



Countering Misinformation:

*Understanding False Narratives and
Tactics of Manipulation*



Roberta Braga, Founder and Executive Director, DDIA

◆ About Us

DDIA – operated by and for Latinos and Latin Americans – is a hub for research and interventions geared at strengthening trust and connection between communities and democracy.

In an era of tech solutions to tech problems, we center the human experience in research, capacity-building and policy solutions that contribute to healthy information ecosystems necessary for vibrant digital democracies.





◆ Our Work



DDIA is using every tool in our toolbox to help Latinos live a healthy digital life.

What is in our toolbox?

- Public opinion research (surveys, focus groups, interviews)
- Narrative analysis (OSINT investigations, monitoring, social listening)
- Messenger and message testing (pre and post testing)
- Capacity-building (trainings and workshops)
- Policy (knowledge-sharing for better policymaking)





Terms and Definitions

Disinformation: False information spread with intent to deceive. To prove that a particular incident counts as disinformation, it is necessary to prove both that the information was false and that the source spread it deliberately.

Misinformation: False information spread with intent that cannot be ascertained, or which can be shown not to be deliberate (e.g., if the source subsequently corrected itself).

Propaganda: The deliberate spread of information or ideas to influence a person, group, institution, or nation in support of—or in opposition to—a particular cause.

Hyper-Partisan Narratives: Narratives that drive wedges within audiences. These narratives can be disinformation or misinformation, but it does not have to be. For example, racially divisive content may not be disinformation but can be a problematic or harmful narrative.



Terms and Definitions

Claims: a statement or assertion, in this case often an outright falsehood or an affirmation made without evidence to back it up.

Narratives: an account of connected events; a story. Often, narratives are not outright true or false, but rather harnessed to flip the script using a grain of truth that is massively twisted for a purpose.

Meta/Master Narratives: conspiracies or misleading/false stories that get recycled about specific issues. Under meta-narratives, we often find a set of claims that are predictable and used as false proof to underpin the narrative.



What Do We Know Actually About Misinformation?

- 1. Misinformation is predictable, cyclical, and borderless. We can get ahead of it.**
 - Understanding the broader **narratives and tactics being used can help you predict disinformation before it happens.**
 - Bad actors amplify each other's content. Addressing falsehoods in a silo is not strategic.
- 2. The decentralization of content creation, media consumption and online ecosystems means people are consuming facts mixed with opinions and falsehoods all of the time.**
 - Social media can distort **perceptions** about the size and scope of problems.
 - Most misinformation spreading nowadays are not outright lies, but a **grain of truth distorted for a specific purpose.**
- 3. Information voids are one part of the problem, but so is the oversaturation of information.**
 - People are overwhelmed. **Access to correct information is not the solution for everyone.**
 - High interest in politics and consumption of hyper-partisan information** are big drivers of engagement with disinformation; levels of education and access less so.



What Do We Know Actually About Misinformation?

4. Solutions to misinformation also go beyond communications and content.

- a. Assess your avenue for impact. **Not everyone should be at the forefront of countering disinformation directly.** ALSO, sometimes **strategic silence** is the way to go.
- b. Being on the defensive on everything can do more harm than good if the claims are not spreading widely enough.

5. Today, social media platforms are moderating only the **WORST** offenses online, and even that is asymmetric between English and non-English-language violations.

- a. False narratives spread in Spanish and Portuguese often go **unchecked** and tech platforms have done a **poor job** of **labeling** or **taking down** harmful content in **non-English languages.**



What Do We Know So Far (Latino-specific)?

Most Latinos are familiar with popular misinformation narratives, but are not believing them. There are high levels of uncertainty among Latinos when it comes to disinformation.

Latinos *who see and believe misinformation most often* tend to have high interest in politics, consume very partisan media, and also tend to be more distrustful and conspiratorial. This is not all about education or access to information.

Interventions such as fact-checking and inoculation are effective, even within subgroups that are more likely to adopt false claims, but solutions should consider cultural references.

