

Extreme Polarization and Breakdown in Civic Discourse

Overview

Extreme polarization, the decline of fact-based discourse and rise in manipulative practices, and the growth of xenophobia pose related threats to open society in the U.S. The Arizona shootings last month may have shamed the nation, our politicians, and the press to suspend at least some of the escalating rancor and divisive rhetoric in public discourse. It's not clear how long this reprieve will last, but extreme polarization has been building for some time. In recent years politics has been defined by vitriol-filled town hall meetings on health care reform and unusually manipulative and misleading attack ads of the 2010 mid-term elections.

An open society requires a diverse, independent, and highly-functioning press that can provide factually accurate reporting, sort out fact from fiction, and help hold both the public and private sector accountable. Fast-paced and dramatic changes in technology, advertising, and consumer habits have upended the field of journalism, and fear-mongering and unsupported opinions increasingly supplant facts. The problem runs deeper than Fox News, which has a relatively small viewership. A fractured media creates echo effects in American public discourse, by which lies and manipulations spread through multiple channels, often deliberately amplified by private interests.

This rancor is fed by xenophobia and intolerance that stem in part from economic uncertainty, demographic shifts, and the threat of terrorism. Foes of immigration seek to build support for repealing the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees citizenship to anyone born in the U.S. Fevered opposition to plans to build the Park51 Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan was firmly rooted in anti-Muslim bigotry that has intensified since September 11. The consignment of broad categories of marginalized people to the category of "other" threatens to do more harm than the violent rhetoric that pervades our civic discourse. Many commentators have argued persuasively that once people are sufficiently demonized or portrayed as the enemy, violent hatred will increase.

Snapshot of U.S. Programs' Current Work

U.S. Programs hopes to address these interrelated problems through work to encourage fact-based discourse, strengthen journalism, and counter rising xenophobia; the current work is at differing stages of development and includes:

- **Building fact-based discourse.** Since late last year, staff has been tracking a range of initiatives attempting to address the decline of fact-based public and political discourse. A new grant supports Media Matters, which is a leader in monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media. A grant to NewsTrust is supporting the development of online news literacy tools and practices (initially in Baltimore); we are testing the public's use of these tools to examine the reliability of news. The following projects are also under exploration (background on both is included in this tab):

- Rather than letting all the various efforts on fact-based discourse develop in isolated silos, the New America Foundation has identified an opportunity to network several nascent fact-checking efforts, mediate and moderate debates in this evolving field, draw other institutions of fact-based production (including universities) into the field, conduct research, convene practitioners and thinkers, and develop and promote best practices in fact checking across all forms of media.
- The American Library Association has been engaged to explore a nationwide effort to raise public awareness about manipulative discourse and to promote critical thinking and media literacy. ALA is well positioned to have a direct and profound impact by reaching large groups of people and lending its mainstream voice to this effort.
- **Strengthening journalism.** Following the Board’s guidance in mid-2010, efforts have focused on strengthening fact-based accountability journalism on critical open society issues at the state and local level; and on revitalizing, expanding, and bringing greater diversity to the public media sector. New grants support NPR’s *Impact of Government* initiative and the New America Foundation’s work to build a new framework to strengthen U.S. public media.
- **Addressing xenophobia more comprehensively.** U.S. Programs has identified four strategies to counter xenophobia and intolerance: engaging unusual allies; building bridges between mainstream and marginalized groups; using culture and new media; and conducting opposition research. Two new grants addressing xenophobia reflect these strategies (write-ups for both grants are in this tab). A grant to the Center for American Progress supports its work to document structures underlying the Islamophobia movement. Another new grant supports Welcoming America, an Atlanta-based organization that uses rotary club meetings, church socials, and university gatherings to provide substantive education about immigration and facilitate exchanges between native- and foreign-born Americans. It is partnering with leading academics to “diagnose the causes of immigration anxiety” and generate ideas for curbing it.

Questions to Frame the Board’s Discussion

1. Given our role and expertise, are these three lenses – supporting accountability journalism, promoting fact-based discourse, and addressing xenophobia – the right avenues for addressing extreme polarization and the breakdown in civic discourse?
2. Within the three lenses identified above, what mix of strategies is likely to be most effective?
3. How should we engage untapped or under-utilized constituencies in this work (including youth, white people, and others)?
4. What concrete goals do we hope to advance in these areas over the next two years?

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What I Didn't Know:
Open Society Reconsidered

GEORGE SOROS

In his novel *1984*, George Orwell gave a chilling description of a totalitarian regime in which all means of communication are controlled by a Ministry of Truth and dissidents are persecuted by the political police. Orwell wrote the book as a warning that the whole world could turn into the Soviet system of the time. Obviously, the threat did not materialize. The United States remains a democracy governed by a constitution and by the rule of law, with a pluralistic media. Yet there are some disturbing signs that the propaganda methods Orwell describes in his novel have taken root in contemporary America.

What I find most troubling is that the American people seem so susceptible to manipulation. The outstanding example is the War on Terror, which has imposed a false and misleading interpretation of the threat presented by the terrorist attack of 9/11. The general public has bought into that interpretation so com-

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pletely that even though it criticizes the war in Iraq, it is loath to challenge the War on Terror as a false metaphor. This is not the only case where public opinion has been successfully manipulated. Political discourse is rife with examples: the Clear Skies Act actually relaxes the rules on air pollution; the Healthy Forest Restoration Act actually permits clear-cutting; and the No Child Left Behind Act imposes testing standards without providing the necessary funds. Needless to say, both sides of American politics engage in deliberate deception at election time.

How could propaganda methods reminiscent of Orwell's worst fears prove so successful in contemporary America? How could the public be so badly misled?

MY OWN ANSWER goes right to the heart of the concept of an open society. I shall argue that open societies in which various ideas compete for acceptance are just as susceptible to deliberate deception as are closed societies, where a particular ideology enjoys a monopoly. We cannot protect ourselves against false metaphors and other techniques of deception unless we reaffirm our commitment to understanding reality. But that is not as simple as it sounds. Why should we bother with understanding reality when reality can be so easily manipulated? To answer this question in the affirmative, we need to reexamine the relationship between our ideas and reality. This mental exercise will lead to a reformulation of the concept of open society. I will need to take the reader through this exercise even at the cost of getting embroiled in a somewhat dense philosophical argument. I apologize in advance.

As conscious beings, we seek to understand and form a view of the world in which we live. Let's call this pursuit of knowl-

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edge the *cognitive function* of the mind. The need for cognition arises because we want to make an impact on the world, so that it will correspond to our desires. I used to think of this as the participating function, but for the purposes of this argument, I should like to rename it the *manipulating function*. The need to at once comprehend and influence reality is the task that confronts us as thinking agents.

The two functions—cognitive and manipulative, knowledge-seeking and reality-influencing—go hand in hand, but they work in opposite directions. The cognitive function takes a situation as given and seeks to form a view that corresponds to it. The manipulating function takes desires as given and seeks to make situations correspond to them. In an imaginary world, where the two functions can always be isolated from each other, both could work perfectly: People's views could correspond to reality and the consequences of their actions could correspond to their expectations. But that is not the world in which we live. People perform both functions at the same time, and since the two work in opposite directions, they can interfere with each other. I call this interference *reflexivity*. Reflexivity explains why our understanding is imperfect and why our actions have unintended consequences.

The feedback loop of reflexivity affects only a relatively narrow segment of reality. In the realm of natural phenomena, events occur independently of what anybody thinks; therefore, natural science can explain and predict the course of events with reasonable accuracy. Reflexivity is confined to social phenomena, but where it is present, it introduces an element of uncertainty both into our understanding and into the actual course of events. Consider the statement "It is raining." It is either true or false, depending on whether it is, in fact, raining. Now consider

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the statement "You are my enemy." That may be both true and false, depending, among other things, on your reaction.

Uncertainty is difficult to live with. We need to know what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong, in order to make decisions. There are two ways to deal with uncertainty. One is to embrace ideologies and religious belief systems that lay claim to some ultimate truth. The other is to act on a set of beliefs, knowing that we may be wrong. The latter is much harder to cope with. Dogmatic ideologies remove doubt, but they have a major drawback: They are bound to be false. They can be imposed on society only by repressive methods that stifle free discussion and prevent a better understanding of reality. Such ideologies lead to a closed society. By contrast, open society is based on the recognition that our understanding is inherently imperfect. Although this insight forces us to live with uncertainty, it also allows us to get closer to reality through a critical process of trial and error. The positive results of the critical process may be sufficient to compensate for the hardships connected with uncertainty. When that is the case, open societies are able to resist the temptations of totalitarian ideologies.

The United States is an open society, but people are not widely familiar with the idea. The Constitution of the United States predated by a century and a half the philosophical concept of open society. The founding fathers drew their inspiration directly from the Enlightenment. The philosophers of the Enlightenment put their faith in reason, expecting it to provide a full and accurate picture of reality. Reason was supposed to work like a searchlight, illuminating a reality that lay passively, awaiting discovery. The possibility that the decisions of thinking agents could influence the situation was left out of the account. The Enlightenment failed to recognize reflexivity. It

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postulated an imaginary world in which the manipulating function could not interfere with the cognitive function. This resulted in a distorted view of reality, but one that was appropriate to an age when so many things were waiting to be discovered and so many exciting discoveries were in fact made. Although the faith in reason was not fully justified, it produced truly impressive results, which were sufficient to sustain the Enlightenment for two centuries. The ideas of the Enlightenment have become deeply ingrained in Western civilization.

Ideas that do not fully correspond to reality but nevertheless produce positive results have played an important role in history. I call them "fertile fallacies." I would go so far as to claim that all civilizations are based on fertile fallacies. The Enlightenment is a prime example. It ignored reflexivity, but it produced the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights, which are among the greatest achievements of our civilization. These documents assert the greatest degree of individual freedom compatible with the freedom of others. But the underlying assumption—that freedom of thought and speech will assure that reason will prevail—is incorrect.

Where exactly is the fallacy in the Enlightenment? It lies in separating reason from reality. Although the philosophers of the Enlightenment understood the role of the will and emotion, they gave precedence to the cognitive function over the manipulating function. The Enlightenment fallacy is an obvious one to fall into. We need to keep our thinking separate from the subject matter that we think about to be able to formulate factually correct statements, and we must give precedence to the cognitive function over the manipulating function if we are interested in pursuing knowledge. The separation of reason and reality is commonly called dualism, and it is deeply rooted in

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Western philosophy. Nevertheless, it contains a fallacy. It is appropriate to the realm of natural science, where reason is, in fact, separated from reality, and events occur independently of what anybody thinks. It is misleading in social science, where the participants' thinking forms part of the reality that scientists seek to study. And it is downright false in politics, where the manipulating function prevails over the cognitive.

In the realm of natural science, facts and statements genuinely belong to separate universes. That is why scientists have been so successful in establishing theories that correspond to the facts. In the realm of social science, the separation is less clear-cut because thoughts and statements form part of the subject matter. Medicine is on the border between natural and social science. In social science, theories may influence the facts. This makes it harder to understand reality, while opening a loophole for manipulating reality. To take advantage of the loophole, social theories need to at least pretend that they serve the cognitive function in order to benefit from the reputation that scientific method has achieved. Marxism serves as the prime example. Karl Popper exposed Marx by showing that Marxism does not qualify as scientific because the theory cannot be falsified. As I have tried to show elsewhere (*The Alchemy of Finance*, 1987), the same argument applies to the notion that markets always tend toward equilibrium. I call that notion "market fundamentalism" and I consider it just as tendentious and manipulative as Marxism.

Natural scientists may wish to manipulate reality so as to make it conform to their desires, but they cannot get away with it. That is why they have to go through the laborious process of first gaining knowledge and then applying it, in order to bring about the desired results. In politics, by contrast, the desired re-

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sults can be brought about more directly by manipulating people's perceptions and, if necessary, deliberately deceiving them. Politicians are likely to give precedence to the manipulating function because their chances of getting elected and staying in power depend on it. Once they are in power, the cognitive function assumes greater importance, because that determines to what extent their policies will produce desired outcomes. But those who give precedence to the cognitive function at all times are unlikely to attain and occupy positions of power.

The achievements of natural science fascinated philosophers and led to the logical positivist school, which asserted that statements that do not correspond to the facts are meaningless. This idea, of course, is false because the subjective views of participants—which by definition do not correspond to the facts—can objectively alter the situations to which they refer.

Karl Popper was a trenchant critic of logical positivism, yet he, too, bought into the idea that the purpose of critical thinking is to gain a better understanding of reality. Until quite recently, I was too much under Popper's influence to recognize the error in this assumption. I did not realize that in political discourse the cognitive function takes precedence over the manipulating function. That insight came to me when I asked myself the question: How could the Bush administration mislead the American public so badly?

My failure to recognize that political discourse is dominated by the manipulating function is a glaring example of the sway that the Enlightenment fallacy holds over our thinking. After all, I arrived at the concept of reflexivity nearly fifty years ago, yet I continued to be guided by Popper's concept of open society. I now recognize that the purpose of political discourse in a democracy is to get elected and stay in power. Those who think

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that democratic debate primarily serves the cognitive function are victims of the Enlightenment fallacy. In his 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language," Orwell inveighed against the abuse of language in service of the manipulating function—a concept he did not recognize, but the workings of which he understood all too well. Orwell meant *1984* to serve as a terrifying example, and his essay "Politics and the English Language" as a lesson for future generations. It is ironic that today his seminal essay is largely ignored and *1984* is used as a textbook by unscrupulous manipulators such as Republican consultant Frank Luntz, who claims credit for many of the most successful deceptions practiced by the radical right in America.

THE TENDENCY TO MANIPULATE public opinion is not peculiar to contemporary America. It is innate to the political process. It prevails both in open and closed societies, although the methods and institutions are liable to be different. Yet the present situation in America is unique. It is both different and more dangerous than in the past. The techniques of deception have undergone enormous improvements since Orwell's time. Many of these techniques were developed in connection with the advertising and marketing of commercial products and services, and then adapted to politics. Their distinguishing feature is that they can be bought for money. More recently, cognitive science has helped to make the techniques of deception even more effective.

