental to our population, and with time it makes our population dumber. The consequences I foresee of the increased use of misleading data and nonfactual information either intentionally through malicious use or through the rise of AI is that the public loses even more trust in the government and would create divides in society.