MEDIA**MATTERS**
FOR AMERICA

est. 2004

The Top Watchdog Against Fake News and Propaganda

Transforming the Media Landscape

Media Matters will continue our core mission of disarming right-wing misinformation, while leading the fight against the next generation of conservative disinformation: The proliferation of fake news and propaganda now threatening the country's information ecosystem. Utilizing our unique capacity as the nation's premier progressive media watchdog and rapid-response research center, Media Matters will further increase our visibility in the ecosystem, strengthen the ability of our supporters and partners to influence it, and improve the infrastructure on which it rests.

THE TOP WATCHDOG AGAINST FAKE NEWS AND PROPAGANDA

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

The onslaught of well-funded right-wing media manipulation brings with it significant challenges.

The conservative Media Research Center, with an annual operating budget of $18 million, works closely with establishment right-wing media to reinforce the myth of a liberally biased media, push journalism to the right, and propel misinformation into the mainstream.

Breitbart, which has received millions in funding from extremist billionaires close to the Trump administration, provides a nexus point for the so-called alt-right (the newest branding for American white nationalism, anti-Semitism, and misogyny) to exploit vulnerabilities throughout the media landscape. With a powerful ally in the White House (former chief executive Steve Bannon will be Trump's chief strategist), Breitbart plans to export its brand of anti-establishment racism on a global scale.

Meanwhile, the right has spent millions building and maintaining a next generation conservative news infrastructure, which it effectively weaponized through social media and affiliated sites during the 2016 presidential campaign.

The relationship is symbiotic.

Donald Trump uses his Twitter account to manipulate news cycles with lies; attack press outlets that produce critical stories about him; and share stories from fake news purveyors, conspiracy websites, and right-wing news outlets.

"Trump TV" (the streaming news upstart Right Side Broadcasting) gives him a platform to bypass other news media and distribute programming directly to his supporters. (Trump TV will reportedly be present at White House press briefings even without traditional press credentials.)

In a hyper-fragmented media environment, the right is aggressively exploiting vulnerabilities and finding new ways to poison the information ecosystem with lies.

Media Matters is ready to stop them.

OVERARCHING STRATEGY

In our last four-year strategic plan, we described the media landscape ahead as being "sandwiched between two realities." We foresaw a landscape where, on the one hand, legacy outlets would ostensibly remain at the forefront, but their power and relevancy would wane as they made abrupt shifts to respond to changing economic realities. On the other hand, fragmentation among audiences would create an explosion in new digital outlets yielding increases in confirmation bias, trap information consumers in the filter bubble isolating them from contrary views, and foment extremism.

We are no longer sandwiched between two realities. The new reality is the one of fragmentation— and all that comes with it. Specifically, Media Matters must respond to three distinct challenges:

- **The decay of journalism.**

- **The rise of fake news, disinformation, and active propaganda efforts.**

- **An information ecosystem that furthers extremism and cultivates a climate of harassment.**

To stop right-wing media manipulation in this environment, we must further increase our visibility in the ecosystem, strengthen the ability of our partners and supporters to influence it, and improve the infrastructure on which it rests.

TOP OUTCOMES

Over the next four years, Media Matters will focus on achieving the following outcomes:

Serial misinformers and right-wing propagandists inhabiting everything from social media to the highest levels of government will be exposed.

Internet and social media platforms, like Google and Facebook, will no longer uncritically and without consequence host and enrich fake news sites and propagandists.

Toxic alt-right social media-fueled harassment campaigns that silence dissent and poison our national discourse will be punished and halted.

STOPPED DONALD TRUMP'S PHONE INTERVIEW PRIVILEGES.

Media Matters was the first to call out national cable broadcast networks for allowing Trump to phone in to their shows instead of forcing him to appear via satellite or in studio. Because of this unprecedented privilege, Trump could appear on more shows (he conducted 69 phone interviews in the first 69 days of 2016 alone), and he could avoid being confronted by images and interviewers showing his lies for what they are. As a result of our campaign urging major networks to correct course, CBS News and NBC News publicly stated they'd discontinue Trump's phone privileges. Eventually others followed suit and Trump's ability to control the news cycle from the comfort of his home was greatly reduced.