The findings of cognitive science demonstrate that the disembodied intellect, or reason as something separate from reality, is a figment of our imagination. Reason is inextricably intertwined with emotion. Moreover, emotions can be activated

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without engaging consciousness because only a small proportion of mental processes ever enter into consciousness. Negative and positive emotions involve different neural circuits, and the two are not directly connected, so they can be independently influenced.¹ Television connects with the emotions more directly than the printed word. Seeing something on television activates the same neural networks as experiencing that same thing directly.

Television and cognitive science combined have enabled political operatives to arouse emotions in ways that bypass conscious judgment.² The fact that people can be successfully manipulated has given rise to political professionals not bound by the Enlightenment fallacy, and they concentrate only on getting results. They utilize the findings of cognitive science and appeal primarily to emotions rather than reason. In politics, such men and women have found a home on the radical right because the political establishment was too hamstrung by the Enlightenment fallacy. In this way, the radical right stole a march on more traditionally minded politicians and political professionals. First, they captured the Republican Party, and then, using the terrorist attack of 9/11 as a pretext, took over most levers of power. Both Republicans and Democrats engage in deliberate deception, but the radical right has been more successful, partly because it is not hindered by the Enlightenment fallacy and partly because it has been better financed. We have witnessed the rise of professional dishonesty: People whose job it is to manipulate reality can take professional pride in their accomplishments. Moreover, they are liable to enjoy the respect of an American public that admires success no matter how it is achieved. The fact that professional dishonesty has become respectable casts doubt on the concept of open society as it was

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formulated by Karl Popper and later adopted by others, including me. This adds urgency to the reexamination

Open society is based on the recognition that perfect knowledge is unattainable, but we can gain a better understanding of reality by engaging in critical thinking. Under the influence of the Enlightenment fallacy, proponents of open society failed to recognize that in politics, gathering public support takes precedence over the pursuit of truth. As a result, the democratic debate does not necessarily lead to a better understanding of reality.

This insight should lead us not to abandon the concept of open society, but to revise and reaffirm the case for it. The revision consists in abandoning the tacit assumption that political discourse aims at a better understanding of reality and reintroducing it as an explicit requirement. This means that open society cannot be ensured merely by the division of powers, free speech, and free elections; it also requires a commitment to the pursuit of truth.

Understanding reality is a social enterprise that requires all the participants to abide by certain ground rules. The scientific method provides the most successful example of this. To conduct successful tests requires an agreement on principles, such as the requirement that scientific experiments have to be replicable. The ground rules for political discourse cannot be identical to scientific method, but they should be similar in character: They should constitute socially accepted values such as truthfulness and respect for other people's opinions. Why should politicians bother with understanding reality when it can be so easily manipulated? Only because the public cares about the truth and punishes politicians when it catches them in deliberate deception. And why should the public care? Because the

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misinterpretation of reality produces negative results. Politics is about the pursuit of power, not the pursuit of truth. Nevertheless, the truth matters because deception misleads people in choosing their representatives, distorts policy choices and the execution of policies, interferes with holding politicians accountable, and destroys trust in democracy.

Recent history provides convincing evidence that if you engage in policies based on a misrepresentation of reality, reality is liable to catch up with you. That is what happened after 9/11—not because of the terrorist attack, but because of the way the Bush administration responded to it, declaring a War on Terror and treating any criticism as unpatriotic. This smoke screen allowed the Bush administration to invade Iraq on false pretenses, violate human rights on a large scale, abandon the Geneva Conventions and habeas corpus, restrict civil liberties, and extend executive powers beyond the limits envisioned by the Constitution. The results have been disastrous.

The public is now awakening, as if from a bad dream. What can we learn from the experience? The importance of the critical process that is the hallmark of open society has, in fact, been reaffirmed. Open society remains preferable to a dictatorship or the rule of a philosopher king, not because an electorate that is constantly bombarded by misleading messages is a better judge of reality than a philosopher king, but because the electorate is in a better position to correct the mistakes of the rulers than the rulers themselves. It takes time for a divergence between outcomes and expectations to become apparent, but once it does, the electorate can replace the rulers.

What we have learned—what we should have known—is that the supremacy of the cognitive function in political discourse cannot be taken for granted. It can be ensured only by an

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electorate that respects reality and punishes politicians who lie or engage in other forms of deception.

The concept of open society I am proposing here differs in an important respect from the one I inherited from Karl Popper. Popper took the supremacy of the cognitive function for granted. I now recognize that assumption was false: In political discourse, the manipulative function takes precedence. That implicit assumption has to be replaced by an explicit requirement that people respect reality and hold politicians accountable. This requirement is *additional* to the various freedoms with which open society has been traditionally associated. Without a commitment to the cognitive function, the critical process that Karl Popper extolled will not produce the desired results.

That commitment is all the more difficult to make now that we know that reality can be manipulated. This poses a twofold obstacle to the pursuit of cognition. First, reality becomes more difficult to understand because it constitutes a moving target: All the tendentious and biased interpretations of reality make an impact on the reality that needs to be understood. Second, the rules and conventions that work so well in science do not carry the same weight in political discourse because the participants are more interested in manipulating reality in their favor than in understanding it. Nevertheless, the importance of the cognitive function needs to be reaffirmed because the misinterpretation of reality is bound to bring unintended adverse consequences. What better time to bring this argument home than the present, when the unintended adverse consequences of the War on Terror are so clearly visible?

How can the cognitive function be given more weight when the political discourse is dominated by the manipulating function? When politicians distort reality, the electorate ought to

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punish them for it by voting them out of power. If the electorate were committed to a better understanding of reality, political professionals would learn to give it more weight. The practical difficulty is in recognizing when the political professionals are distorting reality. There is an important role here for the media, the political elite, and the educational system, which must all act responsibly in their commitment to the principles of open society. They have to act as watchdogs protecting a less well-informed and more gullible public.

WHAT CAN A RESPONSIBLE MEDIA and a committed educated elite do to protect the public from deliberate deception? The public needs to be inoculated against the various techniques of deception by being made aware of them. The most effective techniques operate at the subconscious level. When emotions can be aroused by methods that bypass consciousness, the public is left largely defenseless. But if the public is made aware of the various techniques, it is likely to reject them.

There is much to be learned from recent experience. When I heard President Bush warning that people who do not support his policies are supporting the terrorists, I heard alarm bells ringing. I had been exposed to Nazi and Communist propaganda in my youth, and I knew the warning signs. The American public did not share my alarm because it had not been exposed to similar manipulation before. But now that Americans have had the experience and have seen the results, they ought to have an allergic reaction when they are exposed to similar methods.

My personal experience has given me the opportunity to study the process up close. When I took an active role in

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opposing President Bush's 2004 reelection, I was subjected to a concerted campaign of personal vilification. The attack was led by the Republican National Committee, which sent out regular mass mailings making various unflattering and untrue allegations about me. These were then amplified by *The O'Reilly Factor*, Rush Limbaugh, the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Post*, among others. Feeding into these channels was a nebulous opposition research network financed by the Pittsburgh billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife. It was the same shadowy network that persecuted the Clintons when they were in the White House and finally succeeded in entrapping President Clinton in a perjury. The campaign recently gained new momentum when two operatives, David Horowitz and Richard Poe, published a book entitled *The Shadow Party: How George Soros, Hillary Clinton, and Sixties Radicals Seized Control of the Democratic Party*, and when Bill O'Reilly devoted a chapter to me in his book *Culture Warrior* and featured me prominently in his shows.

This campaign painted a totally false and misleading picture of me. I was allegedly a Nazi collaborator in World War II; I was said to have profited from my foundations in Russia; I was the Lenin of an anti-American conspiracy, to mention only the most blatant lies. I was defenseless against these accusations. There were no legal remedies available, and to contest the allegations publicly would have merely rewarded my attackers by drawing attention to their spurious campaign. But the experience allowed me to witness their manipulative methods firsthand. As the attacks went on, I could identify a number of recurring deceptive devices and rhetorical techniques, including:

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1. *Conflating facts and opinions:* The writer gives a reasonably factual account and then introduces an opinion as if it were a fact. Someone who disagrees with this opinion can then be accused of deliberately and knowingly falsifying facts.
2. *Guilt by association:* The writer establishes ties, however tenuous, between the object of attack and others, and holds the object of attack responsible for the behavior of others.
3. *Conspiracy theory:* The writer assumes that everyone who is mentioned is acting in concert.
4. *Mixing sources:* The writer quotes a number of reliable sources and then mixes in some products of "opposition research," giving the impression that they are equally reliable.
5. *Transference:* The writer accuses his opponent of having the same motives or using the same techniques that he has or uses himself.
6. *False labeling:* The writer divides the world between us and them, good and bad, left and right, and then condemns people by labeling them.
7. *False patriotism:* The writer accuses the opponent of being unpatriotic and anti-American.

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Perhaps the most influential of these devices is what I have called transference: accusing your opponent of having the same motives or using the same techniques as you. It is the key to O'Reilly's book. He claims to be a conservative who is trying to defend America against the incursions of what he calls "Secular Progressives." In fact, he is a radical who is trying to overturn the secular tradition, which is enshrined in the Constitution. Similarly, the authors of *The Shadow Party* transfer to the Democratic Party one of the defining qualities of Republicans: The Democrats are depicted as having been hijacked by the well-funded advocates of a radical ideology. It is relevant that David Horowitz, who accuses me of being "the Lenin of the anti-American conspiracy," used to be a Trotskyite. Similarly, Ann Coulter's last best-seller, *Godless*, transfers her own brand of religion to the liberals when she speaks of the "Church of Liberalism."

Propaganda often goes beyond transference by completely reversing meanings and turning reality on its head. That is what Fox News does when it calls itself "fair and balanced" and what the Bush administration does when it uses names like the "Clear Skies Act" and the "No Child Left Behind Act." Republican pollster Frank Luntz says that he learned the technique from George Orwell, so it would be appropriate to call it Newspeak. Karl Rove and his acolytes have carried the Orwellian technique even further by selecting their opponents' strongest traits and treating them as their Achilles' heels, using insinuations as well as bold-faced lies. Their goal is to portray opponent achievements as phony. That is how they defeated Vietnam War veterans Senator Max Cleland in 2002 and John Kerry in 2004.

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The common feature of these Newspeak devices is their total disregard for reality. A false picture of reality is driven into people's consciousness through constant repetition. A whole network of publications is devoted to the task, some of which manage to parade as mainstream media. These deceptive practices have come increasingly to dominate the American political discourse, particularly in paid political announcements. Both sides use them, but the radical right has been more effective.

The general public has proven to be remarkably susceptible to the manipulation of truth, yet I believe it may be possible to inoculate the public against false arguments by arousing resentment against being manipulated. This could be served by identifying the techniques of manipulation and naming them when they are used. In 1980, Ronald Reagan scored big against Jimmy Carter in the second presidential debate just by saying, "There you go again." Perhaps the same result could be achieved if we said, "There you go again" every time an Orwellian Newspeak technique is used.

The Pursuit of Facts Project

A Concept Paper for the Open Society Institute By the New America Foundation

Revised: February 8, 2011

The incumbent American media industry is being overthrown. The unfolding digital revolution in technology, publishing, advertising, television and computing has upended the traditional values and function of journalism, with far-reaching implications for American elections and political competition, public debate and social cohesion. The authority of traditional gatekeepers has been undermined and channels of information radically altered; the rules of media and politics are each being torn up and rewritten.

The United States has entered a period of disorder characterized by the ability of private actors to assert their interests through media, online and via television, to manipulate speech and public opinion. America today is a case study of the observation that open societies are as susceptible to manipulation and deception as closed societies.

The problem runs deeper than Fox News. Digital ecosystems are creating echo effects in American public discourse, by which lies and manipulations spread through multiple channels, often deliberately amplified by private interests.

These trends are dangerous and must be challenged. We see an opportunity to build a new coalition, online and off, to challenge the manipulators. There will likely be a host of interventions and innovations during the next several years designed to address the decline of fact-based public and political discourse. Rather than allowing these efforts to form in isolated silos, we see an opportunity to network them, and to define and publicize a broad American movement committed to the rule of fact. This coalition should encompass journalism, academia, libraries, science and other institutions committed by charter to the pursuit of truth.

New America is well positioned to serve as an intellectual home for these efforts, to mediate and moderate debates, conduct research, publish and communicate with media, and draw other institutions, particularly universities, into a new discourse about the role of facts in American public life.

One pragmatic basis for this work would be to strengthen and amplify the emerging fact-checking movement in journalism. The explosion of fact checking sites has been one of the few bright spots in a rapidly changing media landscape dominated by the rise of opinion journalism. Like their mainstream ancestors, the best fact checkers are dedicated to the principles of balanced, non-partisan journalism, approaching the evidence with an open, independent frame of mind in much the same way that a natural scientist would test a hypothesis. At the same time, many have abandoned the “he said, she said” conventions taught in some journalism schools in favor of a truth-oriented approach. They do not shy away from reaching conclusions when those conclusions can be supported by a rigorous analysis of all the available evidence.

Lee Bolinger of Columbia University, already a collaborator with New America, would be one candidate to partner in this effort, as would Michael Crow, the innovative president of

Arizona State University, where New America has formed partnerships for conferencing on science, public policy, as well as a new joint center devoted to the promotion of social cohesion in Arizona and beyond. From these platforms and New America's rich connections to journalists, broadcasters and publishers, we would seek to build allies at all levels of government, media and politics.

Some of the activities we envision would include:

Leveraging University Resources in Media. Both the fact checking community and local noncommercial media would benefit from partnerships. Universities are ready-made to provide them with knowledgeable faculty members and energetic students. Historically, few universities have played the roles they could. World Affairs Councils and public radio licensees associated with universities offer additional connective tissue. Pilot projects might be undertaken initially in cities where New America already operates.

Convening Debate About The Pursuit of Facts in Public Life. To emerge as a paradigm of post-Cronkite journalism, fact checking requires visibility and diverse voices, to define the movement in an enduring, forward-looking way. New America would conduct research about the nascent movement and use these findings to convene conferences, media events and debates among practitioners and thought leaders.

Defining Standards and Best Practices. Fact checkers traditionally labored in the back offices of a few high-end magazines. Now they are moving into a room of their own, derived from traditional journalism but distinct from it, too. What are the borders of this new fact checking profession and movement? What are its values, standards and best practices? New America would seek continuously to moderate, publicize and advance discussion about such questions, drawing from multiple professions grounded in peer-reviewed empiricism.

