

Argument Outlines: Social Media & Democracy

Resolved: *Social media is harmful to democracy.*

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Argument Outlines: Social Media & Democracy

Resolved: *Social media is harmful to democracy.*

PRO SIDE: HARMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is _____.

Today, we will discuss whether social media is harmful to democracy.

My partner and I believe that social media is harmful to democracy.

Before presenting our first argument, let's discuss the framework.

FRAMEWORK

Each of the following comes from Oxford...

1. Democracy: a system of government where people choose their leaders by voting.
2. Social Media: websites and apps that let people share ideas, photos, and messages online.
3. Our value is Justice, and our criteria is on balance.

So, on balance, the side that best upholds justice should win the debate.

Now, I will present our first argument... Harming Voters.

Definitions from Oxford University (Do not read these Aloud!)

- Democracy: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/democracy>
- Social media: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/social-media>
- Justice: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/justice>
- On balance: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/balance>

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Resolved: *Social media is harmful to democracy.*

PRO-01: Harming Voters

Social media harms voters.

Because... false information spreads fast and confuses people.

First... Spreading Lies and Misinformation (ex. Fake News)

According to... *Frontiers in Physics, August 21, 2022*

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fphy.2022.970174/full>

[Yuwei Chuai & Jichang Zhao, "Anger can make fake news viral online," *Frontiers in Physics*, August 21, 2022]

Original: Fake news that manipulates political elections, strikes financial systems, and even incites riots is more viral than real news online, resulting in unstable societies and buffeted democracy. While factor that drives the viral spread of fake news is rarely explored. In this study, it is unexpectedly found that the easier contagion of fake news online is positively associated with the greater anger it carries. The same results in Twitter and Weibo indicate that this correlation is independent of the platform. Moreover, mutations in emotions like increasing anger will progressively speed up the information spread. Increasing the occupation of anger by 0.1 and reducing that of joy by 0.1 are associated with the generation of nearly six more retweets in the Weibo dataset. Offline questionnaires reveal that anger leads to more incentivized audiences in terms of anxiety management and information sharing and accordingly makes fake news more contagious than real news online. Cures such as tagging anger in social media could be implemented to slow or prevent the contagion of fake news at the source.

It states... fake news spreads faster than real news because angry posts make people share them more, leading to false stories that can hurt elections, create public anger, and weaken democracy.

This means... social media harms democracy because fake news tricks millions of people into believing these lies, causing confusion, unfair voting, and loss of trust in democracy.

Also... Biased Information Harms Voters

According to... *Princeton University, June 2024*

<https://www.princeton.edu/~fujiiwara/papers/SocialMediaAndElections.pdf>

[Thomas Fujiwara, Professor of Economics, Princeton University; Karsten Müller, Assistant Professor, National University of Singapore; and Carlo Schwarz, Economist, Bocconi University, *The Effect of Social Media on Elections: Evidence from the United States*, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2024, Vol. 22(3):1495–1539,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jeaa/jvad058>]

Original: We study how social media affects election outcomes in the United States. We use variation in the number of Twitter users across counties induced by early adopters at the 2007 South by Southwest festival, a key event in Twitter's rise to popularity. We show that this variation is unrelated to observable county characteristics and electoral outcomes before the launch of Twitter. Our results indicate that Twitter lowered the Republican vote share in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, but had limited effects on Congressional elections and previous presidential elections. Evidence from survey data, primary elections, and text analysis of millions of tweets suggests that Twitter's relatively liberal content may have persuaded voters with moderate views to vote against Donald Trump. (JEL: L82, D72)

It states... biased information on social media can change how people think and vote, pushing some voters toward one political side and reducing fair balance in elections.

This means... social media harms democracy because biased messages influence millions of voters to make choices based on one-sided information, creating unfair elections & reducing our trust in democracy.

Therefore... Social Media DOES harm voters!

The next argument I will present is... Causing Violence.

Argument Outlines: Social Media & Democracy

Resolved: *Social media is harmful to democracy.*

PRO-02: Causing Violence

Social media causes violence.

Because... it creates echo chambers, which create intolerance and it also spreads anger and hate.

First... Echo Chambers are Creating Intolerance

According to... Nature, January 11, 2024

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-50850-6>

[Chen Avin, On the Impossibility of Breaking the Echo Chamber Effect in Social Media Using Regulation, Scientific Reports (Nature), January 11, 2024, Vol. 14, Article 1107, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-50850-6>]

Original: As scientists, we are proud of our role in developing the current digital age that enables billions of people to communicate rapidly with others via social media. However, when things go wrong, we are also responsible for taking an ethical stand and trying to solve problems, and this work aims to take a step in this direction. Our goal is to set the foundation for a mathematically formal study of how we might regulate social media and, in particular, address the problem of the echo chamber effect. An echo chamber is a closed system where other voices are excluded by omission, causing your beliefs to become amplified or reinforced. In turn, these bubbles can boost social polarization and extreme political views, and, unfortunately, there is strong evidence that echo chambers exist in social media. The fundamental question we try to answer is: how and can a regulation “break” or reduce the echo chamber effect in social media? Sadly, the paper’s main result is an impossibility result: a general regulation function that achieves this goal (on our social media model) while obeying the core values of democratic societies (freedom of expression and user privacy) does not exist. This result leaves us with hard future choices to make.

