# Resolved: Social media companies ought to be legally responsible for content posted by users on their platforms.

### Intro –

As social media continues to grow all over the world. Social media companies often raise questions of accountability, like should the user be held responsible for what is posted or should the companies be held responsible for not censoring and preventing problems from happening in the first place?

The pros of social media like networking, spreading information at a mass speed and even being a place for grassroot movements (grassroot movements- Grassroots, type of movement or campaign that attempts to mobilize individuals to take some action to influence an outcome, often of a political nature https://www.britannica.com/topic/grassroots) A dangerous pro that comes with social media is the ability to find solidarity and comradery online, alongside anonymity. Meaning that folks can post, just about whatever they would like and find others that empathize, agree or associate with them. This can be a great thing, like in the case of the LGBT+ community coming together to talk about similar instances and find support. Or even simple things like cooking groups to find a new recipe, safe and harmless. On the flip side there are users who incite violence, have racist, homophobic, or targeting rhetoric that with a support of a platform can often create dangerous realities for members online, and in real life. For example, the website reddit is often seen for a place of memes, laughs, but the deeper the website goes, the more niche opinions become. https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/reddit-banned-pro-trump-subreddit-here-s-what-means-hate-ncna1232797 States that, “Reddit made headlines this week for banning 2,000 subreddits under new rules that ban certain violent and hateful content. While the vast majority of the banned subreddits were small or inactive, the list included r/The\_Donald, a pro-Trump community; r/gendercritical, a subreddit where transphobic commentary has thrived; and r/ChapoTrapHouse” It forces platforms to question the existence of content moderators and how much power they should have while regulating, while a place for freedom of speech should hate speech be included in that?

Companies are taking their own stances as the current elections are coming up, for example Twitter banned all political ads in 2019, making Facebook contested for spreading misinformation. Which lead to Mark Zuckerburg (CEO of Facebook) to testify in front of congress in 2020 as he's allowed the spread of misinformation and hate speech run rampant on the platform he created. While other companies have all taken stances to downplay Trump's presence on social media or ban hate speech and harassment coming from his supporters. As content moderators are trying their best to figure out whether or not to allow something or not, it also becomes alarming when something that people feel needs to be discussed is reported and cut out of conversations. In recent news among the George Floyd protests the #BlackLivesMatters is another example of social media's powerful grasp on the world, where the app Tik Tok was very influential in spreading information and for people to find support with one another. Without social media, this powerful movement wouldn’t have gotten the traction it needed to be where it is now. Especially when companies themself take a stance to support the movement and educate their users on the apps, in 2019 an estimated 2.95 billion people were using social media apps. Which is why this resolution not only has a large effect on the population but also its influences on the elections, movements, protests, and more.

#### Resources-

What Is Social Media?

Social media is computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities.

-<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>

Legally responsible person means one who has a legal obligation under the provisions of state law to care for and make decisions for an individual.

-<https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/legally-responsible-person#:~:text=More%20definitions%20of%20Legally%20responsible%20person&text=%EF%BC%8B%20New%20List-,Legally%20responsible%20person%20means%20one%20who%20has%20a%20legal%20obligation,legal%20guardians%20of%20minor%20children.>

To understand the social media executive orders- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-preventing-online-censorship/>

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2020/06/03/trump-social-media-executive-order/>

explanation on what an executive order is - <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/teaching-legal-docs/what-is-an-executive-order-/>

Explain what section 230 or freedom of speech online - <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/business/section-230-internet-speech.html>

Action taken against the executive order - <https://www.insurancejournal.com/news/national/2020/08/04/577881.htm>

Whose jurisdiction is this? Identifying the FCC

<https://www.ntia.doc.gov/book-page/federal-communications-commission-fcc#:~:text=The%20Federal%20Communications%20Commission%20(FCC)%20is%20an%20independent%20Federal%20regulatory,wire%2C%20satellite%2C%20and%20cable.>

<https://www.axios.com/fcc-takes-next-step-on-trumps-social-media-executive-order-3e83e54e-1399-4757-85dc-ad6d1f218511.html>

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### Framework

#### Value quality of life

Jenkinson 2020

Crispin Jenkinson is the deputy director of the Health Services Research Unit, University of Oxford. 05/06/2020 Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. “Quality of Life”  <https://www.britannica.com/topic/quality-of-life> -VL