THE MEDIA MATTERS PLAN

Media Matters will push back on conservative misinformation across all media channels in the information ecosystem and specifically neutralize the effects and infrastructure of the newly empowered alt-right.

We will focus our efforts into the following three areas:

- **Leverage our authority to encourage good journalism.**

- **Develop technologies to serve as an early warning system for fake news and inoculate social media platforms from exploitation and abuse.**

- **Implement a robust omnichannel communications strategy and mobilize a massive grassroots advocacy effort.**

ENCOURAGE GOOD JOURNALISM

Traditional news outlets are dying.

Their business models have been decimated over the last 20 years as their audiences have fallen, competitors have grown, and advertising revenue has plummeted.

17,929
news articles highlighting or relying on Media Matters

Journalists face an increasingly precarious personal financial position as news outlets lay off reporters or fold altogether.

This position of weakness, combined with journalists' institutional tendency to portray political problems as equally the fault of both Democrats/progressives and Republicans/conservatives regardless of the facts, suggests that the press will continue to normalize Donald Trump and his allies.

Journalists who confront the extreme reality of a Trump administration experience personal harassment. Media outlets that hold him accountable may be subject to boycotts, enflamed by the president himself. Both risk access to government information and officials.

Media Matters must grapple with the effects of decaying journalism and ensure that truth triumphs in the information ecosystem—not only as a means to combat misinformation but because it's necessary for our embattled democracy to survive.

Here's how we'll do it:

RESEARCH
Even our fiercest detractors acknowledge the veracity our research. Recognizing that Media Matters' strength comes from its research products, we will elevate and promote their branding and use.

In early December 2016, Media Matters restructured our research department to improve our ability to engage in deep dive research studies and opposition research while simultaneously supporting rapid response that bolsters the progressive movement.

In 2017, we will revamp the Media Matters website to make this vital and often evergreen information significantly more accessible. Every day, Media Matters receives requests from members of the news media and progressive partners that can be satisfied by simply pointing them to previously published research content. Developing a research portal will capitalize on this demand.

Along these lines, when it comes to ultimately moving the needle and shaping coverage, few products rival a Media Matters quantitative study that puts hard numbers on the amount and type of coverage a topic has received, and the people and organizations sought to discuss it. We know this based on feedback from journalists as well as the impact these studies have generated. Increasing the number of quantitative studies we publish will strengthen Media Matters' overall brand while increasing our credibility with activists, media, and our movement partners.

Additionally, Media Matters' core media monitoring and research teams, which focus on the news of the day, are bolstered by five issue-specific teams led by experts who study how media cover the key progressive topics of our time, even when they do not lead the news. Media Matters' issue teams are focused on correcting misinformation on: gun violence and public safety, LGBT equality, reproductive health and gender equality, climate and energy, and economic policy. Our issue teams teams work daily with movement partners specializing on these issues to amplify our work and change the narrative on how these issues are covered in the media.

> *"Over the years, Media Matters has won or assisted in a number of tangible victories, from getting Glenn Beck off cable news to holding 60 Minutes accountable for its faulty Benghazi reporting."*
>
> —The Nation

MEDIA ADVOCACY—PUNISH ENABLING AND COMPLACENCY

Media Matters will be vigilant in holding news media accountable for even the slightest bit of normalization of Trump. We will encourage journalists to defend standard practices, like the protective press pool and media credentialing, and strive for higher standards against this new threat.

When Breitbart applied for Permanent Senate Gallery Press Credentials, Media Matters was quick to act by advising the credentialing committee of the myriad ways that Breitbart violated their requirements. Additionally, Media Matters did something that the committee was unable to do: A deep dive study of Breitbart content, reviewing thousands of their stories to demonstrate that they do not meet the credentialing requirement for original reporting.