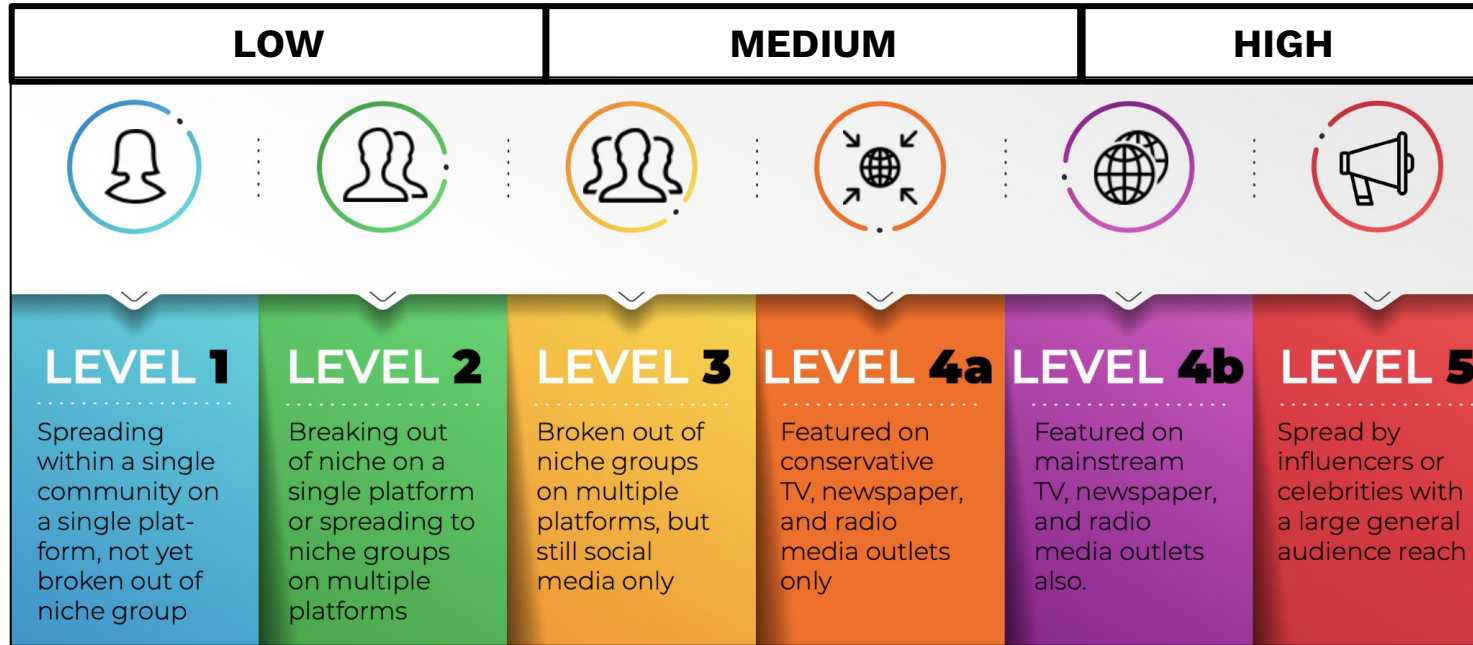


Key Issues and Narratives in Latino Spaces Online

Takeaways

- The silver lining of disinformation is that it is predictable.
- The big meta-narratives rarely change - what actually changes are the claims underpinning those meta-narratives.
- Focus on addressing the meta-narrative by reframing the conversation. Don't get bogged down by addressing specific claims, unless they are breaking out at scale (DDIA can help you understand what is breaking out at scale. You can also use the Ben Nimmo scale included in the next section as a guide).
- What are the meta-narratives circulating in Latino spaces online? See next slides.

Assess Reach Using the Breakout Scale



Source: [Dewey Digital's Breakout Scale explainer](#)

Original: [Breakout Scale report](#)

Immigration

- **Meta-narrative 1:** Immigrants are a threat to the country or society.