 Quality of life, the degree to which an individual is healthy, comfortable, and able to participate in or enjoy life events. The term quality of life is inherently ambiguous, as it can refer both to the experience an individual has of his or her own life and to the living conditions in which individuals find themselves. Hence, quality of life is highly subjective. Whereas one person may define quality of life according to wealth or satisfaction with life, another person may define it in terms of capabilities (e.g., having the ability to live a good life in terms of emotional and physical well-being). A disabled person may report a high quality of life, whereas a healthy person who recently lost a job may report a low quality of life. Within the arena of health care, quality of life is viewed as multidimensional, encompassing emotional, physical, material, and social well-being.

#### Criterion utilitarianism

Tandi 2020

Carli Tandi is a seasoned technical editor and digital content producer in the financial services sector. Updated 06/14/2020 Investopedia <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/utilitarianism.asp> -VL

Utilitarianism is a theory of morality, which advocates actions that foster happiness or pleasure and opposes actions that cause unhappiness or harm. When directed toward making social, economic, or political decisions, a utilitarian philosophy would aim for the betterment of society as a whole. Utilitarianism would say that an action is right if it results in the happiness of the greatest number of people in a society or a group.

### Contention 1: Social Media spreads misinformation

#### The ongoing pandemic has created an especially violent platform on social media.

Gais 2020

Hannah Gais is the assistant editor and social media editor at the Foreign Policy Association in New York, and the managing editor of ForeignPolicyBlogs.com. Gais is a graduate of Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass., where she focused on Eastern Christianity and European Studies. 04/07/2020 Southern Poverty Law Center “Hate Groups and Racist Pundits Spew COVID-19 Misinformation on Social Media Despite Companies' Pledges to Combat It” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/04/17/hate-groups-and-racist-pundits-spew-covid-19-misinformation-social-media-despite-companies> - VL

Hate groups and racist pundits have pushed misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic on mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube throughout the crisis, despite companies pledging to fight fake news about the virus. Among some of the false claims propagated on social media include the notion – based on unproven race science – that persons of East Asian descent were predisposed to suffer from COVID-19, erroneous assertions that the virus was originally designed to be a bioweapon and arguments supporting the idea that racism can protect against global pandemics. Hatewatch has chosen to repeat some of these posts in full to demonstrate the nature of the problem. This deluge of COVID-19-related misinformation cuts against a pledge made by Facebook, YouTube and Twitter in February 2020, when representatives from some of the world’s largest tech companies convened with members of the World Health Organization (WHO) to discuss tampering the spread of false information related to the virus. The group was gathered, in part, in response to what a representative from the WHO dubbed an “infodemic” in an interview with CNBC – the new wave of false information on major social media platforms. Groups such as Change the Terms, a coalition of civil rights organizations including the Southern Poverty Law Center, have pushed to bridge this gap. Change the Terms advocates for social media companies to adopt a reasonable standard of care regarding regulation, which aims to constrain hate activity without stifling communities arbitrarily. But there is work yet to be done. Companies, as the 2019 “Year in Hate” report found, still struggle “to prioritize public safety over the freedom of their users to post extremist content.” The moderation of hate groups across all platforms is often inconsistent as well. Some groups, such as white nationalist publication American Renaissance, have been banned from Twitter and Facebook for hate speech for years, but have nevertheless continued to operate on YouTube. As Hatewatch found in a survey of numerous hate groups tracked by the SPLC’s Intelligence Project across three major social media platforms – YouTube, Facebook and Twitter – racism and disinformation has continued to fester. In addition to spreading racist memes and fake news about Asian Americans and other minority groups, hate groups have used all three platforms to boost a slew of conspiracy theories, fake cures (including one that has resulted in a death in Arizona) and anti-immigrant rhetoric. When considering the real-world threat posed by social media companies’ inability to enforce their own guidelines on misinformation and fake news, Chloe Colliver, the head of digital policy and strategy at ISD, told Hatewatch that “three main risks came to mind.” These included the risks posed not only to public health by the proliferation of fake cures, but also to institutions as a result of a preponderance of conspiracy theories. She also cited the danger of “target attacks” against minority groups and others. “None of which are new,” she added. “They fit the patterns of platforms’ inability to deal with [these] specific kinds of attack and disinformation content.” Most, if not all, of the groups spreading this content have been given a pass to do so under existing social media policies. “Obviously, the historical reticence of these companies to promote evidence-based or expert information above other kinds of information has come back to bite [them] now, as we’ve seen,”

