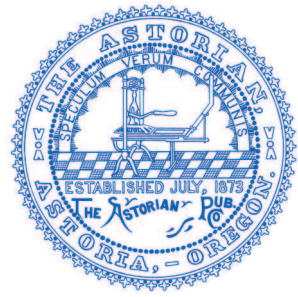


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



DAVID F. PERO, *Publisher & Editor*  
 LAURA SELLERS, *Managing Editor*  
 BETTY SMITH, *Advertising Manager*  
 CARL EARL, *Systems Manager*  
 JOHN D. BRUIJN, *Production Manager*  
 DEBRA BLOOM, *Business Manager*

## OUR VIEW

# Fake news fixation has the power to reshape our world

An early scene in George Orwell's legendary dystopian novel "1984" has the main character rewriting history to suit a repressive government's political agenda. What we actually have in 2016, 32 years after the Orwell's fictional world, is a news environment in which private citizens and those who want to manipulate us can create, share and often believe fake news — fictions that have the power to reshape our government.

Newspapers and other "legacy" organizations don't have a monopoly on the truth. We are prone to our own biases — often a nearly unconscious belief in moderate politics and incremental change for the common good. Even so, we are traditionally reliable curators of the news, providing a record of the facts that is literally printed in black and white. Falsehoods and biases are fairly easily spotted and challenged. A newspaper that too often blatantly disregards the facts doesn't stay long in business. Those that have longevity have done so by building credibility within the communities they serve and keeping it on a daily basis by diligently working to separate fact from fiction.

Slippery do-it-yourself news of the kind so commonly found on Facebook isn't so easily policed or punished by the marketplace. It has neither cost nor consequences. In fact, as Americans increasingly seek validation rather than objective information, there are rewards for even flagrant lies online, so long as they achieve enough popularity to be shared among people with like beliefs.

"People most readily believe that which they can believe most conveniently," Cliffs Notes observes in its essay about "1984." This is almost the definition of modern U.S. politics, in which many Americans choose to believe or disbelieve stories based on complicated personal and political preconceptions.

It is a fact of modern life that more Americans get information from Facebook posts than directly from the entities that actually do the hard work of fact-gathering. If you have friends with diverse political beliefs and levels of education, you are certain to encounter Facebook posts denying climate change or asserting the truth or falsehood of other matters. There was, for example, a posting last week that boldly asserted Donald Trump overwhelming won the popular vote, despite the objective fact that the opposite is true.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has struggled with a response to widespread accusations that his company aided and abetted the dispersal of falsehoods that warped the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. In essence, his problem is how to maintain Facebook as freewheeling marketplace for ideas, while somehow not allowing it to be an easily manipulated stooge that regurgitates lies that are packaged in superficially believable ways.

After initially denying it was the problem, Facebook now reportedly is looking into third-party verification services, better automated detection tools and simpler ways for users to flag suspicious content.

In a Nov. 18 column in The New York Times, John Herrman notes that these fake news items are "indefensible, easy to identify and extraordinarily viral." The bigger problem, in his opinion, is the more subtle manipulation of people through a clever blending of out-of-context "facts" that mesh with reader biases and preconceptions.

Herrmannov is pessimistic about Facebook actually correcting a profitable system in which its members get to decide on alternative versions of reality. "Those who expect the operator of the dominant media ecosystem of our time, in response to getting caught promoting lies, to suddenly return authority to the companies it has superseded are in for a ... surprise," he observed.

Even on Facebook, it is possible to be a sophisticated news consumer. Double check the credibility of sources and look for stories by organizations that have a direct financial and reputational stake in being reliable.

Ultimately, there actually is a true version of the facts. Any community that wants to play for real and actually succeed can best do so by embracing reality. Facts, not fantasies, are the path to success.

**Ultimately, there actually is a true version of the facts. Any community that wants to play for real and actually succeed can best do so by embracing reality. Facts, not fantasies, are the path to success.**



## GUEST COLUMN

### Public sentiment on U.S. political system efficacy

A long-term study by DHM Research shows how Oregonians responded when asked the question:

**"When thinking about the U.S. government and political system, which of the two following statements best reflects your feelings?"**

Statement	2016	2014	2008	2002	1999
The system has some problems, but it is essentially sound. It does not need fundamental and radical reform.	36%	59%	58%	59%	64%
The system is a mess and needs to be fundamentally and radically reformed.	54	35	39	37	32
Don't know/other	10	6	4	5	4

Source: DHM Research

EO Media Group graphic

# Time for Jefferson's 'radical reformation'

By ADAM DAVIS  
 DHM Research

On Nov. 9, before the riots of the next night, protesters peacefully gathered in downtown Portland to show their displeasure over the previous night's election results. Among the signs at Pioneer Courthouse Square were a pair of banners that read: "Honk if you're fed up" and "Honk if you will fight for change."