It states... social media creates echo chambers where people only hear ideas they already agree with, which increases extreme opinions and makes it almost impossible to fix without harming freedom or privacy.

This means... social media harms democracy because echo chambers make millions of people more intolerant of different views, dividing society and weakening open discussion.

Also... Intentionally Spreading Hate & Violence

According to... Harvard University, December 9, 2021

<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policycast/nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa-how-social-media-pushing>
[Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Visiting Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School PolicyCast, Harvard University, December 9, 2021]

Original: Yes. But the thing is with news organizations, you realize that you just... It's like going to the gym. You continue doing your work. Even when the people you serve don't care about it because, when disaster hits or when news hits, they will come to you and you must be at your strongest. So that kind of like, delayed gratification wasn't there for your ex alumni. Oh, he wasn't even an alumni. Wasn't there for Facebook. And so what we saw and it wasn't just Facebook. So let me not also... It's social media in general. And what we've seen now. So if you think about like, if the platform that delivers news is biased against facts, it's biased against journalism. Then what are you getting? By design, the algorithms that deliver content to you actually are weighted towards emotional content. And you saw this in the Frances Haugen papers. What they actually showed was that they weighted emotions five times more and anger five times more. When anger is weighted, then you actually... they put their thumb on the scale. That's not a pipe. They decided they're going to deliver a little arsenic with your water. And 1 percent arsenic is still poisonous. So if you have a platform that prioritizes the spread of anger, hate... And I've seen this among the radicalization of young men. This is really dangerous. Someone should have told them right off the top, this is dangerous. And what have we seen? Genocide in Myanmar. We've seen violence all around the world, that has been sparked by these types of... toxic sludge is the word I use. But it's beyond that. This changes human behavior. So I always say this when you don't have facts, you can't have truth. And when you don't have truth, you can't have trust. If you don't have trust, you have nothing. George Schultz, a hundred years old, his last op-ed and the Washington Post says with trust in the room, everything is possible. Without trust, nothing is possible. That is a world we live in today. And that is courtesy of the platforms that deliver the news.

It states... social media companies design their systems to spread emotional and angry content, which helps leaders and groups use these platforms to spread hate and violence across the world.

This means... social media harms democracy because this deliberate use of anger and hate has fueled global violence, putting tens of millions of lives in danger and destroying public trust in the world.

Therefore... Social Media DOES cause violence!

So, for all these reasons, please vote for the PRO. Thank you.

Argument Outlines: Social Media & Democracy

Resolved: *Social media is harmful to democracy.*

CON SIDE: BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is _____.

Today, we will discuss whether social media is harmful to democracy.

My partner and I believe that social media is NOT harmful to democracy.

Before presenting our first argument, let's discuss the framework.

FRAMEWORK

Each of the following comes from Oxford...

1. Democracy: a system of government where people choose their leaders by voting.
2. Social Media: websites and apps that let people share ideas, photos, and messages online.
3. Our value is Justice, and our criteria is on balance.

So, on balance, the side that best upholds justice should win the debate.

Now, I will present our first argument... Making Voices Heard.

Definitions from Oxford University (Do not read these Aloud!)

- Democracy: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/democracy>
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CON-01: Making Voices Heard

Social media allows our voices to be heard.

Because... everyone can share their opinions freely and it is a powerful tool for change; helping social movements such as the Arab Spring, Me Too, and Black Lives Matter.

First... Every Voice Matters

According to... Trinidad Publica News, June 30, 2025

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vtza_V3aoCM

[Kevin McClean, Social Media Professional, We Focus – How Social Media Is Giving Everyone a Voice, Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT Live Online), June 30, 2025]

Original: Before social media, people needed money or special access to share their opinions publicly. They had to pay for radio ads or get interviews on television to be heard. Today, social media removes those barriers and allows anyone to speak freely. Kevin McClean explains that there are no longer gatekeepers blocking voices, and the apps are free to use. All it takes is creating an account and sharing your thoughts. He adds that social media levels the playing field, especially for creators and entrepreneurs who do not have traditional resources.

It states... social media gives everyone a fair chance to speak and share ideas, removing barriers that once kept ordinary people silent and helping all voices be heard equally.

This means... social media strengthens democracy because it allows hundreds of millions of people—not just the rich or powerful—to share opinions, promote change, and take part in public discussion.