### Contention 2: Groups are taking advantage of fast spread media

#### Hate groups have been gathering on the internet for years, targeting minority populations

Gardner 2018

Kianna Gardner is the Assistant editor and reporter for @DailyInterLake. 08/30/18 The Center For Public Integrity “Social Media: WHERE VOICES OF HATE FIND A PLACE TO PREACH” <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/social-media-where-voices-of-hate-find-a-place-to-preach/>

-VL

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — On Twitter, David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, sometimes tweets more than 30 times a day to nearly 50,000 followers, recently calling for the “chasing down” of specific black Americans and claiming the LGBTQ community is in need of “intensive psychiatric treatment.” On Facebook, James Allsup, a right-wing advocate, posted a photo comparing migrant children at the border to Jewish people behind a fence during the Holocaust with the caption, “They present it like it’s a bad thing #BuildTheWall.” On Gab, a censorship-free alternative to Twitter, former 2018 candidate for U.S. Senate Patrick Little, claims ovens are a means of preserving the Aryan race. And Billy Roper, a well-known voice of neo-Nazism, posts “Let God Burn Them” as an acronym for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender. Facebook, Twitter and other social media companies offer billions of people unparalleled access to the world. Users are able to tweet at the president of the United States, foster support for such social movements as Black Lives Matter or inspire thousands to march with a simple hashtag. “What social media does is it allows people to find each other and establish digital communities and relationships,” said Benjamin Lee, senior research associate for the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. “Not to say that extreme sentiment is growing or not, but it is a lot more visible.” Social media also allows something else: a largely uncensored collection of public opinion and calls to action, including acts of violence, hatred and bigotry. Months before the violent 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, people associated with the far-right movement used the online chat room Discord to encourage like-minded users to protest the city’s efforts to remove long-standing Confederate statues – particularly one of Gen. Robert E. Lee. Discord originally was a chat space for the online gaming community, but some participants used the platform to discuss weapons they might brandish at the Charlottesville rally. Some discussed guns and shields, and one suggested putting a “6-8 inch double-threaded screw” into an ax handle. Multiple posts discussed the logistics of running a vehicle into the expected crowds of counterprotesters. Heather Heyer was killed after James Alex Fields Jr. of Ohio rammed his car into an unsuspecting group of demonstrators. Others were injured. He has pleaded not guilty to multiple charges, including the death of Heyer and other hate crimes. “They (the right) said it was a free speech rally, it was never meant to be such,” said Jalane Schmidt, a University of Virginia associate professor and counterprotester. “What had been happening in internet chat rooms came to in real life.” The clash in Charlottesville attracted hundreds of members of the far-right community. The event garnered global attention, brought the violent side of America’s political divide into focus and prompted criticism and questions about social media’s role in inciting hate. The far-right’s use of social media also prompted some companies to ban users. Since the Unite the Right rally, Facebook, Twitter, Spotify, Squarespace, PayPal, GoDaddy, YouTube and others have jointly suspended hundreds of users associated with the far-right. Members of the far-right are calling it an “act of war” on their free speech rights – an unjustified censoring of conservative viewpoints. News 21 monitored the daily social media activity of various far-right users, including white nationalists and neo-Nazis, from June 10 to June 24. Those tracked had more than 3 million followers combined. Reporters recorded and compiled more than 2,500 posts from popular platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, and emerging social media platforms, including Gab and VK. About half the posts were directed at specific demographics or communities, from black Americans and Latinos to Jewish people and LGBTQ members. The posts varied in sentiment from describing gays as “ill” to referring to black Americans as “chimps” and “sh\*tskins.” Most of the posts followed current events. When families were separated at the U.S.