Writing, Publishing and Speaking. New America would create a Fact Check Resource Center to support the work of different groups of fact checkers. This would involve identifying the themes that are likely to dominate the next election cycle, assembling networks of independent experts, and compiling user-friendly databases to resolve controversies that typically arise in election campaigns. The Fact Check Resource Center could take a lead in networking the fact checkers through the use of collaborative online tools and by convening symposia. The Center would thus act as a catalyst for the creation of a national fact checking community, similar to the fraternity of investigative journalists represented by such nonprofit organizations as the Investigative Reporters and Editors. The Center's professionals would write and speak about their work and the larger emerging movement.

Leveraging Scientific Associations. From the Scopes trial and the debates surrounding Glenn Beck, faith, demagoguery and science have contested one another in public. Science, fortunately, has won out at nearly all of the most important intersections. Yet scientific associations remain too muted in public debate. The current environment offers an opportunity for scientific associations and institutions to defend empiricism as a basis for public debate. New America would seek to convene, rally, define and amply scientific groups, alongside universities, as it builds a movement devoted to the pursuit of facts.

Strengthening the Fact Checkers

Journalistic fact checkers played a significant role in the 2008 election cycle and are likely to play an even more important role in the 2012 presidential election. The model first established by national fact checkers, such as Factcheck.org, Politifact, and the Washington Post Fact Checker has percolated down to the level of individual states and cities. Nonprofits such as Voice of San Diego and local commercial television newsrooms normally devoted to if-it-bleeds-it-leads sensationalism have also embraced political fact checking to a striking extent. Although no serious study has been conducted on the fact-checking phenomenon (a gap that the Project would address), anecdotal evidence suggests that politicians are adjusting their behavior to respond to the “verification blowback” of these fact checkers. As reported recently by the American Journalism review, politicians are taking much greater care to document their charges, claims and campaign ads.

It would not be desirable or necessary to duplicate or to compete with Politifact, Factcheck.org, or the more advocacy-driven groups that have proven to be particularly effective in this space, such as Media Matters. New America would instead resource, strengthen, promote and seek to muster and organize new institutional allies for the incipient fact-checking movement – universities, scientists, research institutes, and other leaders and institutions devoted by their ideals to the pursuit of truth. The Resource Center described above would stand at the center of this effort.

Universities, scientific organizations and the like would be linked as deep, adept resources for fact checking and encouraged to conduct their own fact checking directly, employing students and others. Second, university and scientific leaders would also be summoned into a broader discourse about the role of facts and reason in American politics – to define and advance a movement, a narrative, in journalism and beyond.

By late 2011 or early 2012, as the primary season begins, the Project could be ready to organize a national conference to rally, publicize and define the fact-checking movement’s role in the upcoming campaign. Its staff would seek to appear and speak at professional journalism conferences and membership conventions to exchange ideas and promote public-minded fact checking as a prospective department of mainstream news organizations.

Promoting Media and Digital Citizenship

Political discourse is increasingly dependent on digital spaces that are shaped, owned and operated by private companies. Politics are not merely conducted through the Internet: Decisions and actions by a range of public and private actors shape the nature of the discourse itself. A new layer of politics has emerged: The politics of control over digital spaces and platforms themselves.

At present, the American public is barely engaged in this politics. As the Wikileaks story has shown, there is an urgent need for stronger coverage of the politics and geopolitics of our new digital realm. It is essential that citizens understand the private interests shaping Internet and media discourse, and learn how to engage with them effectively. Only then can greater pressure be brought to bear on the private sector, regulators and politicians. One idea to pursue this goal would be to launch a news/information service (tentative title: “The Netizen Report”) to cover the digital world as a politically contested space. The idea would be to combine professional journalism, expert research and the use of social media to shine a light on the activities of all digital actors.

A related effort to combat “digital spin” would track attempts to manipulate public opinion through the new media, whether by commercial companies, governments, or political parties. These include organized attempts to manipulate on-line reviews and Google search results. Consider the case of a rapidly expanding company called ReputationDefender, which claims to be “the leader in online reputation management.” The company promises to promote favorable information and suppress “negative search results.” The need for disinterested watchdogs to monitor this new industry is obvious.

New America’s Role

We are grateful for our past partnerships with the Open Society Institute and pleased to be engaged in this discussion. The ideas we have developed with O.S.I.’s staff to date strike us as unusually exciting and well suited to our strengths, talent pool and activities. New America has become a national leader in media and technology policy. Our Open Technology Initiative works in Washington and in communities nationwide to promote broadband inclusion, net neutrality, open technologies and platforms, and other public interest goals. Native Public Media, the largest nonprofit involved in media and broadband policy in Indian Country, has merged into New America. Rebecca MacKinnon, a global thought leader in online civil society, has joined New America to complete her forthcoming book, *Consent of the Networked*, which will define some of the core values and aspirations of global online civil society. New America fellows Tim Wu and Evgeny Morozov have recently published influential, provocative books about the connections between industrial structure and free speech, and between open technology and authoritarian governments.

These and related endeavors at New America during the last several years would inform and strengthen the Pursuit of Facts Project proposed here, ensuring that its launch and development would be supported by strong, credible ideas, media visibility and a commitment to collaboration.

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER

To the Open Society Institute

Barbara M. Jones, Director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association

Deborah Caldwell-Stone, Deputy Director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom

January 25, 2011

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE: PROMOTING AND USING AMERICA'S LIBRARIES AS A PLATFORM FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

A. Introduction: The Problem of Media Illiteracy

The advent of mass communication via radio and television was heralded as a means for democratizing, educating, and providing equitable public access to information. The three broadcast networks presented news and information programming pursuant to government regulations that promoted fairness and neutrality in support of the public interest. National events—such as the Kennedy assassinations and the Vietnam Conflict—were collective experiences explained by journalists like Walter Cronkite or Huntley/Brinkley. While individuals could and did disagree, there was a shared understanding about the need for reasoned discussion and debate about policy. And, there were far more hard-copy daily newspapers and newsmagazines that provided content and detail for those desiring a more thorough understanding of current events and policies. The public schools also provided a common ground for students to receive media literacy—civics classes. Students were taught how to analyze a variety of media sources and to recognize rhetorical devices that biased the reports.

Today, the multitudinous channels of cable television and the unlimited resources of the Internet allow individuals to “fine tune” their news and information sources, so that they only hear news and information confirming their beliefs, while tuning out any alternatives that might alter their opinions. Deregulation of the broadcast media, the fading of the public interest requirement, the decline in journalistic standards, and the need to compete for the larger and larger audiences in a noisy marketplace of ideas have contributed to a set of circumstances that have shattered any kind of shared understanding or forum for discussion of complex ideas. And we know from Pew Research Center reports that the majority of Americans get their news from TV.

Critics such as Robert McChesney argue persuasively that these changes have ushered in an age of “sound bites,” or memes, with an accompanying dumbing down of the news. Cable news managers and media consultants have created a mind-numbing formula that encourages reporters and commentators to employ repetitive brief, sound bites to provide a simplified version of events. Many of the manipulative communication techniques described in George Orwell's *1984* - guilt by association; accusations of treason; simplistic labeling; and conspiracy theories - are in use today—

on the left and on the right. The current absence of formal public school education concerning media literacy and the tools used to manipulate public opinion contribute to the success of these rhetorical tactics.

And the Internet and social media have their own problems. Twitter requires that ideas be reduced to 140 characters or less. Bloggers disseminate every rumor and allegation as truth, and online commentators disparage and vilify those who dare to disagree with them. The result is that reasoned debate and civility are dying. One need only read the news on any given day to read about how lack of civility has disrupted a city council meeting or other public gathering. The firing of Shirley Sherrod at the Department of Agriculture, in which her boss, as well as her opposition, made decisions about her employment and beliefs based on half-baked information provided by sensationalist bloggers demonstrates how rumor and innuendo have replaced reasoned reporting and thoughtful discussion. It is difficult, if not impossible to find a nuanced discussion of the U.S. health care debate or the global economic collapse on any mass media source.

B. Why Are Libraries Poised to Address the Problem of Media Illiteracy?

Current surveys reveal that libraries are considered one of the most trusted community resources for diverse information. ALA's policies and activities help libraries to maintain and build up this public trust by supporting libraries' mission to provide open access to a wide range of ideas and opinions. ALA's extensive work in these areas provide the necessary experience to successfully frame media literacy issues and to reach out to public, school, and academic libraries and encourage them to serve as community educational centers to disseminate this information.

1. ALA's long tradition of promoting intellectual freedom and the use of libraries as limited public forums:

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Freedom to Read Foundation, vigorously promote and defend the legal conception of libraries as protected public forums where the librarians have the right to disseminate information, and the public has the right to receive it. As a result, public libraries already provide their users with multiple opportunities to encounter and discover various points of view. For example, many public libraries establish diverse collections of information, open their meeting rooms for use of other organizations, and facilitate the use of the library for town-hall type meetings and Kettering-style National Issues Forums.

In short, ALA has the information, the infrastructure, and the written philosophy to support the idea of providing balanced views in libraries.

2. Experience with promoting and using the civic engagement process:

In November 2009, ALA partnered with the Kettering Foundation to establish the ALA Center for Public Life. The ALA Center for Public Life has been actively training librarians from all types of libraries to convene and moderate deliberative forums in their communities. Using the methods and tools provided through these training sessions, ALA members conducted successful

community meetings in their libraries, using Kettering's problem-solving dialogue techniques to engage the ordinary citizen in issues of national concern, such as health care reform. The community meetings, much as the old town meeting, provide a respectful forum with a structure that allows every voice to be heard.

One training program hosted by the ALA Center for Public Life helped local librarians prepare for and participate in a nationwide deliberative forum event, "Privacy: Who Do You Trust?" held during Choose Privacy Week, May 2-8, 2010.

3. *ALA divisions covering all age groups and types of libraries to reach diverse audiences:*

ALA's many divisions service all types of libraries and reach every constituency within the library community. These include the Public Library Association; the American Association of School Libraries; the Association of College and Research Libraries; and the Association of Library Trustees, Friends, and Foundations. All of these divisions, their administrators, and members can—and do—address the freedom to read, information literacy, and community civic engagement.

4. *Established ALA units for dealing with legal and legislative issues:*

ALA maintains several units whose role is to advocate for libraries, library issues and the library profession. These include the Office for Intellectual Freedom, which promotes unfettered access to libraries and library materials and educates librarians and the general public about the nature and importance of intellectual freedom in libraries. In addition to guiding the development of policies that are considered the ultimate resource for legal and policy decision on intellectual freedom in libraries, OIF successfully fought (and continues to fight) certain provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act and other legal issues surrounding censorship and barriers to information access. The Washington Office monitors federal legislation, policy, and regulatory issues of importance to libraries, including actions of the FCC and other relevant regulatory agencies. The Public Information Office works with media outlets and other channels of communication to convey ALA's message to the American public. They are acutely aware of the issues discussed in this proposal and have been excellent supporters of Choose Privacy Week and Banned Books Week.

5. *Experience with public programming that promotes free expression and civic engagement:*

Consistent with ALA's educational mission, many ALA offices and units develop highly-regarded public programming, which ranges from traveling exhibits to webinars to face-to-face workshops at state library association meetings. ALA's Public Programs Office promotes cultural programming as an essential part of library service and is responsible for such renowned reading programs as "One Book, One Community," and traveling exhibitions like "Lincoln: the Constitution and the Civil War," "Becoming American—New Immigration Stories," and "Lewis & Clark and the Indian Country."

The Office for Intellectual Freedom has sponsored Banned Books Week every September for 29 years, which is the most popular and highly publicized program of the American Library

Association. Part of the mission of Banned Books Week is to advocate the reading and discussion of books *critically as a whole* and to reject the mass media model of picking and choosing elements of any given book. The ALA website documents the hundreds of libraries and bookstores that sponsor readouts, essay contests, parades, and other events to raise community awareness of censorship; the new Judith Krug Fund awards cash prizes to libraries so that they can develop local Banned Books Week programming.

Thanks to funding from the OSI, the Office now sponsors an annual Choose Privacy Week as well. As noted above, last year's activities included a Kettering-style National Issues Forum on privacy.

6. *Collaboration with other civil liberties groups to promote public policy goals:*

The Office for Intellectual Freedom is closely allied with FEN (Freedom of Expression Network); the Media Coalition; the National Coalition Against Censorship; and other civil liberties groups. We regularly read and/or interact with such media reform organizations as Media Matters and ReThink Media. We also work with the American Constitution Society, which is currently working to provide alternative models of constitutional interpretation to Congress, the media, and the general public to broaden and enrich the discussion of the U.S. Constitution sparked by Congresswoman Michelle Bachman's "Conservative Constitutional Seminars."

7. *Commitment to education as a means of achieving public policy goals and promoting social justice, as evidenced by our work with OSI on two "Choose Privacy" grants.*

The Office for Intellectual Freedom, consistent with its mission, is committed to education as a means of achieving public policy goals and promoting social justice. This is exemplified by OIF's recent work with OSI on promoting and educating the public about the importance of individual privacy. Similar projects include a Ford Foundation grant that funded a highly successful program that sought to educate and equip municipal and city attorneys with the information and skills needed to defend the library as a forum for free expression and the preservation of minority viewpoints., as well as an initiative to provide public librarians with the information they needed to defend user privacy from unwarranted intrusions by law enforcement.

8. *ALA's highly respected national program on Information Literacy that could easily be applied to media literacy.*

The Association of College and Research Libraries' information literacy initiative is the program considered to be the "North Star" of the profession for teaching information literacy:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/infolit/index.cfm>

ACRL's information literacy standards, conferences, and training provide academic librarians with the pedagogical and content expertise to teach students how to analyze and use information resources wisely. The program emphasizes the importance of learning to use evidence and documentation, and how to analyze the reliability of various types of resources. Academic libraries

already apply these principles and activities to all types of library information, but their approach could easily be adapted as a media literacy curriculum for public and school libraries.

