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IS IT FAKE NEWS? SCANDAL CONFUSION IN THE TRUMP ERA

Fairleigh Dickinson University, November 1, 2018— The Trump presidency has been anything but ordinary. Among the hallmarks of Trump’s idiosyncratic administration have been the number of scandals that have surrounded the White House. The most recent statewide survey from the Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll finds confusion over the scandals, with many expressing doubts over whether a scandal actually occurred, and partisan differences apparent in the ability of Democrats and Republicans to correctly identify a real versus imagined political scandal.

The poll asked a random sample of residents in New Jersey a series of questions about scandals, two of which occurred and two that did not. The “real” scandals involved Paul Manafort’s guilty plea to conspiracy charges and Scott Pruitt’s departure from the Environmental Protection Agency over concerns regarding misuse of taxpayer funds. The “fake” scandals involved embarrassing remarks made by then reality TV star Donald Trump while on the set of *The Apprentice* and the resignation of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo over negotiations with North Korea.

Across nearly all of the questions, partisan differences exist. Although a majority or plurality of both Democrats and Republicans could correctly identify the real and imagined scandals across three out of the four descriptions, Democrats were considerably more likely to have offered a correct response.

For example, two-thirds (63%) of Democrats know that Paul Manafort pled guilty to conspiracy, whereas only 43 percent of Republicans believe this to be true. And similar differences separate Democrats from Republicans on the question of Scott Pruitt’s departure from the EPA: 61 percent of Democrats correctly identified this as a truthful statement with significantly fewer (45%) of Republicans saying the same.

And, on a scale that accounts for correct answers to scandal questions, 32 percent of Democrats were able to identify at least three of the four correctly, whereas fewer (17%) of Republicans could do the same

“It’s interesting that fewer Republicans were able to correctly identify the real scandals, as compared with Democrats. It could be that what we’re seeing here is something that researchers call motivated reasoning,” said Cassino. “When the facts don’t align with what people would like to believe, they often shift their perception of the facts, rather than re-evaluate their attitudes. This isn’t about random memory failures. Rather, people are motivated to forget about things that conflict with what they would like to believe.”

Correct responses to Trump Scandals Blue = real scandals; Red = fake scandals			
	All	Democrats	Republicans
The Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, recently resigned over negotiations with North Korea. UNTRUE	47%	45%	52%
Remarks Donald Trump made while filming his reality show <i>The Apprentice</i> were leaked to the press. UNTRUE	14%	16%	11%
Paul Manafort, President Trump's former campaign manager, recently pled guilty to conspiring against the United States. TRUE	54%	63%	43%
The former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, recently resigned over concerns that he was misusing taxpayer money. TRUE	55%	61%	45%

Among the full sample of adults, although a majority were able to correctly identify the real scandals, the same cannot be said for those that were fictionalized. Over half (54%) of New Jersey adults know that the President's former campaign manager, Paul Manafort, pled guilty to conspiracy charges earlier this year, with 21 percent saying that it didn't happen. Fifty-five percent know that EPA administrator Scott Pruitt resigned over concerns about misuse of taxpayer money, with 9 percent saying that it didn't happen, and 36 percent saying that they are "not sure" whether it happened or not.

Regarding the two fictionalized scandals, a plurality correctly believe Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is still in his job, but the same number incorrectly believe that remarks Donald Trump made by filming his reality show *The Apprentice* were leaked to the press ARE true. While some individuals who appeared on the program have said that the President made insensitive and racist comments, purported tapes of these comments, which are rumored to exist, have not surfaced. The President has denied that any such recordings exist.

"There has been such an onslaught of news since Trump took office that voters seem to have a hard time keeping up," said Dan Cassino, professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and an analyst for the poll. "At this point, it seems many remain confused about what happened, and what didn't."

A minority of respondents (24%) were able to correctly identify at least three of the four scandals, with almost a fifth (18%) in the dark completely about which scandals are real versus fiction. Around a quarter (27%) were able to correctly identify one out of four scandals, with another 31 percent who identified two scandals correctly.

In addition to partisan differences, gender, age, and education also offer hints at who can tell the difference between a real versus fictionalized scandal. Across the board, women are less likely to recognize the correct scandals than men, older residents do a better job than millennials, and those with college degrees are significantly more likely to distinguish between the two types of scandals when presented.

Methodology - The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone September 26-30, 2018 using a random sample of adults in New Jersey aged 18 and older (N = 805). Results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.8 percentage points, including the design effect. Interviews were conducted in English.

Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

Interviews were conducted by Clear Insights Group of Lehi, Utah, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, sex, and race. 273 interviews were conducted on landlines and 532 were conducted on cellular telephones.