-Mexico border, anti-Latino sentiment was expressed by nearly every user tracked. Almost all used coded terminology and symbols, which allows them to communicate with others who understand their unique online language. One common symbol is the use of parentheses or asterisks to show something or someone is Jewish or associated with Jewish people: “Our people can and will achieve the goals we desire – no matter how hard \*they\* try to stop it.” By the end of the two weeks monitored by News21, the 2,500 posts resulted in more than half a million “likes” from social media followers and were shared nearly 200,000 times. “Social media companies have succeeded in sort of negotiating a place for themselves in the world where they are not the publishers,” said Lee, who researches digital media and the far-right. “And somehow we all sort of sat down and accepted it up until the point we didn’t, and now they’re running to catch up.” Lee said the purging of online extremists began when government officials noted the Islamic State terrorist group had been recruiting new members via the internet and social media. Since then, the eradication of users has expanded to include the far right. “It wasn’t until after Charlottesville they (social media sites) started to understand that there was a risk on their site for keeping them (far right groups) there,” said Goad Gatsby, an anti-racism activist in Richmond, Virginia. “All these social media companies saw all these organizations as a way to generate revenue without any risk.” Gatsby and others consistently receive online threats from extremists via social media. Some threats have become incidents of “doxing” — the publishing of private or identifying information about a person online, usually meant to provoke physical harm to that person. “A lot of people have had to go into hiding because they were targeted in their own neighborhoods because of who they were as activists online,” Gatsby said. According to Gatsby, doxing occurs regularly, raising concerns over whether social media companies are capable of curbing real-world violence. “They’re confronting the question of whether or not it (social media) really is the Wild West and whether the people that are in control of these platforms are like a local sheriff,” said Bob Wolfson, a former regional director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Wolfson said social media executives appear to tolerate most individuals using their platforms so long as they don’t “spew hate.” “And when the bad guys come, we’re going to tell them, ‘You can come and drink. You can come and rent our hotels. You can come and talk to the locals, but you’re going to have to check your guns.’ ” On April 11, 2018, the Facebook account Altright.com released a post to its thousands of followers expressing concern over increasing internet censorship. Within hours, Altright.com was suspended from Facebook indefinitely. The account was one of several linked to Richard Spencer — one of the most prominent leaders of modern white nationalism and a primary organizer of the Unite the Right rally last summer. A few days after his Facebook account was removed, Spencer acknowledged the suspension in a single Tweet saying “The alt-right is being recognized as THE grounded, authentic anti-war movement in the U.S. For our enemies, that’s unacceptable.” Later, his online white nationalist magazine, The Alt Right, was kicked off GoDaddy, a popular website-hosting company. The decision was made in response to a letter from the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, which claimed Altright.com incited violence, particularly against racial and ethnic minorities. The committee compared Altright.com to the Daily Stormer – a neo-Nazi website GoDaddy removed in 2017 after a Daily Stormer editor belittled the killing of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, calling her a “drain on society.” In its two-week review of the social media activities of prominent far-right figures, News21 found that nearly half the posts were directed at Latinos, black Americans, Muslims, Jewish people, LGBTQ members, women and other groups. About one-third of those referred to Jewish people or Latinos, followed closely by Muslims and the LGBTQ community, which accounted for about a quarter of the posts. Many posts followed real life events. When families were being separated at the U.S.