

# 22x20

PRESENTS

## 10 EASY STEPS TO FACT-CHECKING A POLITICIAN

Despite what it seems, it's **not rocket science**. Learn to fact check like the best in the world with these **10 tips** and get **closer to the truth** when you listen to the President's **State of the Union** speech.

### LEARN TO SORT FACTS FROM OPINIONS

- 1** "My administration has done better than others", "I have achieved more", all these are common phrases for a politician, but they are opinions, not facts. A fact-checkable claim always refers to a particular issue (education, healthcare, employment) and, usually, carries numbers.

Search for claims with:

- Historical data ("It rained yesterday")
- Comparisons ("It rains more in Miami than in Houston")
- Legality ("He is 18, so he can have a driver's license")
- Statistics (More than 70% of teens are enrolled in school)

### BE PATIENT

- 2** Fact-checking requires some time. You will constantly want to qualify the statement as true or false, but resist! Apply these tips first and decide later. Only after you finish the process you will have all the information to rate a claim.

### LOOK FOR EVIDENCE

- 3** Politicians work for the public and not the other way around. They have the obligation to answer your questions because they are public servants. Reach out to them on Twitter, Facebook or call their office. If you don't get any response (the White House is not likely to respond to your tweets during the SOTU), search on the websites of statistical bodies and academic institutions for evidence that corroborates or refutes the claim you are checking.

Some useful webpages could be:

<https://www.usa.gov/statistics> • <https://www.census.gov/>  
<https://www.data.gov/> • <https://ucr.fbi.gov/>  
<https://www.bls.gov/> • <https://ucr.fbi.gov/>  
<https://www.bls.gov/>

### ONCE YOU FIND THE EVIDENCE, TEST IT!

- 4** Did you find evidence or a politician answered your question? Congrats! But that's not the end of the work. Now you may want to test that evidence with questions such as:

- When was the information collected? Remember, it's a favorite trick to carefully choose start and end dates for data to make the numbers look good. Zoom out to get a glimpse of the longer trend.
- How was it compiled, and by whom? What do you know about the source of the data? Is it credible? How was the information gathered?
- Is the data comprehensive? A small, localized study will not necessarily tell you much about the national picture.
- Has the evidence been tested by others? Has this evidence been published and confirmed by other credible sources?
- Does the evidence actually show what the politician says it does? Read the evidence in full. Don't take at face value that the idea supports the claim.

### THINK ABOUT CONTEXT

- 5** Imagine that a phone manufacturer tells you that sales have doubled. Now add context: It was December, holiday season, a lot of discounts are going on in stores and buying a phone is simply a little cheaper. That change is to be expected, right? The same happens in the public debate.

If a politician claims there are fewer teenage pregnancies in a high-school, it may be because there are fewer students than before and not because prevention campaigns work. Think of the time and space in which what you are verifying occurred.

### ARE THEY CLAIMING CREDIT NOT DUE?

- 6** If a politician takes credit for economic growth during their first weeks in office, they are likely misleading listeners — economic data takes time to be collected and published. In the same way, politicians can mislead by complaining about rising crime numbers, for instance, without noting that the population has also grown.

### FIND RELIABLE SOURCES TO TEST THE CLAIM AGAINST

- 7** The best sources may be government papers and official statistics, company records, scientific studies or think-tank reports. A basic rule: Don't rely on just one source.

### UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE MIGHT BELIEVE IT

- 8** You don't win arguments by calling someone stupid. So, think about why people might believe the claim and take that into account when you fact-check.

### RATE THE CLAIM

- 9** Look again to the whole process you have made, be fair and decide how you would rate the claim (Yes! You can do it now. It wasn't that hard, right?)

### CORRECT YOUR MISTAKES

- 10** Nobody is immune to mistakes, and that means you too. Correct your mistakes openly and you will enhance your credibility.

Based on  
**How to Fact-Check a Politician's Claim in 10 Steps**  
by Peter Cunliffe-Jones, founder of Africa Check.

A VERY  
SPECIAL  
THANKS TO



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YEAR 2020**