Media Matters also first sounded the alarm about Breitbart's international expansion and began working with journalists in the United States and abroad to educate them on Breitbart's model as well as the larger universe of alt-right activity for which Breitbart is the nexus. Most significantly, we helped journalists understand the symbiotic relationship between Breitbart and opposition political parties so that they can accurately report on the danger that is spreading across western democracies.

Supporting journalism means just that: Helping news media navigate the complicated alt-right landscape, defending them against harassment and abuse from alt-right pockets, while simultaneously ensuring that they do the work that is so vitally needed.

NEUTRALIZE GOVERNMENT DISINFORMATION

What happens when the most dangerous source of misinformation is no longer right-wing radio hosts or Fox News, but the federal government itself? Misinformation coming out of government agencies can have devastating consequences. Look no further than government-fueled misinformation amplified by an uncritical news media that led the country to war with Iraq in 2003.

The notion that the United States government under Donald Trump could become a source of misinformation is not far-fetched—and in fact seems all but inevitable. Trump himself has repeatedly pushed lies on his social media accounts. And several of his top officials have promoted fake news stories, including the person that he has put in charge of the official White House social media accounts, who has also used social media to harass detractors.

Bottom line: Media Matters must be fully prepared to identify misinformation coming from government and fight it at every turn—both directly and indirectly by prodding journalists to scrutinize federal claims.

As part of our research department restructuring, we have added a dedicated team of media analysts that will use new technologies to help track government disinformation. Media Matters is prepared to confront the United States government under a proven and dangerous dissembler.

INNOVATE AGAINST FAKE NEWS AND PROPAGANDA

Facebook's virtual monopoly on information distribution has supercharged the fragmented landscape.

Almost two-thirds of Americans (200 million) consume news on social media. By contrast, less than half of adults watch local news, less than a third watch cable news or nightly network news, a quarter listen to radio, and only one in five read newspapers.

In 2016, a full two-thirds of Facebook users used the platform to get news. Facebook's algorithm fuels confirmation bias by feeding content from outlets that tell the users what they want to hear. Fake news purveyors exploited this vulnerability for profit and political influence.

Fake news was so profitable during the 2016 election that teenagers in Macedonia began publishing pro-Trump propaganda for the sole purpose of making money. In instances where fake news can be funded by political operations or even foreign governments, Facebook's algorithm is the only barrier to mass access.

We are already experts in monitoring the way information moves through the media landscape; we understand where and how a lie is manufactured and how it proliferates.

Now is the time to build on our expertise and unique audio and video archive to develop the technologies necessary to combat this new onslaught of misinformation.

Here's how we'll do it:

BIG DATA ANALYSIS AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM
Media monitoring enables us to identify pernicious misinformation and develop strategies for combating it. Historically, this has meant monitoring conservative media, television news, and newspapers.

But relying on human media monitors is no longer sustainable. Fake news and alt-right communities are multiplying exponentially.

FORCED CHANGES AT *60 MINUTES* OVER BENGHAZI SMEAR.

In October 2013, CBS aired a *60 Minutes* report that purported to raise further questions about the Obama administration's response to the Benghazi attack based on an interview with a so-called "eyewitness." Our relentless research and pressure provoked reporting that proved the account to be a total fabrication. The network was forced to issue a correction and apology, and the publisher pulled the "eyewitness's" book (published by CBS's corporate cousin) from the shelves. After the network launched an internal investigation—for which we were the first to call—into the origins of its faulty reporting, the reporter and producer responsible were forced to take a leave of absence, and the show's executive producer promised to make changes to reduce the chance of repeating the error. *Slate* credited Media Matters, writing, "the fast torpedoing of CBS's Benghazi story shows how far the liberal attack machine [Media Matters] has come."

Media Matters has already secured access to raw data from Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites. We have also put in place the technology necessary to automatically mine white nationalist message boards and alt-right communities for our archive.

We will now develop technologies and processes to systematically monitor and analyze this unfiltered data.