-Mexico border, Roper, the neo-Nazi, posted a tweet stating “#KeepFamiliesTogether Deport them all, along with any who support them. With a catapult.” On Facebook, Allsup, the white nationalist, compared the separations to Jewish people during the Holocaust, wondering what the problem was and calling immigrant parents “deadbeat parents.” As of August 2018, many of these users still are online. Researchers cite multiple possibilities as to why some users get to stay and others go including: the hiding of hateful rhetoric in coded language, adopting new neutral-sounding identities, such as “white civil-rights advocate,” and the lack of a concise definition of hate and hate speech. In December 2017, Twitter announced it would start enforcing stricter rules on “hateful comments,” but Duke, the former KKK leader who calls the Holocaust a hoax, remains on the site. Over the two weeks that News21 tracked his social media activity, Duke posted more than 230 tweets – 30 percent of them directed at Jewish people. “I can’t look into the minds of the people making these decisions to allow or not allow prominent people to have platforms,” said Mark Pitcavage, a senior research fellow with the ADL’s Center on Extremism. “You can’t get much more obvious than David Duke.” Pitcavage, a researcher for the league’s hate symbols database, which identifies various codewords and symbols commonly used by extremists, suggested the development of the far-right’s online vocabulary may be why some hate groups remain available online. “By the nature of who is doing this type of moderating, a lot of stuff is going to be missed,” Pitcavage said. “A lot of times the message has to be really blatant for that person looking at it to understand what the objectionable part of it is.” Some common terms, such as snowflake (someone who’s sensitive or feminine) or normies (those who lean left), may be predictable in meaning and are generally less offensive. However, other obscure symbols such as 88 (which stands for “Heil Hitler” because H is the eighth letter in the alphabet) could be instrumental to identifying hateful social media users. Pitcavage said the ambiguous terminology allows users to bypass automated algorithm searches and average social media users – two ways Facebook, Twitter and other large platforms flag or report hate. It also allows users to remain in the mainstream undetected while still communicating with those who understand the language. “With shorthand, where everyone knows what it means, it creates this degree of commonality,” Pitcavage said. In August 2017, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg posted on his page: “There is no place for hate in our community. That’s why we’ve always taken down any post that promotes or celebrates hate crimes or acts of terrorism — including what happened in Charlottesville.” Later, in April 2018, Zuckerberg reiterated that, saying “we do not allow hate groups on Facebook, overall.” But it wasn’t until almost a year after Charlottesville that Facebook removed Jason Kessler, the primary organizer of the Unite the Right rally, which featured torch-wielding white nationalists marching through town shouting “Jews will not replace us!” and “Blood and soil!” Kessler identifies as a white civil-rights advocate, which researchers say may contribute to his remaining on major social media platforms and to Facebook’s delay in his suspension. “It’s a much more acceptable way of framing your ideology,” said Lee, of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. “It’s this idea of saying, ‘We’re not about this idea of race anymore,” and it takes the ethnic stuff, the racial stuff and the white out of white supremacy.” Kessler, who goes by the Mad Dimension on Twitter and Gab, remained mostly self-censored across all social media platforms during News21 tracking. “Anybody who goes back and looks at the content I put out on my Facebook and on Twitter, I don’t use ethnic slurs and I don’t take cheap shots at other races,” Kessler said. “I try to be constructive, that I am advocating certain policies.” Main organizer of the 2017 Unite the Right rally, Jason Kessler, primarily blames the Charlottesville, Virginia, police for last year’s violence. His complaint that the police didn’t keep the groups of protesters separated is shared by many who were part of the rally. Kianna Gardner/News21 In a June interview with News21, Kessler predicted social media companies would consider removing him as he prepared for another Unite the Right rally, which was Aug. 12 in Washington, D.C. About one month after the interview, Kessler set his Gab account to private about the same time his Facebook page was suspended. In the weeks before the suspension, Kessler posted about the upcoming “white civil rights rally.” “Any time whites say they want something for white people and stand up for white interests, no matter how watered down it is or how radical