

Viewpoint: Consensus as truth? How ‘science misinformation police’ control policy narratives

The notion of consensus-as-truth has been operationalized in various forms: journalistic “[fact checkers](#),” academic “[misinformation](#)” researchers, and [content moderation](#) on social media platforms. The practical effect is the creation of self-appointed arbiters of truth — journalists, academics, social media platforms, and even [governments](#) — who render judgments on acceptable and unacceptable speech according to conformance with an acceptable view.

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The notion that scientists should agree with a consensus is contrary to how science advances — scientists challenge each other, ask difficult questions and explore paths untaken. Expectations of conformance to a consensus undercuts scientific inquiry. It also lends itself to the weaponization of consensus to delegitimize or deplatform inconvenient views, particularly in highly politicized settings.

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A recent study of scientific censorship by scientists by [Clark et al. 2023](#) finds that pressures by scientists on their peers to conform to a consensus are fairly common within the scientific community:

Confirmation bias and other forms of motivated cognition can fuel a self-reinforcing dynamic in which censorship and self-censorship discourage empirical challenges to prevailing conclusions, encouraging a false consensus that further discourages dissent.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)