False and Misleading Claims:

- Migrants are to blame for a country's alleged economic decline.
- Migrants are stealing resources from U.S. citizens.
- Migrants are getting benefits from the government that citizens don't get.
- Migrants are all criminals or gang members.
- Migrants are the source of increased crime and insecurity.
- Migrants make our cities/states unsafe.

Immigration

- **Meta-narrative 2:** There is an ongoing immigration crisis in (pick country).

False and Misleading Claims:

- The southern U.S. border is in shambles / open / insecure.
- Neighboring countries are negligent and to blame for the entrance of drugs and criminals into our country.
- One president's immigration policies have caused the influx of undocumented immigrants.
- One political party is intentionally bringing immigrants with the motive of securing their vote.

Voting & Elections

- **Meta-narrative 1:** Elections are fraudulent and can't be trusted.

False and Misleading Claims About the Electoral System:

- Imperfect or random events that don't impact election outcomes being portrayed as electoral fraud (examples: delays at polling places, ballot switching, machines not working, machines being hacked, Sharpie-gate)
- People making up irregularities, including ballot switching, appearance of fake ballots
- Accusing authorities of committing electoral fraud

False and Misleading Claims about Voting:

- Spreading false or misleading information about who has the right to vote
- Claims of manipulation to prevent voting
- False or misleading claims about the documentation someone should use to vote

Voting & Elections

■ **Meta-narrative 1:** Elections are fraudulent and can't be trusted.

False and Misleading Claims about the Voters:

- Claiming that dead people are voting
- Claims that non-citizens are voting
- False claims about citizens votes in other countries
- Fake or manipulated surveys
- Domestic fissures portrayed as gullible voters being manipulated by foreign powers

False and Misleading Claims About the Candidates:

- Candidate declarations that are false
- Candidates' ideologies being ones they are not
- Candidates not being fit for office (gender, age, experience, racism, birth)
- False or manipulated photos and videos of candidates or their families
- AI-generated audio of candidates
- False affiliations

Global Control

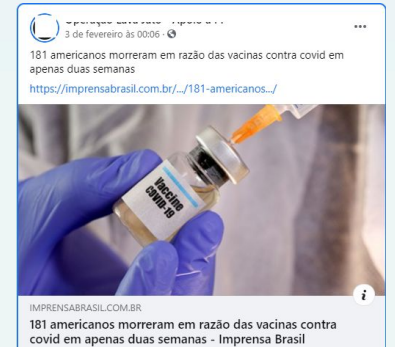
- **Meta-narrative 1:** Global elites are secretly controlling the population via a variety of fronts.

False and Misleading Claims:

- “Big International Institutions” - Global elites are using the United Nations, World Economic Forum, World Health Organization, etc., to implement their agenda to control the population (Agenda 2030)
 - COVID - COVID-19 pandemic was a form of population control - elites were trying to kill us off or monitor our behaviors by inserting microchips into our bodies
 - QAnon - Global elites and politicians are trafficking in children (and 50 other things; note these are fringe and should not be amplified)
- Corporations are controlling politics and voters have little say in election outcomes.

Health and Vaccines

- **Meta-narrative 1:** Vaccines are ineffective and harmful, and often cause debilitation or death.
 - False allegations that vaccines kill
 - False allegations that vaccines cause severe health-related issues like infertility and myocarditis
 - Sports players are hurt or harmed because of the vaccines
- **Meta-narrative 2:** Vaccines are being used by a cadre of secretive global elites to control societies.
 - Claims that pandemics a form of global control “by elites” - example: “plandemic”, micro-chip, etc.
- **Meta-narrative 3:** Alternative fake cures





Key Techniques and Tactics Used by Bad Actors

The 5 Ds of Disinformation

- **Dismiss** - disinformers will often push back against criticism by dismissing their critics. This might be arguing that the people calling them out use a different standard for them than with other actors or themselves; or arguing that their criticism is biased.
- **Distort** - disinformers often twist the narrative or the context around it to deceive. They do so by taking information, including imagery and video, and changing the framing around it.
- **Distract** - disinformers will try to distract you from their bad behavior by shifting attention to a different narrative or actor, for instance by accusing critics of the same activity that they've been accused of.
- **Dismay** - disinformers often use threats to silence or discourage others from exposing them or taking action against them. For example, many will threaten journalists or news outlets reporting on a story.
- **Divide** - disinformers often fabricate, misrepresent, or exaggerate conflict between subgroups, to widen divisions in a community

(Credit: Ben Nimmo)

Other, Related Techniques...