C. *Activities for Libraries to Promote Media Literacy to the General Public*

The following ideas for promoting media literacy and civic engagement to the public are based on previous successful projects at the American Library Association, with a focus here on the Office for Intellectual Freedom. We are happy to discuss these in more detail and send examples.

1. ***Educational tool kits, videos, social media communications, or resource guides*** tailored for various age groups, can be developed so that teachers, librarians, or parents can use them for creating media awareness. For example, George Soros has identified seven “deceptive devices and rhetorical techniques” used by the media in his article, “What I Didn’t Know: Open Society Reconsidered.” Modular lessons could be developed for each of these techniques. *ALA materials would draw examples from the entire political spectrum.* Students could be encouraged to collect examples from the media, or develop their own videos with flip cameras. ALA could mount these materials on a web site. For Choose Privacy Week, OIF produced a resource guide—another option for a Media Awareness campaign.
2. ***Contests, awards, and/or cash incentives for ordinary citizens to create models*** of good civic discourse or to create newscasts of such complex issues as the movement toward renewable energy or the current health care debate. These contests would challenge applicants to use various forms of media to create their message. They could use the media awareness gained from the tool kit.
3. ***Develop a speakers’ bureau of people from countries with media restrictions.*** This list would be arranged by region, so that libraries could create public programming at a low cost. There is nothing so powerful as listening to a former East German citizen (or anyone from the former Soviet bloc) who experienced media manipulation and book censorship—or to experience Internet censorship in China or Dubai. Some of these people are immigrants and refugees and are regular users of America’s public libraries. This would give them a voice.
4. ***Collaborate with the ALA Center for Public Life*** to create civic engagement forums on the topic of media literacy. Participants would receive a background of the issues and would then do a Kettering-style problem solving forum. If these forums were conducted early in the project, ALA could adopt the ideas emanating from these forums and test their effectiveness.
5. Collaborate with the ALA Public Programs Office to develop reading programs and exhibits that promote and celebrate civic engagement and tolerance for diverse viewpoints.

D. *A Model Example of Media Literacy Using Chicago or the State of Illinois*

This example is given here because we have close knowledge of this state, but ALA has networks in many states and strong ties with state library associations. OSI and some media advocates could help ALA identify states or communities for this implementation.

Partners: Chicago Public Schools; Chicago Public Library; ALA, OSI, Illinois Library Association; Columbia College (strong media program); Media Matters, College of Du Page (has an advanced media facility and a continuing education program for library support staff); Dominican University (has a library and information science program and could provide student volunteers); University of Illinois (has an LIS program and also Robert McChesney is a professor there who could act as an advisor. Partners could also include the National Coalition Against Censorship and the faculties at Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and Loyola University.

1. ***Develop a survey as a base-line assessment of media literacy, including awareness of the rhetorical devices used by the mass media across the political spectrum.***
2. ***Develop a series of modular units focused on media literacy.*** It could be taught in the schools, but would be especially useful in libraries, because school libraries are not as closely tied to state curricular standards as classroom teachers. Topics would be developed for various age groups.
3. ***Develop National Issues Forum materials*** that frame the problem of media literacy and use techniques for public engagement in this issue.
4. ***Create incentives (cash prizes, etc.) for various groups.*** For example, high school students might create in-depth media projects with examples of “conflating facts and opinions, and then provide information on how to use evidence to create news stories.
5. ***Work with the National Association of Student Councils*** and other school organizations to create leadership in the area of civic discourse and public engagement. Train students to do Kettering-style forums in the schools.
6. ***Create oral histories of people from various parts of the world who have experienced different mass media models.***
7. ***Make sure that the activities include opportunities for the general public to participate in this dialogue.***
8. ***End the project with a conference*** to assess the success of the project and next steps for sustainability of the activities.

Name of Organization: Center for American Progress

Tax Status: 501(c)(3) public charity

Purpose of Grant: To support the Examining Anti-Muslim Bigotry Project

Grant Description: To support the launch of the Examining Anti-Muslim Bigotry Project, in which a cross-program team will: (1) study anti-Muslim bigotry in the public discourse and respond on a rapid response basis throughout the grant period using the Center for American Progress' (CAP) blogs and communications platform; (2) conduct investigative research on the Islamophobia movement and issue a major report on its findings in the first quarter of 2011; and (3) convene in the first quarter of 2011 two dozen subject experts, including representatives of progressive organizations and the Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian-American community, to formulate strategies for combating anti-Muslim xenophobia. CAP is the nation's largest progressive think tank and is located in Washington, D.C.

Previous OSI Support: \$6,759,991
\$2,150,000 from Democracy & Power Fund (2008-2010)
\$250,000 from USP Neighborhood Stabilization (2009)
\$75,000 from USP Global Warming (2009)
\$50,000 from NSHR Campaign (2009)
\$3,950,000 from Progressive Infrastructure (2005-2008)
\$150,000 from Special Chairman's (2005-2007)
\$110,000 from Justice Fund (2005-2006)
\$24,991 from MENA (2007)

Organization Budget: \$34,456,782

Project Budget: \$225,000

Major Sources of Support: Project: Individual donors \$25,000 (to be requested)

Amount Requested: \$200,000

Amount Recommended: \$200,000 [NSHR Campaign, T1: 21095]

Term: 10 months (November 16, 2010 – September 15, 2011)

Description of Organization:

The Center for American Progress (CAP) was founded in 2003 by John Podesta and is the nation's largest progressive think tank. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., CAP shapes critical

policy debates, advances innovative policy solutions, and shifts perceptions of what is politically feasible. CAP's policy experts cover a wide range of issue areas and often work across disciplines to tackle complex and interrelated issues such as national security, energy, and climate change. CAP avoids the traditional program-centric operation that think tanks typically use, and instead employs an integrated and cross-programmatic approach that allows it to develop a more comprehensive picture of the problem and find innovative solutions. CAP places value in forging relationships with key constituencies to create the campaign networks that are critical to success.

Description of Program for Which Funding Is Sought:

The Center for American Progress seeks support to launch its Examining Anti-Muslim Bigotry Project run by cross-program team that would: (1) study anti-Muslim bigotry in the public discourse and respond on a rapid response basis throughout the 10-month grant period using CAP's state of the art communications platform; (2) conduct investigative research on the Islamophobia movement and issue a major report on its findings in the first quarter of 2011; and (3) convene in the first quarter of 2011 two dozen experts, including representatives of progressive organizations and the Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian-American (AMEMSA) community, to formulate strategies for combating anti-Muslim xenophobia. The Project's components include:

1. Outreach to Subject Experts

CAP's first step will be to interview and engage in the Project the journalists, researchers, academics, and leaders in the anti-hate movement who are researching and writing on Islamophobia, and to develop a roster of knowledgeable and credible experts to whom journalists and policymakers can turn for information. As part of this process, CAP will reach out to Media Matters for America, FAIR, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute, Muslim Advocates, the Interfaith Center of New York, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the cohort of emerging Muslim leaders in CAP's Young Muslim American Voices Project that is run by CAP's Faith and Progressive Policy Institute.

2. Audit of Islamophobic Activities and Strategy Convening

CAP will research and track the activities of the most prominent drivers of Islamophobia, including Stop Islamization of America, led by Pamela Geller; the Center for Security Policy, led by Frank Gaffney; David Horowitz's Freedom Center, which sponsors Robert Spencer's Jihad Watch; the Middle East Forum, led by Daniel Pipes; the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, led by Cliff May; and Keep America Safe, led by Liz Cheney. In addition, CAP will examine the role played by right-wing media, the Tea Party movement, prominent politicians, pundits, and conservative donors in spreading anti-Muslim hysteria.

This research will form the basis of a CAP audit of Islamophobic activities that will inform a strategy convening of around two dozen researchers and advocates, including representatives of progressive organizations and the AMEMSA community. Participants will be asked to formulate strategies for combating anti-Muslim bigotry. The convening is planned for the first quarter of 2011.

3. Fact-checking Attacks, Reporting on Developments, and Issuing Timely Exposés

Throughout the grant period, the Project's research and communications professionals, bloggers, and reporters will aim to drive and define the debate over Islamophobia on a rapid response basis through research, reporting, and targeted press outreach. CAP staff will work closely with the staff of ThinkProgress and the WonkRoom, two blogs run by CAP's sister organization, CAP Action.¹

Project staff will travel to and report on right-wing conferences and meetings, such as the Middle East Forum's "Legal Lawfare" conference, and track and report on instances where representatives from Islamophobic organizations engage in local controversies, such as Frank Gaffney's recent testimony against plans to build a mosque in Mufreesboro, Tennessee. Staff will also research and monitor the leaders of the Islamophobia movement and the media outlets that promote them, debunk their attacks on Muslims, write timely exposés with the aim of changing events on the ground and providing a fresh and continual stream of sharp analysis and news, and disseminate its exposés through CAP's blogs and other media outlets.

4. Comprehensive Report

Building upon the audit, strategy convening, and research described above, CAP will release in the first quarter of 2011 a comprehensive report on Islamophobia and its connections to right-wing organizations, including those that focus on national security issues. The report will explore not only well-known leaders but groups operating under the radar that feed mainstream conservatives with anti-Muslim argumentation. The report will also explore grassroots and state-level networks and their ties to prominent conservative Christian groups that have organized local drives to ban the construction of mosques and enact anti-Sharia laws. In addition, the report will keep an eye on the emerging dynamics of anti-Muslim bigotry in connection with the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and the 2012 presidential election cycle.

This research will be conducted under the direction of CAP staff and will utilize several consultants, including Henry Fernandez, a CAP fellow who has conducted extensive work on hate groups and the rise of intolerance more broadly, and who is positioned to draw larger observations on xenophobia. The project will also utilize researchers with expertise in analyzing the finances of nonprofits and think tanks. CAP will develop a timely and strategic launch of the report that will use social media outlets and online marketing teams, as well as outreach to the Hill, the Obama administration, the media, civil rights groups, civil liberties and human rights advocates, national security groups, faith communities, and AMEMSA groups, among others.

Rationale for Recommendation:

This grant will advance the National Security and Human Rights Campaign priority of combating racial and religious profiling of AMEMSA individuals and communities in the name of national security.

While a handful of researchers, journalists, scholars, and advocates have begun to make some headway in mapping out the field of players, institutions, infrastructures, and mechanisms behind the highly secretive Islamophobia movement, we still know very little about the way in which

¹ CAP has submitted a bifurcated project budget.

the movement operates and how its work is planned, funded, implemented, and coordinated. As a result, progressives were caught off guard this summer when vitriolic anti-Muslim demonstrations erupted in opposition to plans to build the misnamed “Ground Zero Mosque,” an Islamic cultural center slated for a site several blocks away from the site of the former World Trade Center, and when a small town pastor’s threat to burn a Koran on the ninth anniversary of 9/11 became an international news story and provided a media platform for “experts” in Islam to vilify the religion as one that is incompatible with American values and to paint all Muslims with a terrorist brush.

Progressives and AMEMSA communities are in urgent need of high quality opposition research so that they can switch from playing defense and develop a proactive strategic plan to counter anti-Muslim xenophobia and to promote tolerance. We need a clearer understanding of what by all indications is a well orchestrated and well financed system by which right-wing think tanks, pundits, and politicians are able to introduce false narratives and flawed research into the media cycle and use their misinformation to manipulate public opinion and thwart progressive counterterrorism policies.

Based on a number inquiries made by NSHR staff, CAP is especially well positioned to undertake the vital task of conducting opposition research and outlining a strategic plan for combating anti-Muslim bigotry. CAP will assemble a cross-program team that includes experts on foreign policy, national security, religion, the right wing, and the media, as well as investigators, researchers, media watchers, and bloggers, whose multi-disciplinary examination will spark innovative thinking. Just as critically, CAP will approach its work with an appreciation of the connections between the Islamophobia movement and related forms of xenophobia. In addition, CAP has formed strong ties with, and earned the trust of, many of the progressive stakeholders working on this set of issues, including AMEMSA leaders, interfaith leaders, researchers, academics, and journalists. Moreover, CAP is sensitive not only to short-term dangers of anti-Muslim rhetoric, but to its long-term dangers, including: the ammunition it provides to violent extremists who seek to portray America as at war with the Muslims and Islam; the weakening of America’s moral leadership at home and abroad; and the undermining of America’s national security interests..

For the above reasons, NSHR staff recommends a grant of \$200,000 over ten months to the Examining Anti-Muslim Bigotry Project of the Center for American Progress.

<u>Grant ID:</u>	20030830
<u>Legal Name of Organization</u>	Welcoming America (Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition is fiscal agent)
<u>Tax Status</u>	Other
<u>Purpose of Grant</u>	To support Welcoming America's efforts to increase interaction and understanding between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans
<u>Grant Description</u>	A project support grant to Welcoming America will strengthen the capacity of its National Desk and state and local affiliates. Welcoming America is a national, grassroots-driven collaborative that works to promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans. Headquartered in Massachusetts, Welcoming America currently represents 15 affiliates across 14 states. The ultimate goal of Welcoming America is to create a welcoming atmosphere – community by community – in which immigrants are more likely to integrate into the social fabric of their hometowns. Its state and local affiliates use a combination of local leadership development, strategic communications and public engagement to reduce anxiety and promote healthy dialogue in communities across the country on immigration integration. The National Desk coordinates and fortifies the work of affiliates through fundraising support, facilitated networking, and trainings on messaging and strategy development.
<u>Previous OSI Support</u>	None
<u>Organization Budget</u>	1,572,038
<u>Project Budget</u>	\$665,038
<u>Major Sources of Support</u>	BeCause Foundation, Ford Foundation, Four Freedoms Fund, French American Charitable Trust, Jewish Funds for Justice, J.M. Kaplan Fund, Kellogg Foundation, Unbound Philanthropy
<u>Amount Requested</u>	\$200,000 over one year
<u>Amount Recommended</u>	\$150,000 over one year (\$128,000 from the Equality and Opportunity Fund, T1: 24023 and \$22,000 from the Strategic Opportunities Fund, T1: 21081)
<u>Term</u>	One year, January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2011
<u>Matching Requirements</u>	None

Description of Organization

Welcoming America is a national, grassroots-driven collaborative that works to promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans. Welcoming America currently represents 15 affiliates across 14 states. It is the first national organization in the U.S. to focus its efforts on addressing the fears and concerns native-born Americans have in the face of rapid local immigrant growth. Its affiliates use a combination of local leadership development, strategic communications and public engagement to reduce anxiety and promote healthy dialogue in communities across the country on immigration integration. The Welcoming America National Desk supports the capacity-building and strategic growth of the affiliates through fundraising support, facilitated networking, and trainings on messaging and strategy development. The successful Welcoming Tennessee campaign has served as a model for other Welcoming campaigns and in 2009, was awarded Migration Policy Institute's prestigious E Pluribus Unum award for exceptional immigration integration.