Also... Strengthening Movements Protects Democracy

According to... Columbia University, November 1, 2017

<https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/uprising1313/deva-woodly-blacklivesmatter-and-the-democratic-necessity-of-social-movements/> [Deva Woodly, Associate Professor of Politics, #BlackLivesMatter and the Democratic Necessity of Social

Movements, Columbia Law School, November 1, 2017]

Original: Social movements are often regarded as potentially hazardous disruptions, uprisings that interfere with the normal mechanisms of politics – insurgencies that must be either repressed or swiftly re-incorporated into the regular legislative process. In 2016, three years after its emergence, President Obama chided the Movement for Black lives by saying that it had been “really effective at bringing attention to problems” but claiming, “once you’ve highlighted an issue and brought it to people’s attention [...and] elected officials or people who are in a position to start bringing about change are ready to sit down with you, then you can’t just keep on yelling at them.” He went on to say, “the value of social movements and activism is to get you at the table, to get you in the room, and then to figure out: how is the problem to be solved.” Obama’s view is a common one, but it is also incorrect. The value of movements is something much more profound. Movements are what keep democracy from falling irrevocably into the pitfalls of bureaucracy and oligarchy described by Max Weber, chiefly: dehumanization, expropriation, and stagnation. This is important because democracy is more than the institutional – largely electoral – framework that is commonly associated with it. In truth, democracy demands a broad political orientation toward participation and citizenship from “the people” who are to govern. A democracy where people have come to believe that voting is the only kind of participation that matters; that their vote, in any case, doesn’t count; that the system is fundamentally “rigged;” that those who govern are not “like them,” and worse, are unresponsive; is a polity that will struggle (and perhaps fail) to bear the burden and responsibility of self-governance. If citizens, from whose authorization the legitimacy of democratic government arises, come to believe that their capacity to act as authors of their collective fate is a fiction, then what follows is what I call, a politics of despair.

It states... social movements such as Black Lives Matter keep democracy strong by bringing people together, raising attention to problems, and pushing governments to listen to the people.

This means... social media strengthens democracy because it helps tens of millions of people unite, share their concerns, and make sure that leaders listen and respond to the public.

Therefore... Social Media DOES allow our voices to be heard!

The next argument I will present is... Holding Leaders Accountable.

Argument Outlines: Social Media & Democracy

Resolved: *Social media is harmful to democracy.*

CON-02: Holding Leaders Accountable

Social media creates accountability in government.

Because... citizens can watch their leaders and share what they see on social media.

First... Allowing Communication with Leaders

According to... University of Pennsylvania, June 28, 2024

<https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/jlpa/vol9/iss2/4/>

[Jared Silberglied, J.D. Candidate, *To Block or Not to Block: The State Action Problem with Government Social Media*, *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law & Public Affairs*, June 28, 2024, Vol. 9, Issue 2, <https://doi.org/10.58112/jlpa.9.2.4>]

Original: Social media has provided an unprecedented level of constituent access to their government representatives. While this comes with many benefits to both constituents and representatives, there are many drawbacks to it as well. There are times when comments from a particularly angry or annoying constituent may tempt a government official to hit the block button. But such action has obvious First Amendment implications. At the same time, officials are still private individuals who have their own private right and ability to speak on government matters without implicating state action. The Supreme Court has accepted certiorari in two cases to resolve an alleged circuit split on this issue. But the idea that there are two competing views and tests to evaluate misses the full picture. While the Circuits have articulated different vocabulary, they are all truly examining the same criteria. In this Comment, I will examine how the cases presented before each circuit will have the same result regardless of which articulation of the test is utilized.

It states... social media lets people talk directly to government leaders, allowing them to ask questions, share opinions, and receive information without needing television or newspapers.

This means... social media strengthens democracy because it allows tens of millions of people to reach their leaders faster, share ideas, and make sure promises are being kept.

Also... Fighting Against Government Corruption

According to... United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), October 4, 2018

<https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/anti-corruption/module-10/key-issues/the-role-of-the-media-in-fighting-corruption.html>

[United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Role of the Media in Fighting Corruption*, Module 10: Citizen Participation in Anti-Corruption Efforts, UNODC, October 4, 2018]

Original: The media (including social media) has an important role in the fight against corruption as it can demand accountability and transparency from the public and private sectors. There are several studies that have demonstrated the correlation between press freedom and corruption (Bolsius, 2012; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Chowdhury, 2004; Fardig, Andersson, and Oscarsson, 2011). The media provides information on public sector corruption where governmental activity is opaque by design or by default. The media, and in particular investigative journalism, plays a crucial role in exposing corruption to public scrutiny and fighting against impunity. This is set out in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on the role of the media and investigative journalism (2018). A prominent example of international cooperation activities that brought fraud and corruption to the attention of the public and law enforcement authorities is offered by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publication *Reporting on Corruption: A Resource Tool for Governments and Journalists* (2014) examines and elucidates good practices in the journalism profession and in legislation promoting broader freedoms of opinion and expression that can support anti-corruption efforts.

It states... social media helps uncover corruption by letting people share information, ask for honesty, and make governments and companies more open about what they do.

This means... social media strengthens democracy because it helps tens of millions of people expose corruption, call for fairness, and make leaders more honest and responsible to the public.

Therefore... Social Media DOES create accountability in government!

So, for all these reasons, please vote for the CON. Thank you.