it is, it’s always called ‘hate,’ ” said Jeff Schoep, leader of the National Socialist Movement (NSM). The NSM also identifies as a white civil-rights organization on its website. Schoep said the group has been kicked off of every mainstream platform, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The Southern Poverty Law Center, an advocacy group that tracks hate and bigotry toward marginalized communities, identifies the NSM as the largest neo-Nazi organization in the United States. Other suspended organizations include the American Nazi Party, League of the South and Vanguard America. But not all those kicked off social media sites accept their suspension. One white nationalist, Jared Taylor, sued Twitter for alleged ideological bias in February 2018 after the company banned his personal and business accounts for his nonprofit organization, American Renaissance. The two Twitter accounts combined had about 70,000 followers, Taylor said. Twitter claimed the accounts were associated with extremist groups and promoted violence, which violated the company’s terms of service. Taylor says that’s inaccurate. “They didn’t give a name, they never cited any of our tweets as being extremist or likely to promote violence or anything of the sort,” Taylor said. “It was just preposterous.” American Renaissance, founded by Taylor in 1990, promotes “race realism,” which Taylor defines as the recognition that race is a biological fact, not a “sociological optical illusion.” One recent article published by American Renaissance said the mission of Western women is to be homemakers and build up their husbands, not to hold corporate positions. Another elaborated on the “white fight,” or the struggle to preserve a shrinking white majority. “Jared has a lot of opinions others find appalling, but he expresses them in a respectful manner,” said Noah Peters, one of the lawyers representing Taylor in Taylor v. Twitter. “You can be as genial and polite as you want, if they don’t like what you’re saying, they’ll kick you off.” Taylor isn’t the first conservative user to sue Twitter on the basis of political censorship. But it is the first case so far against a private social media company that hasn’t been dismissed in court. On June 15, Judge Harold Kahn of San Francisco County Superior Court ruled Taylor could proceed with his lawsuit, saying the case “goes to the heart of free speech principles that long precede our Constitution.” “We want to change the rules,” Taylor said. “We want to make it impossible for these companies, simply on pure whimsy, to decide to shut people up that they disagree with. That is the right they claim.” Twitter declined to comment on the case and how the company determines who gets kicked off and who doesn’t. Facebook, Gab, YouTube, Google and others did not respond to requests for comment. “The only free speech that matters is their version of free speech,” Peters said. Taylor is among those who contend freedom of speech is absolute, but others say the fact these social-media companies are private poses a concern. “There is this kind of lingering question, which is, what obligation are they under to provide services to people?” Lee said. “Freedom of speech is freedom to express yourself, but it’s not freedom to force other people to publish what it is you have to say.” But sites built on the promise of First Amendment principles and as alternatives to mainstream platforms are available. “Anybody that wants to say any damn thing on the internet is going to be able today find a place to be hosted,” said Wolfson of the ADL. “They’re going to find someone that is more sympathetic to their message.” Gab, which describes itself as being “dedicated to preserving individual liberty, the freedom of speech, and the free flow of information on the internet,” is one of many emerging alternative platforms. The censorship-free company launched in 2017 and today claims about 400,000 users. According to the company’s annual report, users post more than 1.5 million times per month. Some far-right Gab users tracked by News21 were explicitly hateful. Christopher Cantwell, who hosts the alt-right radio show Radical Agenda, said in one post, “When you search for black lives matter and murder, all you get is a bunch of stories of police taking out the trash.” Patrick Little, who is rumored on Gab to be running for president in 2020, posts pictures of himself holding a campaign sign in that reads “Expel the Jews by 22, vote Little, win Big” and refers to Adolf Hitler as a “saint.” He detailed his removal from mainstream platforms like Twitter and YouTube on his Gab account, saying they shut him down for “truth-telling.”