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) is a statewide, immigrant and refugee-led collaboration whose mission is to empower immigrants and refugees throughout Tennessee to develop a unified voice, defend their rights, and create an atmosphere in which they are recognized as positive contributors to the state. Since its founding in 2001, TIRRC has worked to develop immigrant leadership, build the capacity of its immigrant-led member organizations, help immigrant community members understand and engage in the civic process, and educate the public about policies that would better promote integration of new immigrants and facilitate their full participation in US society.

Description of the Project for Which Funding Is Sought

Welcoming America seeks project support to strengthen its National Desk and the growth of its affiliate network. Through the strategies and activities described below, Welcoming America believes it can begin to mature from a loose collection of local campaigns into a dynamic, inter-connected movement that positively shifts U.S.-born residents' perceptions of immigrants.

Welcoming America focuses on the following two segments of the American public to achieve its mission:

1. *The "Untapped"* – These individuals are concerned about growing anti-immigrant sentiment and want to keep their communities welcoming, but don't know how to become involved as change agents in their communities.
2. *The "Unsure"* – These individuals are confused about immigration. They acknowledge the U.S. is a nation of immigrants, but are not convinced today's immigrants are as good for America as previous immigrants were.

Through a menu of activities, including Welcoming presentations at Rotary Clubs, churches, and universities, film screenings, and cross-cultural potluck meals, local affiliates work to change the hearts and minds of native-born Americans, particularly the unsure. Although Welcoming America's approach is focused on relationship-building and deliberately not focused on particular policy reforms, many of its members have become active supporters of immigration reform.

With support from the Equality and Opportunity Fund, Welcoming America proposes to do the following:

- Provide comprehensive training and materials to affiliates in the areas of local leadership

- development, fundraising, and strategic communications;
- Evaluate the work of affiliates and improve their performance by implementing testing tools that measure the degree to which non-immigrants' perceptions of immigrants have changed after participating in Welcoming activities; and
- Engage in direct fundraising on behalf of the National Desk and the affiliates.

Beyond the activities listed above, Welcoming America plans to capitalize on a documentary film about its work created by producers Active Voice and BeCause Foundation. The documentary, "Welcome to Shelbyville," explores how longtime African American and white residents of Shelbyville, Tennessee approach the integration of Latino immigrants and Muslim Somali refugees into their community. The film has already begun to enhance the reach of Welcoming campaigns and is scheduled to air on PBS in May of 2011. In preparation for the increased attention the PBS airing will generate, the National Desk is working with Active Voice to create a "Welcoming Module" that can be used by people who see the documentary and decide they want to start a Welcoming campaign. Welcoming America also plans to develop Internet-based modules for individuals and groups who are not ready to become Welcoming affiliates but still want to become engaged in Welcoming work.

Rationale for Recommendation

A grant to Welcoming America advances the Equality & Opportunity Fund's overall mission of prohibiting arbitrary and discriminatory government action, and lifting barriers that prevent people from participating fully in economic, social and political life. Welcoming America's long term community building efforts are also aligned with EOF's goal of stemming the erosion of the civil and human rights of immigrants. The grant also advances the Strategic Opportunities Fund's geographic interest in supporting advocacy in the state of Louisiana as well as its broader goal of undertaking special initiatives that address a time-sensitive opportunity to impact a core U.S. Programs concern.

In the past 20 years, immigration to the U.S. has grown at a pace not seen since the early 1900s. While in 1990, one in 12 Americans was an immigrant, that number grew to one in eight by 2005. By 2050, it is expected to leap to one in five.¹ Anxiety regarding immigration has been most pronounced in new gateway cities such as Nashville, Boise and Omaha where immigrant populations have grown at much faster rates than in traditional immigrant receiving states. This anxiety has been exploited by restrictionist and nativist groups as well as opportunistic politicians and public figures seeking to capitalize on the politics of fear. What distinguishes Welcoming America is that it seeks to counter nativist sentiment and defuse anxiety not by entering into the political fray, but rather by increasing U.S.-born Americans' exposure to immigrants through facilitated gatherings that build understanding and trust.

Welcoming America is the brainchild of David Lubell, a former immigrant rights organizer and the founder of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, one of the ten most effective state immigrant rights coalitions in the U.S. In organizing on behalf of immigrants, Lubell realized that he and his colleagues were encountering barriers in moving beyond the usual suspects who were already predisposed to support immigrant rights. Frustrated by this inability to mobilize new and untapped constituencies, he founded Welcoming America as a vehicle to overcome the misconceptions U.S.-born Americans have about immigrants and vice versa.

¹ <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=85>

EOF staff is excited by this work because it has the potential to serve as an antidote to the growing hate, xenophobia and intolerance that pervade the work of many of the fields U.S. Programs supports.

While Welcoming America's goals are decidedly apolitical, its work has already been shown to have positive ripple effects in the policy arena. In 2009, Welcoming Tennessee members helped defeat an English-Only resolution in Nashville. Other affiliates have successfully countered municipal-level anti-immigrant ordinances and changed local attitudes towards immigrant communities.

Many of Welcoming America's partners include organizations supported by U.S. Programs. One of its strongest partnerships is with Active Voice, previously supported by U.S. Programs for its use of the acclaimed film *The Visitor* as an educational and advocacy tool on immigrant detention and deportation. With the added support from SOF, Welcoming America will also be able to strengthen the work of the relatively new Welcoming campaign in Louisiana.

Accordingly, the Equality and Opportunity Fund and Strategic Opportunities Fund recommend a one year project grant to Welcoming America in the amount of \$150,000.

Name of Organization: Common Cause Education Fund

Tax Status: 501(c)(3) public charity

Purpose of Grant: To support the New York Neighbors for American Values' Building Collaborative Strength to Counter Anti-Muslim Hysteria: Moving Beyond Coalition Formation and First Steps Project

Grant Description: To provide a seed grant to New York Neighbors for American Values, a coalition of 130 groups that formed in August 2010 to offer a mainstream voice in support of plans to build the Park51 Islamic cultural center in Lower Manhattan through its Building Collaborative Strength to Counter Anti-Muslim Hysteria: Moving Beyond Coalition Formation and First Steps Project. The grant will allow the coalition to undertake a strategic planning process; hire a coordinator to manage the coalition's operations; convey its support for religious freedom, diversity and equality; and explore ways to replicate its model for mobilizing mainstream Americans to stand up against divisive anti-Muslim stereotypes. New York Neighbors is a project of the Common Cause Education Fund, which is the public education and research affiliate of Common Cause and is located in Washington, D.C.

Previous OSI Support: \$2,175,000
\$25,000 from Jennifer and Jonathan Allan Soros (2010)
\$125,000 from JEHT Emergency Fund (2009)
\$600,000 from Progressive Infrastructure (2006, 2007)
\$800,000 from Strategic Opportunities Fund (2003 – 2006)
\$625,000 from Campaign Finance Reform (2000-2003)

Organization Budget: \$4,125,550

Project Budget: \$150,000

Major Sources of Support: Project: Rockefeller Brothers Fund (to be requested); Carnegie Corporation of New York (to be requested)

Amount Requested: \$100,000

Amount Recommended: \$100,000 [NSHR Campaign, T1: 20195]

Term: One year (November 16, 2010 – November 15, 2011)

Description of Organization:

The Common Cause Education Fund (CCEF) is the public education and research affiliate of Common Cause, a nonpartisan lobbying organization. CCEF's overall mission is to strengthen public participation and faith in U.S. institutions of self-government; ensure that government and the political process serve the public interest rather than special interests; curb the excessive influence of money on government decisions and elections; promote fair and honest elections and high ethical standards for government officials; and protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans. CCEF was founded in 2000 and is based in Washington, D.C. and has an affiliated office in New York State, Common Cause/NY.

Description of Project for which Funding Is Sought:

CCEF requests a seed grant to support the New York Neighbors for American Values' Building Collaborative Strength to Counter Anti-Muslim Hysteria: Moving Beyond Coalition Formation and First Steps Project, to allow the New York Neighbors for American Values coalition (New York Neighbors or coalition) to build on the momentum it has gathered since it formed in August 2010. New York Neighbors is a coalition of over 130 New York City-based civic, religious, civil rights, grassroots, and Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) groups that were appalled by the xenophobic opposition to the proposal to build the Park51 Islamic center two blocks north of the Ground Zero site in Lower Manhattan. In the spotlight of local, national, and international attention, and under the pressure of the 24/7 news cycle, New York Neighbors presented a strong and united voice for the core American values of religious freedom, diversity, and equality; developed and disseminated strategic and timely messages with its coalition partners; and organized well-covered media events that included a 2,000-strong rally on September 10. The coalition's goal offers a model for mobilizing reasonable yet passionate mainstream Americans to counter the misinformation and fear-mongering that has dominated the public discourse and to affirm the importance of tolerance.

A seed grant from OSF will allow New York Neighbors to develop an effective and efficient organizational structure to increase its capacity for rapid, decisive, and collaborative action. The coalition will retain a skilled facilitator to organize a one-day planning retreat with representatives from 30 to 40 of the coalition's core organizations, start the process of envisioning the coalition's mid-term and long-term goals, and develop a concrete strategic plan for the coming year. Seed funding will also allow the coalition to hire a coordinator to facilitate communications among the coalition partners, organize and maintain the coalition's records, serve as a contact for press and other groups, monitor anti-Muslim activities relating to Park51, and manage New York Neighbors' social media campaigns. The coordinator will be housed at Common Cause/NY, which will provide supervision and administrative support. The coalition is currently a project of CCEF, but one of the issues that will be addressed as part of the strategic planning process is whether this arrangement will continue to meet the coalition's needs.

New York Neighbors plans to conduct targeted outreach to community and civic groups to increase the coalition's active membership, and to expand the coalition's web presence and utilization of social media. Its members will meet regularly to share insights and identify best practices and effective messages for combating anti-Muslim propaganda and amplifying its core message of American strength through unity and ending divisive stereotypes.

New York Neighbors also plans to share the lessons and best practices learned from the Park 51 experience with communities facing anti-Muslim forces elsewhere in New York City and nationwide. In collaboration with the Center for American Progress and Media Matters for America, the coalition plans to develop a report examining the media's role in the Park51 controversy and identifying both effective strategies and missed opportunities to contain or end the controversy. Through this work, the coalition seeks to build on its experiences and serve as a model for mainstream activism in opposition to Islamophobia in New York City and elsewhere in the nation.

Rationale for Recommendation:

This grant advances the National Security and Human Rights Campaign priorities of: combating racial and religious profiling of AMEMSA communities and individuals in the name of national security; promoting the acceptance of AMEMSA communities in American society; and supporting credible voices in the movement for a progressive national security policy.

New York Neighbors was formed in August 2010 to amplify and add a neighbor's welcome to the Park51 project, demonstrate the presence of a rational and organized grassroots base on the side of religious tolerance, and reframe the terms of debate beyond religion to the core American values that are central to our democracy. In a testament to the vibrancy of this coalition, which has relied to date exclusively on volunteer staff, over 130 groups signed the coalition's Statement of Principles in just two months. On the evening of September 10, the coalition held a dignified candlelight vigil attended by 2,000 people that featured religious leaders from the Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh traditions, Park51's Lower Manhattan neighbors, local elected leaders, and Muslim-American Congressman Keith Ellison. In doing so, the coalition set a reflective tone for this year's 9/11 commemorations and provided the press with images of a diverse group of mainstream Americans committed to tolerance, which stand in stark contrast to the hate-filled imagery of the anti-Park51 rally that took place the next day.

The coalition has the potential to play an important role in promoting religious freedom, diversity, and equality and to serve as an inspiring model for mobilizing mainstream Americans across the nation against xenophobia. New York Neighbors is a genuine grassroots coalition that prizes the diversity and commitment of its members; however the strength that comes from the coalition's breadth is also the coalition's greatest challenge. A seed grant from OSF will enable New York Neighbors to hire its first paid staff member and to formulate a thoughtful strategic plan so that the coalition will be able to address opportunities and challenges as they arise, whether from a renewed onslaught of anti-Muslim rhetoric, further controversy over the Park51 project, or the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. New York Neighbors is determined to use the anniversary to promote the ideas of resilience and the importance of maintaining American values in the face of an ongoing struggle against terrorism. NSHR staff has spoken with program officers at the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and both expressed enthusiasm for this project.

For these reasons, NSHR staff recommends a \$100,000 grant over one year to the Common Cause Education Fund to support the New York Neighbors for American Values' Building Collaborative Strength to Counter Anti-Muslim Hysteria Project.

MEMORANDUM

To: Aryeh Neier and Wilton Park Meeting Participants

From: Ann Beeson, Nancy Chang, and Raquiba LaBrie

Date: January 12, 2011

Subject: U.S. Models for Combating Xenophobia and Intolerance

This month's shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and 19 of her constituents at a Congress on Your Corner event in Tucson, Arizona provides a grim backdrop to U.S. Programs' consideration of rising xenophobia and intolerance. Although the precise motivations of the shooter are unclear and he appears to be mentally unstable, the shooting shines a spotlight on three factors we believe are polluting the American political arena. Because these factors are so closely linked to xenophobia and intolerance, it is important to delineate each.

First, extreme and violent rhetoric pervades our political discourse. As many media outlets have noted, Sarah Palin, the most visible Tea Party leader, used her website to signal opposition to 20 Democratic Congress members, including Congresswoman Giffords, by posting a U.S. map with marksmen's cross hairs on their districts. Beyond this, politicians and pundits across the political spectrum routinely engage in heated rhetoric by suggesting, for example, that opponents be shot or that constituents should be "armed and dangerous."