The earlier we identify a fake news story, the more effectively we can quash it. With this new technology at their fingertips, researchers monitoring news in real time will be able to identify the origins of a lie with mathematical precision, creating an early warning system for fake news and disinformation.

PREDICTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Bringing this data analysis to scale will also allow Media Matters to identify which individuals and outlets are the most destructive forces driving fake news, misinformation, and harassment.

Cutting-edge advances in cloud computing and machine learning will enable us to identify patterns and connections that would otherwise go under the radar. We will be able to assess where and how misinformation is likely to move, who will be affected by it, and what needs to be done to neutralize it.

But predictive technologies are only as good as the data that goes into them. The more data the system has to analyze, the richer its insights. Media Matters' already extensive 12-year archive gives this new system a big jump-start.

COLLABORATING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Outlets that push fake news are completely dependent on Facebook to spread their lies, and ad networks like Google to fund them.

Media Matters has unique insight to help fix problems in this part of the media landscape.

After Facebook responded to our campaign by acknowledging the problem of fake news and agreeing to do something about it, we began a dialogue. It became clear from these conversations that Facebook needed our help in fully understanding the problem and identifying concrete solutions. Further, it also became clear that we had information and insight that they didn't have that was helpful in educating them on the full scope of the problem. For example, Media Matters had a detailed map of the constellation of right-wing Facebook pages that had been the biggest purveyors of fake news—as well as insight into the food chain of fake news and how it was moving through the Facebook ecosystem.

Similarly, after Google revised their terms of service in order to prohibit so-called fake news sites from using their advertising network, it was Media Matters that had the information necessary to identify 40 of the worst fake news sites to which this policy applied.

GOT FACEBOOK TO COMMIT TO FIGHTING THE RISE OF FAKE NEWS.

During the 2016 election, Facebook refused to do anything about the dangerous rise of fake news or even acknowledge their role in promoting disinformation: Mark Zuckerberg called the notion that fake news is a problem "crazy." In November, we launched a campaign pressuring Facebook to: 1) acknowledge the problem of the proliferation of fake news on Facebook and its consequences for our democracy and 2) commit to taking action to fix the problem. As a result of our push for accountability, Zuckerberg did both. Our campaign was covered by prominent national political, business, and tech media outlets, and we've been engaging with Facebook leadership behind the scenes to share our expertise and offer input on developing meaningful solutions.

Social media platforms need help in identifying vulnerabilities and crafting solutions. To this end, Media Matters will serve as their partner, speaking to them in their language of big data and encouraging changes based on what we see happening in the landscape.

By applying our expertise-driven technologies and enhanced credibility, we will earn and maintain our seat at the table and improve the structures of the media landscape.

MOBILIZE

At the Republican National Convention, Stephen Bannon bragged that Breitbart News had built "the platform for the alt-right." Weeks later, Trump appointed Bannon the head of his campaign, and now Bannon will follow Trump into the White House. The alt-right specializes in harassment and abuse and distinguishes itself from traditional right-wing media by its ability to self-organize.

But it has several key vulnerabilities.

They are largely dependent upon social media behemoths that tolerate their abusive activity. (Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter have permitted the alt-right's presence, with some rare but notable exceptions.) They operate on the edge of the law. Their efforts are largely financed on thin profit margins. And their membership consists of weak individuals, often recruited into the movement because they fear or resent women and/or harbor racial animosity.

Both fake news and the alt-right rely on being able to operate in the shadows. They assume that no one will detect their harassment and propaganda until the damage has already been done.

To stop them, we need to become bigger and louder. Only through mass engagement can we halt their harassment and lies.

Here's how we'll do it:

OMNICHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS
Media Matters will not just manage the effects of media fragmentation; we will leverage it to advance our mission.

To this end, Media Matters will enhance our existing digital program by establishing an omnichannel communications command center to communicate with audiences in ways that are optimized for the platform on which they are already most engaged.

