



Disaster relief

Site helps voters navigate muddy waters

If there is a silver lining in the clouds of superstorm Sandy, it's that it gave us welcome relief from the media's relentless presidential campaign coverage. As the actual storm dissipates, we can expect to be inundated over these last few days before the election with a category 5 hurricane of political reporting, a tsunami of campaign ads and a blizzard of pundits' predictions.

Accusations, insinuations and outright lies will rain down upon us, creating a messy puddle of mud that will be ideal for slinging. But don't panic, you can seek shelter from the storm. **PolitiFact.com** can provide you with virtual waders to help you slosh through the muck and vote with a clean conscience.

Well, maybe not exactly clean. Since nobody running for office seems to be willing to be completely honest, the best you can hope for is voting for candidates who do the least amount of damage to the truth.

Truth-O-Meter

PolitiFact is a Pulitzer Prize-winning website that checks the accuracy of statements made by candidates, political parties, pundits and other people or organizations that influence the political debate. The site, which is run by the Tampa Bay Times, uses the Truth-O-Meter to rate the truthiness of claims.

The Truth-O-Meter has six levels of honesty on it:

- 1. True** — The statement is true.
- 2. Mostly True** — The statement is accurate, but some information has been left out or is fuzzy.
- 3. Half True** — The statement is fact-based but important details or context are missing.
- 4. Mostly False** — The statement contains a grain of truth but gives a false impression.
- 5. False** — The statement is not true.
- 6. Pants on Fire** — Not only is the statement inaccurate, but it also makes a ridiculous claim.

The site also has a Flip-O-Meter, which rates whether a candidate has flip-flopped on an issue, and promise meters to keep track of the status of campaign promises. These meters also have graduated scales to measure the degree of position flip or promise fulfillment.

The liars club

The site gives you several ways to check on the honesty of your favorite, or least favorite, candidate. The home page runs a list of statements that are updated regularly. A picture and the name of the candidate are on the left side of the list. The statement is in the middle and the Truth-O-Meter rating is on the right.

In addition to the list of statements on the home page, there is a row of tabs across the top of the page that divides statements into categories. You can look for statements that are national, specific to certain states, made by specific people, by the honesty rating they got, by subject and many more attributes. You also can look at promises made, flip-flops and articles. The site also has a search field that allows you to look

for specific people or subjects.

Clicking on the candidate's name brings up a short biography and a chart that breaks down the accuracy of all of his or her examined statements. Clicking on the Truth-O-Meter gives an explanation of how the rating was determined.

So which of the two main presidential candidates is being more honest with us? Here's how President Barack Obama's statements were rated by the site on Oct. 31:

- 1. True** — 22 percent
- 2. Mostly True** — 23 percent
- 3. Half True** — 27 percent
- 4. Mostly False** — 12 percent
- 5. False** — 14 percent
- 6. Pants on Fire** — 2 percent

Here's how Gov. Mitt Romney's statements were rated by the site:

- 1. True** — 15 percent
- 2. Mostly True** — 16 percent
- 3. Half True** — 27 percent
- 4. Mostly False** — 16 percent
- 5. False** — 16 percent
- 6. Pants on Fire** — 9 percent

It appears the president has an edge in the honesty department, but it's distressing that more than 25 percent of his statements are misleading or not true. It makes you wonder how a completely honest candidate would fare in an election. We'll probably never know.

PolitiFact.com's design is a bit crowded, and the ads mix visually with the content. However, it is fairly organized and easy to use. And in a campaign full of deception, it provides a valuable service.

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