Second, prejudice against Muslims, Latinos, African Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, and other minorities is growing in a climate of fear, anger, and economic uncertainty. Foes of immigration seek to build support for repealing the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees citizenship to anyone born in the U.S., by characterizing children of immigrants as "anchor babies" and "foreign invaders." The so-called "birthers" question President Barack Obama's citizenship by deploying racist and xenophobic stereotypes depicting him as an Islamic terrorist, socialist, or African witch doctor. Fervent opposition to plans to build an Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan was firmly rooted in anti-Muslim bigotry that has intensified since September 11. Across the country, African Americans are more likely to be victims of hate crimes than any other group. And hate crimes against LGBT people are on the rise particularly against those under the age of 18.

Third, extreme partisanship and polarized discourse are prevalent not only in federal government, but also at the state and local levels. It is widely acknowledged that the dominant political parties have become more ideologically regimented over the past two decades. The media plays a significant role in deepening this divide. Cable television channels, talk radio and political blogs pander to people's fears and privilege expression of extreme views.

All of these factors consign individuals who hold different views or beliefs or belong to a different social group to the category of “other.” For this reason, we believe we cannot ignore how the broader U.S. political climate informs our analysis of xenophobia. In this memo we focus on the conditions faced by Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian communities, immigrants, people of color, and LGBT people because their experiences offer the starkest illustration of growing intolerance and fragmentation in U.S. society. We also consider a full range of actions from rhetoric to harassment to violence perpetrated by government officials and private individuals, or embodied in laws or policies.

The purpose of this memo is two-fold. First, it highlights successful models that have been, and are being, developed to respond to xenophobia and intolerance. Second, we intend it to facilitate an exchange with our Open Society Foundations colleagues on the common sources of xenophobia and intolerance and concrete policy solutions capable of stemming rising hate. In Section I of this memo, we provide an overview of four major strategies used to counter xenophobia and intolerance in the U.S. In Section II, we outline case studies illustrating these strategies.

I. Strategies

In supporting efforts to counter xenophobia and intolerance, U.S. Programs has identified four primary strategies that have proven most effective:

Engaging Unusual Allies

In every field U.S. Programs supports, we make a concerted effort to enlist credible messengers who fall across the political spectrum, represent diverse faiths, and are capable of establishing common ground across lines of difference. Building alliances with unusual suspects is a very effective means of reaching new constituencies and adding moral weight to our positions. It is the most frequently used strategy we have employed in combating xenophobia and intolerance.

Bridge-building

A number of U.S. Programs grantees are using innovative strategies to bridge the divisions that separate mainstream and marginalized groups. These grantees rely on advocacy projects that highlight the shared interests of different social groups and programs that encourage increased contact in order to undermine negative stereotypes and reduce prejudice.

Culture and New Media

Increasingly, human rights and social justice organizations are exploiting the power of popular culture, media, technology, and the arts to mobilize constituencies and effect

change. We believe these strategies could be particularly effective in engaging young people with whom “diversity” and “tolerance” messages do not resonate.

Opposition Research

In the U.S., there are only a handful of organizations dedicated to tracking the activities of hate groups and exposing their activities to law enforcement agencies, the media and the public. We believe increased resources should be devoted to uncovering the connections between individual actors, hate groups and extremist ideologies. U.S. Programs is in the process of determining how best to expand our investment in this area.

II. Case Studies

A. Engaging Unusual Allies: Faith Leaders

The religious right’s influence on social debates from abortion to LGBT rights has inspired progressive faith leaders, some of whom are evangelicals, to mobilize their members on a range of open society issues. Many of these groups are securing victories, as outlined below.

Islamic Society of North America

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) promotes understanding and cooperation within the Islamic community and across diverse faith communities in North America. The backlash last year against the construction of the Park51 Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan prompted ISNA to strengthen its outreach to other faiths. On September 7, 2010, it convened an emergency interfaith summit of religious leaders titled, “Beyond Park51: Religious Leaders Denounce Anti-Muslim Bigotry and Call for Respect for America’s Tradition of Religious Liberty.” The event was attended by White House staff, including Paul Monteiro of the Office of Public Engagement, Mara Vanderslice of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and Rashad Hussain, U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The religious leaders presented a joint statement against anti-Muslim bigotry and held a highly successful press conference that was telecast live on C-SPAN and produced over 200 published news stories about the event. One of the summit's highlights came when Reverend Richard Cizik admonished those who would burn another religion's sacred texts by saying "shame on you" as "you bring dishonor to the name of Jesus Christ."

Under ISNA’s leadership, participants in the September 7 summit launched the Multi-Religious Campaign Against Anti-Muslim Bigotry to promote religious tolerance and demonstrate to the Muslim world that America’s religious communities are committed to religious tolerance for all faiths.

In early 2011, the Campaign plans to hold two events that will bring together religious leadership and Members of Congress to explore ways to bring a halt to anti-Muslim bigotry. One meeting will target newly elected, first-term Members, and the other

meeting will target Congressional leadership and will likely include a joint press conference. The Campaign will also remain in close contact with the White House and seek its continued presence at, and participation in, upcoming Campaign events.

Faith in Public Life

Faith in Public Life provides movement-building and communications resources to leaders and organizations from diverse religious traditions dedicated to advancing social justice. It developed a rapid-response media strategy to address opposition to the Park51 community center. Its strategy included organizing Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders and scholars to release a statement condemning xenophobia and religious bigotry and holding press conferences with national security experts and faith leaders supportive of the Park51 project. Most notably, as a Florida minister threatened to burn a Koran, Faith in Public Life provided media training to Rev. Larry Reimer, one of the leaders in the mainstream religious opposition to the Koran burning, and secured his interview with CNN.

Faith in Public Life also plays a critical role in immigration reform. It provided extensive communications and media strategy support to help educate faith communities about the need for immigration reform. It has also worked with the Public Religion Research Institute to document strong support for reform from faith communities.

Interfaith Alliance

The mission of the Interfaith Alliance is to champion religious freedom by respecting individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism and build common ground. It is coordinating religious services to take place on Sunday, January 30, 2011 at religious institutions across the country. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faith leaders will read from one another's sacred texts and congregations will attest to the strength of religious tolerance in the U.S. These events will be photographed, filmed, and promoted to the press. Resulting articles, photos, and videos will be widely disseminated in American, Arab, and Muslim media outlets.

B. Engaging Unusual Allies: Law Enforcement

September 11 spawned a stream of flawed law enforcement practices and policies in both the national security and immigration contexts. War on Terror policies, such as those requiring special registration by individuals of particular national origins, have had a disparate impact on immigrants and Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian communities. The federal government has also expanded the role of local law enforcement beyond its traditional mandate to include federal immigration enforcement.

This stream of policies has had the unintended effect of creating alliances between law enforcement officials and the advocates that seek to hold them accountable. The following are a few examples.

Rights Working Group

The Rights Working Group (RWG) is a Washington, D.C.-based national coalition of more than 250 civil liberties, national security, immigrants' rights, and human rights member organizations. Its primary focus is defending the rights of Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, South Asian, and immigrant communities that have become the targets of profiling after September 11.

An RWG member in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania worked with the local police chief to adopt a department-wide anti-racial profiling policy. One of the policy's provisions limits the amount of time the police department will hold a detainee booked on criminal charges to allow the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to determine whether to place the individual into immigration custody. Another RWG member in Colorado worked closely with the Denver Police Department to enact one of the strongest state laws in the U.S. requiring law enforcement to inform individuals of their right to refuse voluntary searches.

RWG also plays an important role in encouraging local police to articulate their principled objections to participation in federal enforcement efforts. The following is a summary of the major objections raised. Police executives argue that their deputization to enforce federal immigration laws threatens to undo gains achieved through community policing. Such arrangements jeopardize public safety because undocumented immigrants and their loved ones are less likely to report crimes if they fear deportation. Some police executives fear other community members will lose so much trust in law enforcement that witnesses and victims will refuse to report crimes. Police are also concerned about liability for civil rights violations if they are forced to uphold anti-immigrant laws such as Arizona S.B. 1070. It is worth noting that the first lawsuit challenging S.B. 1070's legality was brought by local police officers who feared discrimination lawsuits.

Border Network for Human Rights

The Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) is an immigration reform and human rights advocacy organizations based in El Paso, Texas. BNHR established a Border Stakeholders group, which facilitates conversations among community residents and advocacy groups, legal advocates, and Border Patrol officials. The group manages a shared "to do" list and negotiates solutions to concerns such as improved training of Border Patrol agents, improving the complaint process, and creating community liaisons.

C. Bridge-building

In our immigrant rights, LGBTQ rights, racial justice, and national security grantmaking, U.S. Programs has funded efforts to strengthen relationships between groups that are sometimes pitted against one another. As illustrated below, the effectiveness of these efforts rests in large part in taking a non-ideological approach.

Welcoming America

Welcoming America is a national, grassroots-driven collaborative that works to promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans. The organization's main premise is that native-born Americans are less likely to be prejudiced against immigrants and *vice versa* when the two groups have greater exposure to, and direct interaction with, one another.

Welcoming America focuses on the following two segments of the American public to achieve its mission:

1. *The "Untapped"* – These individuals are concerned about growing anti-immigrant sentiment and want to keep their communities welcoming, but don't know how to become involved as change agents in their communities.
2. *The "Unsure"* – These individuals are confused about immigration. They acknowledge the U.S. is a nation of immigrants, but are not convinced today's immigrants are as good for America as previous immigrants were.

Through a menu of activities, including welcoming presentations at Rotary Clubs, churches, and universities, film screenings, and cross-cultural potluck meals, local affiliates work to change the hearts and minds of native-born Americans, particularly the unsure. Although Welcoming America's approach is focused on relationship-building and deliberately does not take a stance on particular policy reforms, many of its members have become active supporters of immigration reform. In 2009, Welcoming Tennessee members helped defeat an English-only resolution in Nashville. Other affiliates have successfully countered municipal-level anti-immigrant ordinances and changed local attitudes towards immigrant communities.

Welcoming America participated in the filming of *Welcome to Shelbyville*, which documents the experience of a welcoming committee in a small town in rural Tennessee that succeeds in bridging the interests of whites, African Americans, Latinos and Somalis.

Gay-Straight Alliance Network

The Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network is a California-based youth leadership organization that connects school-based GSA clubs and provides leadership and organizational development training. Ultimately it seeks to strengthen the ability of GSA clubs to create safe environments in middle and secondary schools for heterosexual and LGBT students; to educate the school community about homophobia, transphobia and the diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations; and to fight discrimination, harassment and violence in schools.

GSA clubs are considered to be powerful forces for institutional change in educational settings. The ongoing challenge is to ensure these clubs are equally welcoming to LGBT youth of all races and socioeconomic levels. To that end, U.S. Programs has funded the

GSA Network to partner with racial justice organizations in order to connect the interests of various marginalized groups working to end bullying and violence in schools.

GSA Network operates nationally but is most deeply invested in California. It helped to build public will for the adoption of statewide policies prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in California's schools. It also secured adoption of model anti-harassment policies regarding transgender and gender non-conforming youth in the San Francisco and Los Angeles Unified School Districts.

New York Neighbors for American Values

New York Neighbors was formed in August 2010 to amplify and add a neighbor's support for the Park51 Muslim community center. It seeks to demonstrate the presence of a rational and organized grassroots base on the side of religious tolerance, and reframe the terms of debate beyond religion to core American values that are central to our democracy.

On the evening of September 10, the coalition held a dignified candlelight vigil attended by 2,000 people that featured religious leaders from the Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh traditions, Park51's Lower Manhattan neighbors, local elected leaders, and Muslim-American Congressman Keith Ellison. In doing so, the coalition set a reflective tone for last year's 9/11 commemorations and provided the press with images of a diverse group of mainstream ordinary Americans committed to tolerance. This stood in stark contrast to the hate-filled imagery of the anti-Park51 rally that took place the next day.

A recent seed grant from U.S. Programs is enabling it to hire its first paid staff member and formulate a strategic plan. We believe the coalition has the potential to play an important role in promoting religious freedom, diversity, and equality and to serve as an inspiring model for mobilizing mainstream Americans across the nation against xenophobia.

CASA de Maryland

CASA de Maryland is a Latino immigrant organization founded in 1985 to respond to the human needs of thousands of Central American refugees arriving in the Washington, D.C. area. Towards the end of the 1990s, it began to focus on building stronger relations between Latinos and African Americans to lower the growing tensions between the two communities fueled by perceived competition for jobs. Through outreach to local NAACP chapters, CASA identified police brutality as a common challenge facing both communities and led joint campaigns for police accountability that delivered shared victories and demonstrated the value of multi-racial alliances.

In 2008, CASA developed its Crossing Borders Project, which includes: a multicultural curriculum that analyzes recent demographic shifts among African American and Latino populations; a historical timeline of African American and immigrant experiences; an analysis of the interplay between jobs, race and immigration; and recommendations for

moving from dialogue to action. Underlying the Crossing Borders Project is the idea that with comprehensive immigration reform workers would be free to organize for fair market wages and competition would be reduced.

FIERCE

FIERCE is a membership organization dedicated to building the leadership and civic engagement of LGBT youth of color in New York City. LGBT youth are deeply affected by New York's "quality of life" policies that increase policing and make it difficult for all youth to gather in public spaces without fear of police harassment. Embracing a vision of open society in which all people have a right to safe public spaces, FIERCE waged a successful campaign to defeat a development plan for New York City's Pier 40. The plan would have converted the pier, a popular hangout for LGBT youth, into a Las Vegas style entertainment complex. Through consistent attendance at community board meetings and by finding common cause with neighborhood residents who also opposed the development plan, FIERCE exerted significant influence in public decision-making. Its leadership led to its appointment to the New York City Commission for LGBT Runaway and Homeless Youth.

D. Culture and New Media

The climate of hate in the U.S. has activated culture bearers across the country to explore how the written word, visual arts, music and other forms of cultural expression can be used to advance values of fairness and tolerance in a number of policy contexts. Below we describe how immigrant rights, LGBT rights, national security and racial justice advocates are partnering with "creatives" to educate and mobilize support for reform.

Citizen Engagement Lab and Lady Gaga

The Citizen Engagement Laboratory (CEL) is dedicated to developing innovative online vehicles to enhance civic engagement and amplify the voice of people of color communities and LGBTQ communities. After Arizona passed its controversial law S.B. 1070, CEL worked with its primary constituencies – Latinos, African Americans, and LGBT people – to organize opposition to the law and broaden awareness of its damaging effects.