Put another way, we won't force information consumers to come to us for a one-size-fits-all piece of content. Instead, we will go to them with content that is tailored to their individualized way of interacting. In practice, this means that the way we present a specific issue on Facebook will be different than the way that we present it on Tumblr or Twitter—and some in our audience may not even

> *"I've gotten some tough treatment [from Media Matters] and there were times you guys were right and I internalized that and said 'that is a lesson learned.'"*
>
> —Major Garrett, CBS News White House Correspondent
> (formerly a Fox News correspondent)

> ## "It's often easy to trace Media Matters' influence on a major news story."
> —National Journal

get information on social, but instead have it delivered directly to their phone via text messages.

Our award-winning digital team has incorporated elements of this strategy into our communications for the past few years, resulting in a 970% increase in engagement and a comparable increase in growth.

Now, Media Matters will fully incorporate this approach by overhauling our social media strategy, adding additional staff to our social media team, and initiating a comprehensive audience targeting and segmentation program.

We will also bring on board an expert to construct turnkey rapid-response plans so that Media Matters can squash burgeoning online harassment campaigns and fake news or saturate the landscape with truth, bypassing the news media entirely if need be.

With this capacity, Media Matters will dramatically increase our audience and engagement and effectively quash fake news and misinformation before it spreads far and wide.

MASSIVE GRASSROOTS TRUTH SQUAD

Wider reach alone won't be sufficient. We need our audience to persistently engage in the fight against the alt-right and fake news—routinely and within their own social networks.

Too many Facebook users sit silent as extremism and misinformation fill their news feeds. Progressives in particular are significantly less likely to challenge content that pops up in their feeds compared to their conservative counterparts. Silence allows misinformation to fester.

This can't go on.

We will train hundreds of thousands of individuals on how to identify fake news and alt-right smears in their social media networks and equip them with the tools to fight them on their own.

In December 2016, with fake news at the forefront of public attention, we added 40,000 new participants to our action list. We expect this growth to continue, and will provide trainings, resource materials, and urgent action alerts to keep participants actively engaged.

A deeper grassroots bench also means that Media Matters will be better positioned to win corporate pressure campaigns, proven to eliminate perverse incentives that reward this horrific behavior.

EVALUATION

Media Matters will constantly monitor the following indicators to know if we're on track toward our top outcomes.

Serial misinformers and right-wing propagandists inhabiting everything from social media to the highest levels of government will be exposed. Journalists, activists, allies, politicians, and the general public will routinely utilize and weaponize our research products to understand and take action against the changing media ecosystem and the extremists seeking to manipulate it. We will continue to break engagement records and dramatically expand and diversify our reach by presenting our research in multiple formats on a variety of platforms. Key right-wing targets will see their influence diminish as a result of our work.

Internet and social media platforms, like Google and Facebook, will no longer uncritically and without consequence host and enrich fake news sites and propagandists. Social media companies will engage with us over their promotion of the fake news industry. Facebook will adjust its model

18,134
research, analysis, and rapid-response
pieces published since 2013

to stem the flow of damaging fake news on its
platform's pages. Google will cut off these pages' accompanying sites' access to revenue by pulling
their access to Google's ad platform.

Toxic alt-right social media-fueled harassment campaigns that silence dissent and poison our national discourse will be punished and halted. Hundreds of thousands of activists will join our campaigns to push back on alt-right harassment. Key alt-right figures will lose credibility and influence in response to our research and pressure.

BUDGET AND TEAM

Media Matters' core budget for 2017 is $13.4 million, which covers a staff of 81.

This budget allows us to create a 34-person research department engaged in media monitoring, research, deep dive analysis, and rapid response. In addition, this supports five issue-specific teams housing experts that provide broad support to the progressive movement on topics key progressive issues like gun violence and public safety, LGBT equality, reproductive health and gender equality, climate and energy, and economic policy.

This budget also allows us to invest in technological innovations like the creation of an early warning system to identify the proliferation of fake news more efficiently and to create cutting-edge predictive technology that allows us to identify patterns and connections in order to asses how misinformation will move and how we can neutralize it. We will also build out our digital and video teams to a staff of a nine to create a robust omnichannel communications command center and mobilize a grassroots truth squad; and increase the number and impact of actions and advocacy initiatives we undertake to drive change and accountability across the media landscape.