(Credit - Cambridge University Social Decision-Making Lab)

Emotional Language

- Bad actors will often lace disinformation with emotional language to provoke a strong reaction.
- Emotions are powerful tools of persuasion. Playing into emotions, especially negative ones like fear, anger, or contempt, is a trick to get you to pay attention to something when you otherwise wouldn't.
- Research shows that using emotional words increases the viral potential of social media content.
- For example, bad actors could create posts that a new policy will lead to catastrophic results, using phrases like "end of our freedoms" or "threat to our way of life". They could also make reference to an earlier period, with concepts such as "the good old days."

Incoherence

- Incoherence occurs when someone uses two or more arguments to make a point that cannot logically all be true at once.
- It's a technique most commonly seen in longer discussions about a particular topic.
- For example, contradictory claims could be used about climate changing where a bad actor in one post may claim that the change is natural and cannot be attributed to humans, while in another post claiming that the government's recent policies may be reversing or aggravating climate trends.

False Dichotomies

- A false dichotomy (or false dilemma) is a logical fallacy in which a limited number of choices or sides are presented as mutually exclusive, when in reality more options are available.
- It's also known as the "either-or fallacy".
- False dichotomies are used in various debates such as the right to privacy, where bad actors may say that either you support technology and progress, or you are against innovation.
- False dichotomies may also be used in discussions about political campaigns and policy critiques, where content may promote the idea of people either being for or against a candidate or politician, while dismissing the idea of constructive, nuanced, or critical feedback.
- In these cases, it's important to introduce nuanced perspectives where implications are considered while fighting against the false dichotomy.

Scapegoating

- Scapegoating is when a person or group is singled out or takes unwarranted blame for a particular problem.
- For example, in the case of a small town facing economic decline while also seeing an uptick in immigration, bad actors could amplify content or fake news articles to draw associations between the two trends while blaming immigrants for crime and unemployment.

Ad-Hominem Attacks

- Ad hominem attacks are commonly used to draw attention away from the issue at hand and manipulate your impression of the person instead (see dismiss in the 5 Ds).
- In online content, bad actors can try to discredit or silence voices by focusing on the person rather than message, with messages like “why should we listen to you?” or bringing up background information about a person that is irrelevant to the issue at hand.
- An example of this is the birther theories that have been used to attempt to discredit Barack Obama and Kamala Harris with false claims that they were not born in the United States.



Approaches to Countering Disinformation

Social Listening/Monitoring/Tracking

- What is it? Monitoring of social media and other online spaces to understand how communities are exposed to and targeted with disinformation, propaganda, and hyper-partisan narratives.
- Five Considerations When Assessing Threats:
 - 1) Some platforms matter more than others - is this a platform your community uses?
 - 2) Repetition tricks our brains - is this a narrative that is being repeated across multiple channels?
 - 3) Topic momentum vs. topic spikes - is this narrative being amplified in the moment or has it been recurring for a while?
 - 4) In-network sharing - is this a narrative that is being shared within fringe groups or more widely?
 - 5) Mainstream amplification - is this narrative well known? Has it been picked up by mainstream news outlets? Sometimes, journalists can contribute to the spread through both-sidedism, accepting the premise, amplifying, or pushing to trending topics a narrative

Fact-Checking / Debunking

- What is it? Analysis of a statement by a known person or organization to determine whether it is factual or not; contrast the statement with public and private information and data online, and technological tools (google reverse-image searching, video verification to determine if something has been manipulated or not). This practice is usually non-partisan.
- Fact-checking derives from a need to hold those in power to account for their claims, and is traditionally conducted by journalists, newsrooms, political analysts, and today, by fact-checking orgs.
- Fact-checkers have a huge role to play in nipping disinformation at the bud