One strategy employed by CEL and other civil rights organizations was to encourage performers to join the "Sound Strike" and cancel previously scheduled concerts in Arizona. Recognizing a significant opportunity to strengthen opposition to S.B. 1070, immigrant rights groups and members of CEL's Latino base reached out to the American pop singer Lady Gaga asking her to cancel her Arizona concert and take a public stand against the law. This outreach generated no response. Lady Gaga, who has a significant gay following, responded only after members of CEL's LGBT base signed a petition asking her to condemn Arizona's law when she performed in the state. She honored their request by meeting with advocates before her concert and agreeing to wear the words "STOP SB 1070" written in block letters on her forearm. During the concert, she

displayed the tattoo, criticized the law, and attacked raids that tear families apart. She also dedicated a song to a boy whose brother was apprehended in his home by immigration authorities.

Gay-Straight Alliance Network

As a growing number of LGBT youth suicides made headlines across the country in the last quarter of 2010 and bullying became a household topic, columnist Dan Savage began a viral video campaign called “It Gets Better.” The videos feature celebrities, advocates, and elected officials who assure LGBT youth contemplating suicide that “it gets better” as one grows into adulthood. To complement this effort, the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (mentioned above) launched a multi-faceted outreach strategy, The Make It Better Project. It relies on a peer-to-peer model of reaching LGBTQ youth and connects them with ongoing efforts to make schools safer for LGBTQ youth. Acknowledging youth as powerful agents of change, it educates and motivates them to take action and stop bullying and harassment in their schools. The Make It Better Project has a YouTube channel, a Facebook group, and a Twitter following.

Breakthrough

Breakthrough is a global human rights organization that uses the power of media, pop culture, and community mobilization to inspire people to take bold action for justice. It produced a powerful documentary, “Face The Truth: Racial Profiling Across America,” showing the devastating impact of racial profiling on communities across the country. The video features, among others, Kurdish-American Karwan Abdul Kader, who was stopped and stripped by local law enforcement for no reason other than driving in the wrong neighborhood, and Dr. Tracie Keese, Division Chief, Denver Police Department, who criticized the racialization of police work following the passage of Arizona S.B. 1070 and the adoption of other immigration enforcement programs.

The documentary accompanies a September 2010 report by Rights Working Group (RWG) (mentioned above). RWG has been working with local partner organizations to engage their members and the general public in the Racial Profiling: Face the Truth Campaign by hosting hearings and town halls around the country where individuals have offered testimony about their experience with racial or religious profiling. The report features the testimonies of dozens of witnesses from these hearings and makes recommendations to government officials on how to combat profiling.

RWG also launched a Conversation Project and created a toolkit to assist individuals and organizations in hosting “Conversations” in their homes, offices, coffee shops, or places of worship. Conversation Project materials and resources educate participants on how racial profiling violates the U.S. Constitution and human rights norms and is ineffective as a law enforcement tool.

Center for New Community

The Center for New Community, a national civil and human rights organization based in Chicago, Illinois, is committed to building democratic participation in the affairs of communities and institutions, and to redefine public dialogue and discussion on democratic values. Its Turn It Down Campaign educates the music industry and its fan base on the threat of white power music. The Center argues that white power music is a significant recruiting tool for organized bigotry. This music has succeeded in infiltrating numerous youth subcultures, converting youth rebellion into hardened white supremacy.

The Turn It Down Campaign's main tool is a community blog, Imagine 2050, that seeks to inspire positive dialogue about what it means to be an American through discussions of culture, politics, sports, faith, and activism. Blog contributors include immigrants, activists, artists, and students who recognize the shift in America's demographics and want to invest in a future society that embraces multiculturalism and tolerance.

National Forensics League

Last fall the National Forensics League sponsored a special high school debate question: "Resolved: An Islamic cultural center should be built near Ground Zero." Students from dozens of schools across America conducted debates on this question and in the process gained insights into the way in which inflammatory anti-Muslim rhetoric and misinformation about Islam is being propagated.

E. Opposition Research

As noted above, U.S. Programs has not invested substantial resources into researching the individuals, organizations and ideologies responsible for rising xenophobia and intolerance. We are in the process of determining how we can strengthen our investment in this area. Two important grants are described below.

Center for American Progress

The Center for American Progress (CAP) has formed a multi-disciplinary team to expose the structures underlying the Islamophobia movement. It also plans to engage the progressive community in developing strategies for combating anti-Muslim bigotry

CAP's first step will be to interview and engage journalists, researchers, academics, and leaders in the anti-hate movement who are researching and writing on Islamophobia, and to develop a roster of knowledgeable and credible experts to whom journalists and policymakers can turn for information. It will research and track the activities of the most prominent drivers of Islamophobia, including Stop Islamization of America, led by Pamela Geller; the Center for Security Policy, led by Frank Gaffney; David Horowitz's Freedom Center, which sponsors Robert Spencer's Jihad Watch; the Middle East Forum, led by Daniel Pipes; the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, led by Cliff May; and Keep America Safe, led by Liz Cheney. In addition, CAP will examine the role played

by right-wing media, the Tea Party movement, prominent politicians, pundits, and conservative donors in spreading anti-Muslim sentiment. CAP will produce a major report and recommendations for follow up opposition research work that are scheduled for release in the first quarter of 2011 and will produce a series of articles through September 2011

CAP also houses an anti-hate table focused on anti-immigrant hate rhetoric and violence. Many of U.S. Programs' leading civil rights grantees, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Council of La Raza participate in this table. Our most recent grant to CAP will encourage greater information-sharing between those concerned with anti-immigrant hate and those concerned with Islamophobia.

Center for New Community

Since 2008, the Center for New Community (referenced above) has engaged in targeted, direct action activities as well as research to expose and counter the anti-immigrant movement in the U.S. Its research does the following: documents how the anti-immigrant movement, though strong, has been weakened by strategic opposition from the immigrant rights movement; exposes the racist underpinnings of the anti-immigrant movement's racial politics and deconstructs them; and tracks its messaging.

The Center for New Community also operates the Which Way Forward Initiative to educate and mobilize African Americans around anti-immigrant attacks that directly affect their communities. The goal is to create multiracial coalitions to counter the racism perpetuated by anti-immigrant groups.

F. Brief Reflections on Affirmative Action

Our discussion of xenophobia and intolerance in the U.S. would be incomplete without a discussion of affirmative action. Formerly considered a model for redressing race, gender, and other forms of discrimination, this set of civil rights policies intended to increase diversity in education and employment is now under siege.

There is an endless list of points and counter-points that can be offered to criticize or defend affirmative action. For example, some argue that affirmative action has outlived its usefulness and diversity can be maintained without additional measures. Yet, studies show where affirmative action is withdrawn, participation of minorities and women falls. Others posit that race no longer matters; instead, class is the critical concern. While it is true that affirmative action has helped to expand the middle class for many communities of color, it is equally true that racial bias persists in education, housing, employment and other areas of public life for people of color of all classes.

In our view, what the affirmative action debate reveals is the pressing need for new ideas and approaches to address the conditions of minorities and women who continue to be vastly over-represented in low-paying jobs and continue to face discrimination and

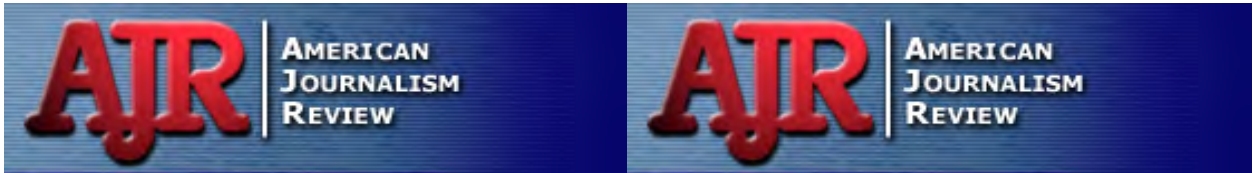
structural barriers to opportunity. Some U.S. Programs grantees are experimenting with ideas such as “targeted universalism.” This approach seeks to target resources to those who are most marginalized while also addressing broader systemic flaws that affect society as a whole. Others grantees continue to argue for race-conscious or gender-conscious policies but avoid using the language of affirmative action.

It is an ongoing challenge to develop policies that redress disparities experienced by marginalized groups and generate mainstream support. We look forward to learning more about innovative strategies that are being used outside the U.S. to promote equality and opportunity.

III. **Conclusion**

Countering xenophobia is an urgent task. It is polarizing U.S. society and eroding support for the values of tolerance, fairness and inclusion. The U.S. Programs efforts described above, while important, are not sufficient. Increased activity and coordination are required. Given the Open Society Foundations’ position as one of the most important funders in this area and the expertise of its staff, we welcome the opportunity to partner with our colleagues across the network to develop strategies for addressing this dangerous threat to open society.

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American Journalism Review

From AJR, **December/January 2011** issue

The Fact-Checking Explosion

In a bitter political landscape marked by rampant allegations of questionable credibility, more and more news outlets are launching truth-squad operations. Posted: Thu, Dec. 2 2010

By **Cary Spivak**

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Gib Heinz was clearly annoyed when the [Seattle Times](#) launched its Truth Needle, a fact-checking initiative that seeks to separate truth from fiction in political claims.

"I'm absolutely stunned by the introduction of this new feature," the Freeland, Washington, resident wrote in a letter published by the paper on August 22. "This 'Truth Needle' is going to decide whether the claims are true or false? News reporting is reporting the news and facts and letting me decide what is true or false."

Sorry, Mr. Heinz, but you'd better get used to it. Not only does it appear that fact-checking operations are here to stay, but they are growing rapidly. Just this year, at least two dozen media organizations or universities launched or joined fact-checking operations. Some are flying solo; some are joining the [St. Petersburg Times' PolitiFact network](#); and others are forming new cooperatives, such as AZ Fact Check, a partnership announced in August that includes the Arizona Republic, Phoenix's 12 News and the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

In each case reporters are leaving the comfort of the press box, where they watch and report on the action, and are getting onto the field to play referee.

"It's a complete reversal of traditional journalism," says Jim Tharpe, editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution's PolitiFact Georgia.

The fact-checking explosion may have begun in 2004 after the media's initially flat-footed response to the attacks on Sen. John Kerry by the group that called itself Swift Boat Veterans for Truth (see [Campaign Trail Veterans for Truth](#)," December 2004/January 2005). But the just-completed 2010 election featured fact-checking on steroids. A bitterly divided electorate and a political landscape replete with high-decibel claims and counterclaims on cable television and echoing throughout the blogosphere have made neutral arbiters more crucial than ever.

"I never thought journalism would be like this," says Bill Adair, the St. Petersburg Times' Washington, D.C., bureau chief and editor of PolitiFact, the Pulitzer Prize-winning fact-checking operation that is exporting its approach to local news operations across the country. "It's just the right formula for the new era."

PolitiFact and other fact-checking ventures are filling a void in political reporting, says longtime Washington Post political reporter and columnist David Broder. "So often in the past, the voters have been left with nothing but a 'he said, she said' — there was no third source with an objective view," Broder says, asserting that reporters are the people best equipped to serve as the arbiters of truth.

"'Who are the alternatives?' is the question," says Broder, who has covered politics for the Post since Lyndon Johnson was in the White House. "In this respect, the press is becoming a little more aggressive, and that's good."

Politicians, many of whom may despise the idea of having their every word — not to mention every advertisement — scrutinized by reporters, are taking notice of the fact-checking teams. "The candidates hate these," says Rick Wiley, a national political consultant. "It's hard for them, because they see it as people coming out and attacking them personally."

Especially when they're called liars — a charge that could easily be picked up and ballyhooed by an opponent in an attack ad.

"What I've heard from folks running for office is that they don't want a 'Pants on Fire,'" says Ken Goldstein, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who specializes in political advertising. "Pants on Fire" is the worst rating doled out by PolitiFact, reserved for assertions that make a ridiculous claim and are clearly false. Goldstein admits being surprised that some politicians have even changed the wording of statements in response to criticism from a fact-checker. "If you had asked me before, I would have been dismissive about the impact of these," Goldstein says. "But I

have been hearing some anecdotal evidence that some politicians know that it's in place and are reacting."

In September, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's PolitiFact Wisconsin gave Tom Barrett, the Milwaukee mayor and Democratic gubernatorial candidate, a "Pants on Fire" rating for erroneously boasting on his campaign Web site that violent crime had fallen 20 percent during his tenure. The following day, Barrett, who went on to lose the governor's race, corrected the claim. "If I had read it I would have caught it," the mayor told the paper. The Journal Sentinel, where I work, is one of eight newspapers to buy the PolitiFact license for use in their home markets.

In June, Markos Moulitsas, the founder and publisher of the liberal blog Daily Kos, was nailed when he erroneously said Turkey is an Arab country. The comment came during a roundtable discussion on ABC's "This Week" show, which is fact-checked weekly by PolitiFact. Moulitsas quickly tweeted a correction after the show, but it wasn't enough to avoid being hit with a "False" rating on the Truth-O-Meter.

"There's a hunger for this," says Richard Wagoner, deputy metro editor who oversees the paper's Truth Needle, which launched in August. "There's so much noise in these political campaigns. People have to know what is true out there and what isn't."

Still, reporters should not think that their incisive research will compel politicians to clean up their acts, cautions Brooks Jackson, director of FactCheck.org, the 7-year-old site that serves as the template for modern fact-checking initiatives. A project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, FactCheck.org operated on a budget of more than \$900,000 in fiscal year 2010.

"Ever since the Greeks invented the word 'demagogue,' politicians have been acting like this," Jackson says, referring to their propensity to do or say whatever they deem necessary to grab and keep power. "It's not going to change."

Jackson points to former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani as proof. The one-time Republican presidential hopeful repeatedly makes erroneous statements, even after being corrected by fact-checkers and others, Jackson says. He notes that Giuliani has often said that men with prostate cancer have a 44 percent survival rate under England's health care system — a lowball figure that has been contradicted by FactCheck.org, other news outlets and a host of experts.

