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This spring, George Clooney stepped onto Broadway for the [first](#) time in *Good Night, and Good Luck*, embodying legendary journalist and war correspondent Edward R. Murrow in a tale of truth, coercion, and bravery against corporate media forces. The irony was unmistakable: while Clooney performed nightly as a reporter who stood firm against political pressure, contemporary developments have been eroding the verification mechanisms that enable citizens to separate fact from falsehood.

Last October, President Trump [refused](#) to appear for his expected election special interview with *60 Minutes*. Fast forward to [January](#), a few weeks before President Trump's scheduled return to the White House, Mark Zuckerberg announced an end to Meta's use of independent, third-party fact checkers and his plan to replace them with Wikipedia-style Community Notes. Similarly, in April, Amazon [retracted](#) its original plan to display the proportion of costs from President Trump's tariffs next to the total prices of products on its website. This occurred around the same time that President Trump made a call to Jeff Bezos, and White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt called Amazon's intention a [hostile and political act](#). Whether this timing reflects political pressure or coincidence, the decision still undermined citizens' capacity to make informed choices by destroying the foundation that allows people to form confident opinions in the first place.

As far back as 1597, English Lord Chancellor Francis Bacon said, Knowledge is power. However, in 1742, the English poet Thomas Gray countered, Ignorance is bliss. Today's dismantling of fact-checking systems forces us to confront which philosophy will define American democracy.

The erosion of information infrastructure strikes at the heart of democratic theory itself. Democracy, unlike other forms of governance that are built to concentrate decision-making power in the hands of elites, requires a [shared body of knowledge](#) among citizens, for example trust in elections and reliable knowledge to inform policy-relevant debate. The idea that governmental legitimacy partially depends on masses of voters' collective ability to make sound decisions provides a major justification for this sort of governance. However, this principle only stands when electoral decisions produce outcomes that are both [fair](#) aligning with human rights principles and [true](#) based on established scientific knowledge and

verifiable facts. While various long-term approaches could theoretically support informed citizenry from improved media literacy to technological solutions the current rapid dismantling of established verification systems creates a dangerous gap. Without reliable mechanisms in place that provide the basis for making true decisions, citizens lose the foundation necessary to exercise democratic choice meaningfully. When verification systems disappear faster than realistic alternatives can develop, citizens lose confidence in their ability to distinguish credible from incredible sources across all policy domains. Instead of empowering informed participation, the absence of reliable verification systems often forces people to choose between retreating into confirmation-biased information bubbles or becoming paralyzed by uncertainty about what constitutes credible evidence neither of which supports the kind of reasoned deliberation that democracy requires.

The Amazon tariff case demonstrates how information suppression directly undermines democratic accountability. When tariff cost display was scrapped, consumers lost crucial knowledge about who actually pays import duties. Without this information, voters cannot understand the real sources of price increases or evaluate economic policies based on their actual effects rather than political rhetoric. This hits especially hard in Ontario, Calif., where Amazon's largest U.S. facility is based a mere 40 miles inland from Los Angeles.

With community-based fact-checking, the expectation that citizens should do their own research misunderstands information complexity. Professional fact-checking organizations hold [advantages](#) in professional journalism training, whereas cognitive biases and the radicalizing nature of the internet make self-education and productive conversation difficult. Compounding this is the beginners bubble of overconfidence where a few minutes of Google searches and clicking on suggested links leaves browsers seemingly informed on a topic. If this is the case, then it is even more important that the little information casual users can access during their rapid research is accurate and not distorted by what could be similarly misinformed fact-checking. The speed disadvantage creates the biggest problem: research analyzing over [237,000](#) community fact-checked posts on X found that community notes might be too slow to intervene in the early (and most viral) stage of the diffusion, with only 13.5% of helpful notes displayed before the posts critical 5.75-hour half-life of viral content spread. Without systematic fact-checking to counter this natural advantage, false information dominates public discourse before corrections can take effect.

The cumulative consequence of these trends could transform the nature of democratic competition if they continue unchecked. When truth becomes negotiable, democracy becomes a contest between competing mythologies where the most emotionally compelling, forcefully promoted story wins nearly regardless of its tangible relationship to reality. The parallel between Clooney's nightly portrayal of Murrow and our current moment is inescapable: both eras feature powerful forces attempting to control information flow and silence inconvenient truths. But, unlike Murrow's era, when brave journalists could still find platforms to challenge authority, today's corporate retreat from fact-checking leaves fewer institutional defenders of verified information. Clooney's echoing of this message favorably showcases the issue to a different audience of show goers and art enthusiasts. The question facing American democracy is whether citizens can maintain the shared standards of evidence necessary for democratic deliberation, or whether we will drift to a system where power alone determines what counts as true.

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