SENIOR STAFF
Angelo Carusone, President. Angelo was named President of Media Matters in December 2016. Previously, he was the organization's Executive Vice President. In that role, Angelo helped run day-to-day operations, expanded the organization's online footprint, and managed accountability initiatives. In 2016, he took a leave of absence to serve as the Deputy CEO for Finance & Administration of the 2016 Democratic National Convention. In 2009, as a law student, Angelo founded the StopBeck effort, which organized participants via social media to successfully convince sponsors to cease advertising on Beck's show. In late 2010, Angelo joined Media Matters as Campaign Director and worked on its

PUSHED ROGER STONE'S BIGOTRY OFF CABLE NEWS.

Media Matters succeeded in pressuring CNN, MSNBC, and even Fox News to stop booking Roger Stone, a regular guest and longtime Trump ally. Stone has a decades-long history of employing political dirty tricks and regularly spouting violent, racist, and sexist rhetoric, and used his various platforms during the 2016 campaign to advance fringe conspiracy theories and promote fake news. In late 2015 and early 2016, we aggressively educated network producers (who had been providing Stone an uncritical platform) about Stone's background. In response to our pressure, CNN and MSNBC confirmed that Stone will no longer appear on their airwaves because of his bigotry, and Stone himself reported that he had been blacklisted by Fox News.

DropFox initiative; he later went on to serve as Director of Online Strategy & Campaigns. He organized the StopRush effort, which convinced thousands of advertisers to refuse to sponsor Limbaugh's program. And he launched the viral DumpTrump campaign in 2012 that was responsible for convincing many of Donald Trump's business partners to sever their relationships with Trump. He holds a B.A. in American Studies from Fordham University and a J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School.

Julie Millican, Vice President. Julie has been with the organization collectively for over eight years in various capacities since she first joined as a researcher in 2006. During her time, she has been a Researcher, Assistant Research Director, Advisor, Deputy Research Director, and also Chief of Staff. She has written extensively about the 2008 election and was routinely cited by the nation's leading papers. Over the years, Julie has been responsible for managing all Research Department resources, involved in organization-wide strategy, overseeing the hiring process, executing restructuring, and overseeing organizational operations. She holds a B.S. in Sociology from Appalachian State University and a M.A. in Clinical Psychology.

Sam Zegas, Senior Advisor. Sam is responsible for spearheading Media Matters' technological innovations, organizational planning, and operations. Sam is a recognized authority in linguistics and multi-lingual project manager with experience in international affairs. Prior to joining Media Matters, Sam was a management consultant at Accenture. There he spent several years helping the Department of State to modernize its international supply chain and asset management systems. He then transitioned to Boston Children's Hospital, where he served as the Acting Director of the International Health Services department—the world's largest international patient program at a pediatric hospital. He has full proficiency and professional experience in German, French, Spanish, and Slovenian, and is also able to translate Russian and Italian. He holds a B.A. in linguistics and anthropology from Harvard University. He is currently on deferment from a joint MBA/MPP program from Harvard Business School and The Kennedy School of Government.

DISRUPTED RUPERT MURDOCH'S TIME WARNER EXPANSION.

As soon as Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox announced its bid to acquire Time Warner in July of 2014, Media Matters kicked into high gear with a coordinated multi-level pressure campaign urging Time Warner to not be swayed by the right-wing media mogul. Murdoch's attempts to grow his influence in the media landscape have always been cause for concern, and we made it a part of our mission to keep his newest power grab in check, cautioning against a future where Fox News-like networks monopolize the free and diverse flow of information in our news. If successful, this merger would have given Murdoch control of 40% of the US cable market and 30% of the movie market. After reports that Murdoch had pulled his offer, the *New York Times, Politico, Broadcasting & Cable,* and other prominent outlets highlighted the influence of our campaign.