Teaching the Identification of Numerical Deception in Political Claims

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Abstract:

This article describes the development of a framework to help teach students how to identify numerical deception in political claims. Seven categories of numerical deception emerged from a review of deceptive political claims analyzed by FactCheck.org and PolitiFact.com. The categories are: cherry-picking, excessive rounding, speculating, ignoring perspective, using imprecise terms, manipulating denominators, and presuming causation. Each category is described, and an example is shown, as well as cues that may alert someone to a potential deception. Practical ideas are then described about how to use the framework for teaching, based on four semesters of incorporating it into a general education, math-for-liberal-arts course. This includes principles adopted, assignments, assessments, and lessons learned.

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