Yet, Jackson says, Giuliani used to ignore the evidence and criticism and kept repeating the falsehood. "He's incorrigible," Jackson says. "Just incorrigible." (Giuliani did not respond to requests for comment.)

What was up with that? I asked Wiley, who was deputy political director for Giuliani's 2008 campaign for the GOP presidential nomination. "There are some politicians who, if they believe something, they're going to say it," Wiley says. "That's just the way they are... There are some battles you're not going to win."

Despite the best efforts of the fact-checking outfits, many people continue to cling to canards like the "death panels" supposedly in the health care reform bill and President Barack Obama's alleged lack of a valid U.S. birth certificate.

So why bother spending all this time holding politicians accountable? The 68-year-old Jackson, who is frequently referred to as the father of fact-checking, doesn't hesitate before answering. "It's a First Amendment thing," he says. "It's what we do." It's necessary for the electorate to have somebody separating fact from fiction, Jackson says, regardless of what people choose to do with the information. "Our audience — the citizens and voters — need to know this.... [They're] awash in all sorts of unverified, false, misleading information."

Teams of reporters are scouring the airwaves, speeches, brochures, Web sites and legislative sessions weighing the accuracy of virtually every word uttered by politicians and TV talking heads. PolitiFact and FactCheck.org focus on national politicians, while scores of reporters are doing local checks, either through independent operations or PolitiFact spinoffs.

"We could do this on the national level," Jackson says, "but what about the guy running for governor or the guy running for dogcatcher?"

Local reporters at a variety of news operations are taking the challenge. Among them are [PoliGraph](#), a partnership between Minnesota Public Radio and the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota; the [Denver Post's Political Polygraph](#); the Tacoma, Washington, Tribune's [Tribune's Political Smell Test](#); the [Voice of San Diego's fact-check blog](#); and [BamaFactCheck.com](#), launched in September by the Anniston Star, the Decatur Daily, the Dothan Eagle, the Opelika-Auburn News, the Times Daily of Florence, the Tuscaloosa News and NBC 13 WVTM-TV of Birmingham. Unlike PolitiFact and FactCheck.org, both of which post new items year-round, some local fact-checking services may publish only during election season or as needed. Others, however, hope to keep an eye on the politicians on a continuing basis.

Each site uses different categories for rating the veracity of comments. For example, [Caesar Meter](#), an initiative of the News Journal in Wilmington, Delaware, dubs true statements "Tall in the Saddle" while pegging false ones as "Horse Puckey."

Says Adair, who hopes that PolitiFact eventually has a partnership with media outlets in all 50 states: "My ultimate goal is that every politician in America ought to face the

Truth-O-Meter," the trademarked graphic that ranks political claims on a scale ranging from "True" to "Pants on Fire." The flashy online version features a meter engulfed in flames, making it easy for a political opponent to play off the name and the graphic in a campaign attack ad.

To reach his ambitious goal, Adair, the creator of and an enthusiastic evangelist for PolitiFact, is traveling the country signing up media outlets to join his network. Each one that does pays between \$25,000 and \$30,000 for the first year, says Neil Brown, editor of the St. Petersburg Times. Then the tab drops to \$1,000 per month.

Demand for the Truth-O-Meter, or the various independent versions of it that are springing up, is an outgrowth of the increasingly bitter rhetoric and name-calling on the campaign trail. Despite the reservations of Seattle Times reader Gib Heinz, reader response to fact-checking has been extremely positive, editors and reporters agree.

"The politicians hate it and the readers love it," says Atlanta's Tharpe. "And that's fine."

Tharpe and Martin Kaiser, editor of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, report they receive complaints from both sides of the political spectrum. "I love it because it confuses the partisans on both sides," says Kaiser, who sees ideas like fact-checking as a key to industry survival, a thought embraced by Jackson and others.

"The function of the press, if we're going to survive, has got to evolve from being a gatekeeper [for information] to a referee or an arbitrator or some sort of adjudicator," Jackson says. "That's the audience that we need to figure out how to serve.... You don't serve it by just printing all the news that's fit to print. You have to address the false and misleading stuff."

And that's just what many in the fact-checking movement are doing. Topics that have been placed under the truth squad microscope include: The serious: Did President Obama in 2009 exaggerate the number of people who would be covered by his health care proposal? (He did, according to FactCheck.org.)

The silly: In 2007, PolitiFact reviewed a music video in which the so-called "Obama girl" declares during a faux debate, "At least Obama didn't marry his cousin" as Giuliani did. (PolitiFact's ruling: True.)

The subjective: [TBD.com's The Facts Machine](#) in September looked into whether Washington, D.C., Mayor Adrian Fenty was a jerk. (The fledgling Web site's [conclusion](#): Mostly On Point. Fenty later lost his bid for re-election.)

"We pushed the limit of the format with that one," says Kevin Robillard, the first-year reporter who does the bulk of the reporting for The Facts Machine. "We backed it up with a lot of reporting. You can't make three phone calls and declare Adrian Fenty a jerk."

Even unnamed bloggers or chain e-mailers are considered fair game for scrutiny. Brown, the St. Petersburg Times editor, bragged in his paper's 2009 submission to the Pulitzer Prize committee that PolitiFact shot down outlandish claims involving Obama.

"PolitiFact sorted out the truth about global e-mail attacks on Barack Obama, including that he used a Koran instead of a Bible when he was sworn into the U.S. Senate ("Pants on Fire"/False) and that his middle name was Muhammed (also "Pants on Fire"/False)," Brown wrote in his letter to the committee.

Jackson, who worked as a reporter at the Associated Press, the Wall Street Journal and CNN before launching FactCheck.org, says there is plenty of room for more players in the fact-checking game. He is especially open to those who can try out some gimmicks and add a little flash to enhance the format's appeal to the public. He says of the Penn-affiliated FactCheck.org, "We have to maintain a pretense of Ivy League respectability. As much as I admire what Bill [Adair] is doing [at PolitiFact], we can't get away with that ourselves."

Among the gimmicks that Jackson must eschew are pictures of Pinocchio, which the Washington Post used in its The Fact Checker feature in 2008, or the graphics in the Seattle Times that show the city's iconic Space Needle building with flags that indicate the truthfulness of a statement. And, of course, Jackson isn't going to put a match to a politician's trousers.

"It's a gimmick, but it's a hell of a good gimmick," Brown says of the Truth-O-Meter. "We've taken it beyond the academics...so this could be part of a mainstream, solid newsroom."

Though not particularly gaudy, the FactCheck.org Web site provides readers with an array of graphics and links. It also attracts significant attention, drawing 455,370 unique visitors in September compared to 407,164 for PolitiFact, according to Compete Inc., a company that tracks Web traffic.

If Jackson is the father of political fact-checking, then Brown and Adair are like the children of a successful entrepreneur who are trying to take Dad's single grocery store and turn it into a national chain.

Brown and Adair quickly realized that they had something they might be able to take national. Fact-checking ventures were popping up, the public seemed to enjoy them and the media were fascinated by PolitiFact, which ran its first item on August 22, 2007.

Adair made more than 200 media appearances in 2008 to discuss PolitiFact and its judgments, "including regular stops on MSNBC, NPR and CNN," Brown told the Pulitzer judges.

"We knew that people were going to come to us and want to do it," Adair says. "So we knew we had to design a business around it."

The eight newspapers that have bought the PolitiFact licensing rights and entered into partnerships with it are allowed to sell advertising on their own PolitiFact sites and to offer PolitiFact through print syndication to others in their state. When stories written by state sites are posted on the national PolitiFact site, the local newspaper gets credit for the pageviews its item receives.

In return, the media outlet agrees to produce several PolitiFact items each week — there is no quota, but Adair hopes to see about five per week — and to assign qualified reporters capable of meeting PolitiFact standards to research and write the stories. Reporters are given training as well as a manual detailing how to research and write a PolitiFact story.

For help in designing a game plan for expansion, Adair looked at two successful franchise operations: McDonald's and Subway. "They had a lot of good lessons," Adair says. "Both places rely heavily on training manuals and standardized procedures. Both do lots and lots of training, periodic quality control."

Adair keeps a close watch on what the local operations are producing. In one case, he says, a reporter who was not meeting PolitiFact standards was reassigned after Adair questioned the reporter's work. "We license our brand and our methods to our partners, and they agree to follow our methods," Adair says. "They are required to follow our standards for journalism."

When a media outlet buys into PolitiFact, editors and reporters receive about three days of training that includes explaining the formula for writing a PolitiFact story. Instead of the traditional inverted pyramid style, the PolitiFact stories follow a pyramid model, with the most important fact — the verdict — coming last. A dose of irreverence is encouraged. All sources are cited and comments from anonymous sources are forbidden.

The reporter who researches and writes the story recommends a Truth-O-Meter rating, but it is a panel — generally consisting of two or three editors — that makes the final judgment. Local editors decide which items should be investigated.

Though local news operations are often fiercely independent, the success of PolitiFact is persuading some editors to sign up for the program. The savings that come from joining a

group as opposed to launching an independent operation also help make PolitiFact attractive to cash-strapped editors.

"I don't think this would have happened if everybody was rolling in the dough," Brown says. "Things have changed."

Indeed, he says, his paper and other regional media could follow suit and look for other ideas that could be shared with, or sold to, other newsrooms. "We should all be looking at things that are points of distinction," he says.

Some papers, however, prefer to go it alone.

Editors at the Seattle Times, for example, liked the idea of launching an in-house truth squad. "It was the kind of reporting that we want to do and want to do more of," Wagoner says. Times representatives met with Adair but decided the paper was not willing to devote the resources that would be required to join the PolitiFact network. "The commitment of personnel was pretty big" and would have cut into the paper's ability to do in-depth reporting on other topics, Wagoner says. "Something has to give at some point," he says, adding that PolitiFact is a year-round operation. The Times is continuing its popular Truth Needle, though Wagoner isn't sure how often it will appear. "It depends on the flow of the news," he said.

Newspaper consultant and AJR columnist John Morton says PolitiFact's unusual national licensing effort appears to be off to a good start, as its affiliates already include "fairly substantial newspapers." In addition to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, other newspapers in the PolitiFact network are the Austin American-Statesman, the Miami Herald, Cleveland's Plain Dealer, Portland's Oregonian, the Providence Journal and the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

"With the reduced staff that almost all newspapers are struggling with, they don't have the manpower to devise a good system," Morton says.

"We could have reinvented the wheel," says Julia Wallace, editor of the Journal-Constitution, which joined PolitiFact in June. "I didn't understand why we would want to."

The Journal Sentinel's Kaiser, which launched PolitiFact Wisconsin in September, says he was impressed with the PolitiFact style and the light touch it often uses. "One of the strengths of it is the consistency," Kaiser says. He says he decided to join the network as he watched yet another campaign season featuring politicians exchanging charges with nobody stepping in to separate truth from fiction.

"This is a revolutionary way to cover politics," Kaiser says.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle praise the concept of fact-checking enterprises but criticize the way they operate. Political staffers say they don't mind having their bosses' words scrutinized but object to what they view as subjective decisions sometimes based on ridiculous levels of word parsing.

"They have a very, very clear objective not to say that politicians are telling the truth," says Edward Chapman, a Democratic consultant who worked on the unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign of outgoing Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker. Chapman complains that he once spent an hour arguing with PolitiFact Georgia over whether a ranking of No. 47 on college entrance exams placed Georgia "right at the bottom," as Baker had said.

"It was a surreal experience," Chapman says. "If we had said 'near the bottom' they would have given us a true." Instead, the statement scored a rating of "half-true."

The dislike of having fact-checkers study the meaning of every word is, in fact, producing some bipartisan agreement among political staffers in a climate where that commodity is rare indeed. "The analysis of a single word or phrase misses the larger scope of what the candidate is saying," says Jill Bader, a Republican who has worked on campaigns in the District of Columbia and two states, most recently Wisconsin. "That fact that you guys get to choose which part of an ad you're going to highlight isn't really objective."

After Roy Barnes, the unsuccessful Democratic candidate for governor in Georgia, said, "If we have to scrape the gold off the gold dome, you make sure that education comes first," PolitiFact Georgia gave him a "Pants on Fire" rating. The reason: The cost of scraping the gold would exceed the value of the precious metal. That ruling made even some journalists cringe.

"I wondered why are they even doing that one; people know he wouldn't go up there and scrape the gold off the dome," says Lori Geary, a reporter with WSB in Atlanta. "They take it verbatim.... Sometimes, I'm like, 'Well, what he said and what he implied are different.' "

But PolitiFact Georgia remains unapologetic. "We have every right to check hyperbole," says Tharpe, who wrote the Georgia dome item that ran in February. "It's fair game."

Overall, Geary says, she supports PolitiFact because it provides a service to readers and viewers. WSB is the sister station of the Journal-Constitution, and Geary does a weekly report during which she confronts a politician who is the subject of an upcoming PolitiFact Georgia report. She tells the politician the verdict PolitiFact Georgia has reached about a statement the political figure had made and solicits his or her reaction.

"I've had some of them cuss at me... I've had to bleep out a few candidates," she says. "The viewers love it."

Political consultant Wiley says fact-checkers would be more effective if they skipped the nitpicking and focused instead on the overarching message. Instead of using journalists to make all the calls, Wiley suggests news outlets hire former campaign staffers who understand how messages are being spun by candidates. "Now [fact-checkers] are choosing black and white statements. But if you had some political hacks, they would look at an ad and say, 'C'mon guys, this is what they're really saying.'"

Though not endorsing hiring old pols, TBD's Robillard sees Wiley's point about the limitations of fact-checkers. "You could fact-check the little lie, but you can't fact-check the big lies," he says. "If somebody says health care reform will make the country a better place, you can't fact-check that."

Regardless, politicians and their staffers are learning to adapt to the growth of truth squads. "It certainly becomes part of the overall picture, not the determining factor in how decisions will be made, but we have to be aware of this stuff," says Patrick Curley, a longtime Wisconsin Democrat and political confidant to Barrett, the Milwaukee mayor. Politicians are learning to use the ratings as a weapon to either promote themselves or attack their opponents, says Curley, who is Barrett's chief of staff.

"Everybody is kind of getting into the game.... All over the country, you're going to see Truth-O-Meters," Curley says. "It's already entered the calculus. It didn't take long."