Inoculation / Prebunking

- What is it?
 - Inoculation Theory is a theory developed in psychology and communications that suggests that it is possible to build up resistance to persuasion, influence, or manipulation attempts by exposing people to weakened or diluted forms of the same arguments before they encounter the full-strength arguments from bad actors.
- This is akin to the way that vaccines work in the body, where exposure to a weakened form of a virus can help to protect against the disease when one encounters it in the real world later.
- Includes forewarning, refutation - can be focused on tactics or narratives

OSINT

- What is it? Open-source intelligence
- Uses any and all publicly available resources
- Can include geolocation, reverse-image searching, mapping, determining who is behind accounts, tracking paid-for content
- Usually aims at exposing and explaining cases or narratives

Labeling/Flagging/Removing Content

- By social media platforms in partnership with fact-checking organizations
- Limited and evolving efficiency
- Has an element of psychology
- Still not done consistently

Content Creation/Message and Messenger Testing

- Combination of traditional research - polling, focus groups, interviews - to test reception to messaging and trusted messengers.
- This is just beginning to happen.
- Done by polling firms, and increasingly by other entities.



◆ Contact Information

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We look forward to working more closely with you all in 2025!



◆ Resources - DDIA (2024)

Best Practices for Producing Prebunking Content to Counter Misinformation

- [How-to-Guide in English](#)
- [How-to-Guide in Spanish](#)
- [Landing Page](#)
- [Full Guidebook PDF](#)
- [Full Deck](#)



◆ Resources - DDIA (2024)

September 2024 Polling on Familiarity and Belief in Misinformation, Trust in Electoral Stakeholders, and Perceptions About AI Among Latinos

- [DDIA Poll Takeaways: Latinos and Narratives + Claims](#)
- [DDIA Poll Takeaways: Latinos and Trust](#)
- [DDIA Poll Takeaways: Latinos and Immigration](#)
- [DDIA Poll Takeaways: Latinos and Artificial Intelligence](#)
- [Full Poll Report \(PDF\)](#)
- [Toplines Deck \(released October 2024\)](#)



◆ Resources - DDIA (2024)

March/April 2024 Polling on Familiarity and Belief in Misinformation, Trust in Electoral Stakeholders, and Perceptions About AI Among Latinos

- [March/April 2024 Poll Takeaways - Latinos & Misinformation](#)
- [March/April 2024 Poll Takeaways - Latinos & Trust](#)
- [March/April Poll Takeaways - Latinos & AI](#)
- [Full Poll Report \(PDF\)](#)
- [Full Poll Deck \(PDF\)](#)



◆ Resources - DDIA (2024)

Narrative Analysis of Latino Spaces Online

- Ongoing coverage of [issues and narratives](#) in Latino spaces online (also available in Spanish and Portuguese)
- Summaries of Latino usage of key [platforms and apps](#) (also available in Spanish and Portuguese)
- A [review of academic literature](#) on U.S. Latinos and disinformation



◆ Resources - DDIA (2023)

Polling On Familiarity and Belief in Misinformation Among Latinos and Effective Counter-Measures

- **(Memo 1):** [In and Out of the Rabbit Hole: Exploring Misinformation Adoption among Subgroups of Latinos in the United States](#)
- **(Memo 2):** [Unpacking Misinformation Adoption Among U.S. Latinos: Toward a Typology](#)
- **(Memo 3):** [Seeking Antidotes to Misinformation: An Analysis of Effective Counter-Strategies among U.S. Latinos](#)



◆ Resources - Equis (2022-2024)

- **Polling On Familiarity and Belief in Misinformation Among Latinos**
 - [Equis Misinformation Poll Summary](#)
 - [Equis Misinformation Poll Full Results](#)
- **Trusted Messengers**
 - Equis Experiment: [The Role of Trusted Messengers in Countering Disinformation](#)
- **Latino Media Consumption Research**
 - [Equis Playbook: Media Consumption Among Latinos](#)
 - [Equis and Harmony Labs YouTube Research](#)