The words took me back to a recent visit to the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., when a quote of his, inscribed on a wall, stopped me in my tracks: "As new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinion change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times." Could it be true? Did one of our Founding Fathers really feel that there may come a time when the system is such a mess that it must be fundamentally and radically reformed?

We have a real mess. I'm not alone in feeling so; I know that because my job is to track public sentiment. As part of this tracking, our firm shows a startling increase in the number of Oregonians who feel the system is a mess and may very well feel we're at Jefferson's point where the "institutions must advance to keep pace with the times."

#### Survey says

For the past 17 years, we have asked Oregonians the following question: "When thinking about the U.S. government and political system, which of the two following statements best reflects your feelings?"

The shift in sentiment, as shown in the graphic was swift and clear. Even two years ago, those saying the system needs to be radically reformed were bumping along at just over one-third of the population, while a clear majority saw the system as essentially sound. Our October survey found those positions had flipped.

What's responsible for this change? Oregonians see many problems, from deteriorating infrastructure and inequality in our public schools to jobs disappearing (and not coming back) and the effects of climate change. They tell us in our focus groups that government isn't getting anything done for rea-

sons ranging from partisanship to overregulation.

Specifically, we hear about two years of threatened government shutdowns, fighting over Supreme Court vacancies, police shootings and inaction on climate change.

And of course there's the politics and the negative feelings about the presidential election (and the election coverage), a process that produced two historically unpopular candidates in their 70s, one of whom was under FBI scrutiny, while the other, the ultimate winner, shouted about a "rigged system" and threatened not to accept the results.

**In the past two years, Oregonians have made new discoveries, discovered new truths, and a significant number have changed their opinion about our institutions.**

Here in Oregon, the perceptions of a mess requiring fundamental change may have grown during the battle over Measure 97, which pitted the desire to fund education and to have "big business" pay its "fair share" against equally strong feelings against a "sales tax" and giving government a "blank check."

The desire for radical reform is seen across the state: 55 percent in Portland-area, the same share in the Willamette Valley and 52 percent in the rest of the state.

Men and women agree at similar rates, and difference by age arises only because 18-29 year olds are much stronger in their support of blowing things up compared to their older counterparts.

Non-whites and lower income groups are similarly more enthusiastic for change compared to whites and those with higher incomes.

The most interesting split in opinion, however, is by political affiliation. In Oregon "Non-affiliated/Other" voters (who are shut out of partisan elections in primaries) usu-

ally split the difference between Democrats and Republicans, with a leaning towards Democrats on many issues. For this issue, however, the strongest support for fundamental and radical reform comes from the Non-affiliated/Others at 65 percent, compared to 57 percent for Republicans and 43 percent for Democrats. To some extent this is validation of the sentiments among those in the 18-29 age group.

#### Where now?

So, where do we go from here with most of Oregonians wanting fundamental and radical change? First, many of those people got the change they wanted at the national level, including a good number of 18-29 year olds and Non-affiliated/ Others who did not vote for Hillary Clinton in Oregon. They want to bring back jobs back to America, reform immigration policies, reduce the size of government, decrease taxes and aggressively enforce existing laws.

Here's the problem for President-elect Trump and his fellow Republicans: If they don't deliver on his promise of radical change, many of his supporters may be the ones carrying the signs four years from now.

As for the current protestors, the change they wanted — first woman president, raising taxes on the rich, investment in education and human services trumping increased military spending, real action on climate change, police reform, and expanded equality for all — did not happen.

They're angry. If Trump makes good on enacting his vision of radical change, they will still be carrying signs and blocking freeways four years from now. One question is, "Will more of them vote?"

Jefferson couldn't have imagined the sordid details that shaped the 2016 presidential election. But he did seem to understand the underlying sentiment that helps explain the outcome. In the past two years, Oregonians have made new discoveries, discovered new truths, and a significant number have changed their opinion about our institutions. Enough, in fact, where now a clear majority feel that fundamental and radical change is needed.

Adam Davis, who has been conducting opinion research in Oregon and across the nation for more than 35 years, is a founding principal in DHM Research, a leader in independent, nonpartisan opinion research, providing consultation for private, public, and nonprofit clients.