#### White supremacists are recruiting on social media and targeting minority spaces

Perrigo 2020

Billy Perrigo is a Reporter for TIME. 04/08/2020 Time “White Supremacist Groups Are Recruiting With Help From Coronavirus – and a Popular Messaging App” <https://time.com/5817665/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-white-supremacist-groups/>

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On March 24, Timothy Wilson, 36, was shot and killed by the FBI as he prepared to attack a hospital in the Kansas City area where patients with the coronavirus were being treated.

The FBI had previously identified Wilson as a “potentially violent extremist” who had considered attacking a mosque, a synagogue, and a school with a large number of black students before settling on the hospital. He died in a shootout when federal officers tried to arrest him. Hours before his death, Wilson had posted anti-Semitic messages on two white supremacist groups on the messaging app Telegram. As COVID-19 continues to spread around the world, white supremacists are seizing upon it as a new and powerful addition to their arsenal. Their messaging often happens on Telegram, which over the last year has become a staging ground for extremist groups, according to the Anti Defamation League. Telegram channels associated with white supremacy and racism grew by more than 6,000 users over the month of March, according to data shared exclusively with TIME by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a London-based think tank that monitors extremism and disinformation. One white supremacist channel specifically focused on messaging related to COVID-19 grew its user base from just 300 users to 2,700 in that month alone — a growth of 800%. In openly-accessible Telegram channels with thousands of members, TIME observed users sharing memes and messages — some couched in purported irony — encouraging people with the disease to infect others, specifically ethnic minorities. “We’ve seen a number of cases of people suggesting that they should deliberately spread it, making themselves into a bio weapon,” says Jacob Davey, a senior research manager at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. “Which really needs to be taken seriously, even if it is presented in the guise of dark humor.” Other messages seen by TIME celebrated the spread of the virus in Israel and Africa; still more complained, using racist language to refer to Mexicans, that COVID-19 would cause a wave of immigration across the U.S. southern border. “As stated in our Terms of Service, we do not allow posts that feature calls to violence on publicly viewable Telegram channels, bots, or groups,” a Telegram spokesperson told TIME. “We process reports from users and posts that violate this rule are removed.” While Telegram channels tend to reach relatively few people compared to larger social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook pages, experts say they are equally if not more dangerous as hubs for extremists. Within these extremist communities, “success isn’t measured by creating a mass movement,” says Cassie Miller, a senior research analyst at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). “Their end goal is to get people to act on these beliefs, and to do so violently.” Telegram states on its web site that it will not engage in “politically motivated censorship.” It says that while it does remove terrorist content, “we will not block anybody who peacefully expresses alternative opinions.” But analysts argue much of the white supremacist content on Telegram meets the definition of terrorism. “There are still channels that we look at every single day, including those that glorify violence, including those that have videos of the Christchurch shooting, that are encouraging people to violence against specific communities, and sometimes specific people,” says Oren Segal, vice president of the center on extremism at the Anti Defamation League. “And so the fact that we can still find that regularly tells us that not enough is being done.” Telegram told TIME it has recently set up “a new system for verifying channels” to combat misinformation, and that searches for “corona” now always bring up an official channel with reliable information. High anxieties surrounding traumatic global events often correlate with the rise of new conspiracy theories. But a new factor driving the increase in coronavirus-related extremism, experts say, is that so many people are now spending time online while confined to their homes. “You basically have a captive audience. It’s not surprising that there’s going to be more online activity,” says Segal. “One of the things we’ve seen is a lot of propaganda being created around coronavirus in the hopes of attracting a new audience.” The Anti Defamation League has also seen coronavirus-related messaging spreading rapidly on Telegram over the last four months. In the early weeks of the virus’ spread, Segal says, the group found many conspiracies linking the virus to Jewish people and the Chinese government, mobilizing established anti-Semitic and anti-Chinese tropes. Only recently, he says, have members of these groups begun to discuss how to weaponize the virus to attack minorities. One strand of white supremacist thought, visible in Telegram channels, that has seen a rapid uptick as coronavirus spreads is “accelerationism,” a fringe philosophy that calls for adherents to do all they can to hasten societal collapse and bring a white supremacist government to power in the U.S. “This is a group of the most extreme extremists who are actively welcoming chaos and violence,” says the SPLC’s Cassie Miller. “They have welcomed coronavirus, because it means that we might get pushed closer to civilizational collapse, which is their goal because only after that happens can they build their white ethnostate.” Telegram is the main place on the Internet where accelerationists congregate, Miller says. “It is the friendliest platform to their thinking,” she says. “They haven’t seemed to make any moves to remove this content.” Telegram is not just used by extremists: it is also popular among activists and journalists because of its privacy credentials. But it has become a hub for white supremacists at the same time that mainstream social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have tried to crack down on hate speech and violent extremism. While those platforms have also been criticized for doing too little to remove harmful content, they have still largely managed to expel their most openly racist users, along with content which calls for real-world violence, according to Davey. On Telegram, by contrast, “the lack of direct enforcement has really made it a safe haven for these groups,” he says. With the pandemic bringing the dangers of disinformation to the front of the public mind, pressure is building for Telegram to revisit its long-held policy of putting privacy ahead of protecting vulnerable groups. “Telegram needs to get its act together,” says Segal of the Anti-Defamation League. “Anybody who is researching, tracking and trying to mitigate the threat of extremism is spending a lot of time on Telegram right now.”

### Contention 3: Lack of Accountability

#### Companies are not held accountable for the actions of their users like the groups above

Selyukh 2018

Alina Selyukh is a business correspondent at NPR, where she follows the path of the retail and tech industries, tracking how America's biggest companies are influencing the way we spend our time, money, and energy. 03/21/18 NPR “Section 230: A Key Legal Shield For Facebook, Google Is About To Change”

<https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2018/03/21/591622450/section-230-a-key-legal-shield-for-facebook-google-is-about-to-change> - VL