The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group and the research was funded by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll received an “A” rating from statistician Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight blog. The ratings measure both accuracy and bias for all major polling services in the United States, providing an update to similar research the poll watchers conducted in 2014. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll’s “A” rating puts it in the top 14 of the more than 380 polling institutes reviewed and graded from A+ through F. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was found to have a 94 percent accuracy rate for predicting election results, and is one of only two A-rated polling institutes with zero bias to their rankings.

Tables

The Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, recently resigned over negotiations with North Korea	
Happened	17%
Did not happen	47%
Not sure	36%
Refused (vol)	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
The Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo recently resigned over negotiations with North Korea.	1 Happened	18%	15%	16%	13%	21%	16%	19%	19%	14%	17%	17%	17%	15%	17%
	2 Did Not Happen	45%	52%	43%	58%	34%	52%	35%	33%	43%	60%	37%	51%	54%	45%
	3 Not Sure	37%	32%	40%	28%	44%	32%	45%	48%	41%	22%	46%	31%	30%	37%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%

Remarks Donald Trump made while filming his reality show The Apprentice were leaked to the press.	
Happened	47%
Did not happen	14%
Not sure	39%
Refused (vol)	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Remarks Donald Trump made while filming his reality show The Apprentice were leaked to the press.	1 Happened	50%	47%	35%	44%	50%	45%	51%	52%	46%	45%	47%	47%	41%	52%
	2 Did Not Happen	16%	11%	10%	17%	10%	14%	13%	14%	15%	12%	11%	15%	13%	14%
	3 Not Sure	33%	39%	50%	37%	39%	39%	33%	34%	37%	39%	39%	37%	42%	33%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	3%	6%	2%	2%	2%	2%	0%	2%	4%	2%	2%	4%	1%

Paul Manafort, President Trump's former campaign manager, recently pled guilty to conspiring against the United States	
Happened	54%
Did not happen	21%
Not sure	25%
Refused (vol)	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Paul Manafort, President Trump's former campaign manager, recently pled guilty to conspiring against the United States.	1 Happened	63%	43%	40%	54%	52%	52%	55%	47%	55%	57%	49%	55%	42%	61%
	2 Did Not Happen	16%	29%	23%	26%	16%	22%	16%	16%	20%	24%	19%	21%	30%	17%
	3 Not Sure	21%	27%	35%	19%	32%	25%	27%	36%	25%	18%	31%	23%	27%	22%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

The former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, recently resigned over concerns that he was misusing taxpayer money.	
Happened	55%
Did not happen	9%
Not sure	36%
Refused (vol)	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
The former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, recently resigned over concerns that he was misusing taxpayer money.	1 Happened	61%	45%	41%	57%	48%	52%	54%	50%	48%	58%	46%	56%	42%	60%
	2 Did Not Happen	7%	10%	8%	9%	7%	10%	5%	7%	10%	8%	8%	8%	9%	8%
	3 Not Sure	31%	44%	51%	33%	43%	37%	40%	44%	41%	33%	46%	34%	48%	32%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%

Number of correct responses to scandal questions	
0	18%
1	27%
2	31%
3	21%
4	3%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Number of correct responses to scandal questions	.00	15%	16%	25%	13%	22%	16%	20%	27%	20%	8%	21%	16%	17%	15%
	1.00	23%	34%	30%	24%	31%	28%	26%	26%	26%	29%	34%	24%	33%	24%
	2.00	30%	33%	30%	32%	30%	31%	31%	27%	30%	34%	28%	32%	31%	31%
	3.00	27%	15%	15%	26%	16%	22%	19%	18%	21%	24%	14%	25%	17%	25%
	4.00	5%	2%	0%	5%	1%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	1%	5%

Exact question wording and order

US1 through US2 released October 3, 2018
 NJ1 through NJ2 released October 12, 2018
 NJ3 through NJ4D and E released October 3, 2018
 NJ4A through NJ4C released October 4, 2018
 US3 through US4 released October 3, 2018
 MW1 through MW4 released October 12, 2018

NEWS1 through NEWS2 withheld

PK1 through PK3 withheld

PK4 I'm going to read you some statements about events that may have taken place lately. After I read each one, please tell me if it happened, did NOT happen, or if you're not sure. [ROTATE PK4A THROUGH PK4D]

PK4A The Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo [pom-PAY-oh] recently resigned over negotiations with North Korea.

PK4B Remarks Donald Trump made while filming his reality show The Apprentice were leaked to the Press

PK4C Paul Manafort, President Trump's former campaign manager, recently pled guilty to conspiring against the United States.

PK4D The former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, recently resigned over concerns that he was misusing taxpayer money

- 1 Did happen
- 2 Did not happen
- 3 Not sure
- 9 Refused (vol)

Weighed sample characteristics
All respondents

Male	49%
Female	51%
Democrat (with leaners)	52%
Republican (with leaners)	33%
Independent	11%
18-34	28%
35-59	35%
60+	35%
White	64%
African-American	11%
Latino	15%
Asian	7%
Other/refused	3%