

Public Forum & LD Debate (NOF Topic, Nov-Dec 2025)

Resolved: *On-balance, Social Media is harmful to democracy.*

BACKGROUND

A democracy is a system of government where people choose their leaders and help make laws by voting. It is important because it gives everyone a voice and makes leaders responsible to the people. For democracy to work well, citizens must have access to clear and trustworthy information. When people have reliable information, they can make smart choices about who should lead and what laws are fair. But if people are misled or do not have quality information, they might make poor decisions, choose the wrong leaders, or support laws that harm rather than help society.

Today, social media is one of the main ways people share ideas and learn about news around the world. However, the information on social media is not always reliable. Many posts spread false or misleading ideas that can quickly reach millions of people. If voters believe these false ideas and make decisions based on them, it can hurt democracy and society. For example, social media often creates echo chambers. An echo chamber is when people only see information that agrees with their opinions and do not hear other views. This can make people more divided and less open-minded. Social media can also spread content that makes people angry or violent, leading to unsafe protests or fights. The companies that run these platforms earn more money when people argue or react strongly because that brings more views and clicks. As a result, they have little reason to stop the spread of harmful content. Over time, this can lower the quality of voting, leadership, and discussion in a democracy.

Still, social media has also brought many benefits. It allows people to share their voices and connect with others in ways that were not possible before. For example, during the Arab Spring—a time when people in the Middle East protested for more freedom—social media helped them organize and share their stories. In the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement used social media to speak out against unfair treatment of Black people and to call for justice. These movements show how social media can help people demand fairness and hold leaders accountable. In the end, we must ask: does social media help democracy more than it harms it, or is the damage too great to ignore?

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PRO: SOCIAL MEDIA IS HARMFUL TO DEMOCRACY

The top ten reasons explaining how and why social media damages democratic societies.

1. **Profit Over Truth:** Media companies care more about making money than sharing accurate information. The more clicks and views they get, the more advertising money they earn. This leads them to allow false or emotional stories because they attract more attention, even if they harm public understanding.
2. **Spreading False Information:** Social media spreads lies and rumors faster than facts. False posts often seem more exciting or shocking, so people share them quickly without checking if they are true. This makes it harder for citizens to know what information they can trust when voting or discussing issues.
3. **Creating Echo Chambers:** Algorithms show people more content that matches their opinions. This makes users feel comfortable but stops them from hearing other viewpoints. When people only see one side, they become less willing to compromise or understand others, weakening democratic debate.
4. **Encouraging Anger and Division:** Content that makes people angry gets more attention and is shared more widely. This means social media often rewards emotional and extreme posts. Over time, this causes people to argue more and listen less, increasing hatred between different political groups.
5. **Weakening Critical Thinking:** Many people now rely on short posts or videos for news. This reduces deep thinking and makes complex issues seem too simple. Without careful thought, people may support ideas or leaders that sound good but are not truly helpful or honest.
6. **Spreading Hate and Violence:** Some users share violent or hateful messages that can inspire real-world attacks or protests. When these posts go viral, they can create fear, anger, and even deadly actions, threatening peace and public safety.
7. **Lowering the Quality of Leaders:** When elections are influenced by likes, shares, and popularity, leaders focus on image instead of ideas. Social media rewards those who are entertaining, not necessarily those who are experienced or honest, which lowers the quality of leadership.
8. **Disrupting Elections and Laws:** Foreign groups or dishonest actors can use social media to spread lies and confuse voters. This can change the outcome of elections and make people lose faith in their government, weakening the foundation of democracy.
9. **Reducing Voter Participation:** When people see too much conflict or false information online, they may feel hopeless or stop caring about politics. This leads fewer citizens to vote or join public discussions, hurting democratic participation.
10. **Manipulating Young Minds:** Teenagers and young voters spend much time on social media, where they are easily influenced by trends or biased information. This shapes their opinions before they fully understand the issues, leading to less independent and thoughtful decision-making in the future.

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CON: SOCIAL MEDIA IS HELPFUL TO DEMOCRACY

The top ten reasons explaining how and why social media is beneficial to democratic societies.

1. **Giving Everyone a Voice:** Social media allows ordinary people to share their ideas and experiences publicly. This helps people who may not have access to traditional media speak out and be heard by others, including leaders.
2. **Increasing Political Participation:** Online discussions make it easier for citizens to learn about issues and join debates. People who may not attend political events can still participate in democracy by sharing posts, signing petitions, and supporting causes.
3. **Spreading Awareness Quickly:** News on social media travels fast, helping people learn about important events almost immediately. This speed helps citizens react quickly and take action when something unfair happens in society.
4. **Encouraging Government Transparency:** Leaders and officials often use social media to share information directly with the public. This allows citizens to see what their leaders are doing and hold them accountable for their promises.
5. **Empowering Social Movements:** Social media helps people organize protests and campaigns for justice. Movements like Black Lives Matter and the Arab Spring show how citizens can use these tools to fight for rights and freedom.
6. **Connecting Global Communities:** People from different countries can communicate easily online. This exchange of ideas builds understanding across cultures and helps spread democratic values around the world.
7. **Fact-Checking and Awareness Tools:** Many platforms now include systems that label false information or provide links to accurate sources. These tools teach users to be more careful and encourage them to think critically before sharing information.
8. **Encouraging Political Accountability:** When leaders make mistakes or break promises, citizens can record and share evidence online. This public attention pressures leaders to act responsibly and respect democratic rules.
9. **Supporting Education and Learning:** Social media gives access to educational content and expert opinions about political and social issues. This helps young people learn how government works and why voting and participation matter.
10. **Promoting Free Expression:** Freedom of speech is a basic part of democracy. Social media protects this right by letting people express opinions freely, even when they disagree with the government or powerful groups.