It's 1995, and Chris Cox is on a plane reading a newspaper. One article about a recent court decision catches his eye. This moment, in a way, ends up changing his life — and, to this day, it continues to change ours. The case that caught the congressman's attention involved some posts on a bulletin board — the early-Internet precursor to today's social media. The ruling led to a new law, co-authored by Cox and often called simply "Section 230." This 1996 statute became known as "a core pillar of Internet freedom" and "the law that gave us modern Internet" — a critical component of free speech online. But the journey of Section 230 runs through some of the darkest corners of the Web. Most egregiously, the law has been used to defend Backpage.com, a website featuring ads for sex with children forced into prostitution. Today, this law still sits at the heart of a major question about the modern Internet: How much responsibility do online platforms have for how their users behave or get treated? In the first major change to Section 230 in years, Congress voted this week to make Internet companies take a little more responsibility than they have for content on their sites. The court decision that started it all had to do with some online posts about a company called Stratton Oakmont. On one finance-themed bulletin board, someone had accused the investment firm of fraud. Years later, Stratton Oakmont's crimes would be turned into a Hollywood film, The Wolf of Wall Street. But in 1994, the firm called the accusations libel and wanted to sue. But because it was the Internet, the posts were anonymous. So instead, the firm sued Prodigy, the online service that hosted the bulletin board. Prodigy argued it couldn't be responsible for a user's post — like a library, it could not liable for what's inside its books. Or, in now-familiar terms: It's a platform, not a publisher. As Cox read about this ruling, he thought this was "exactly the wrong result": How was this amazing new thing — the Internet — going to blossom, if companies got punished for trying to keep things clean? "This struck me as a way to make the Internet a cesspool," he says. At this moment, Cox was flying from his home in California to return to Congress. Back at work, Cox, a Republican, teamed up with his friend, Oregon Democrat Ron Wyden, to rectify the court precedent. Together, they produced Section 230 — perhaps the only 20-year-old statute to be claimed by Internet companies and advocates as technologically prescient. "The original purpose" Section 230 lives inside the Communications Decency Act of 1996, and it gives websites broad legal immunity: With some exceptions, online platforms can't be sued for something posted by a user — and that remains true even if they act a little like publishers, by moderating posts or setting specific standards. "Section 230 is as important as the First Amendment to protecting free speech online, certainly here in the U.S.," says Emma Llanso, a free expression advocate at the Center for Democracy and Technology. No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider. 47 U.S. Code § 230 The argument goes that without Section 230, we would never have platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Yelp or Reddit — sites that allow ordinary people to post opinions or write reviews. It's "the one line of federal code that has created more economic value in this country than any other," says Michael Beckerman, who runs the Internet Association, which represents many of Silicon Valley's largest companies. But Section 230 is also tied to some of the worst stuff on the Internet, protecting sites when they host revenge porn, extremely gruesome videos or violent death threats. The broad leeway given to Internet companies represents "power without responsibility," Georgetown University law professor Rebecca Tushnet wrote in an oft-cited paper. Cox says, "The original purpose of this law was to help clean up the Internet, not to facilitate people doing bad things on the Internet." "A Teflon shield" The original purpose hasn't always prevailed in court. And one specific example has prompted Congress to vote to amend Section 230 — the first cutback to websites' protections in years. It's the case of Backpage.com, a site ostensibly for classifieds, but one well known for its adult-services ads. Among them — if you know what to look for — are sex ads featuring children forced into prostitution. Over the years, victims and their families brought case after case against Backpage — and lost. The website kept convincing judges across the country that Section 230 shielded it from liability for the posts of its users. Major digital-rights groups, including the Center for Democracy and Technology, argued that holding Backpage liable could have chilling effects for social media and other websites. This bewildered Mazzio: "How is it possibly legal that a website that makes millions and millions of dollars has no accountability for this crime?" she says. "Section 230 has turned into a Teflon shield, not to protect free speech but to protect business revenue." The Supreme Court last year declined to hear victims' appeal in the case of Backpage and Section 230. Eventually, mounting evidence showed that Backpage was actively involved in the sex ads. That means the site is a publisher liable for its content. Backpage and its founders are now facing a federal grand jury in Arizona. To Sen. Ron Wyden, co-author of the law, the Department of Justice missed the mark for not going after Backpage earlier, since Section 230 does not preclude federal criminal investigations. Beyond Backpage, similar concerns continue to play out with sites that solicit revenge porn, publicly acknowledge potential risks to users or ignore harassment complaints. "I'm afraid ... the judge-made law has drifted away from the original purpose of the statute," says Cox, who is now president of Morgan Lewis Consulting. He says he was shocked to learn how many Section 230 rulings have cited other rulings instead of the actual statute, stretching the law. Cox argues that websites that are "involved in soliciting" unlawful materials or "connected to unlawful activity" should not be immune under Section 230. Congress should revisit the law, he says, and "make the statute longer and make it crystal clear." Backpage.com executives — CEO Carl Ferrer (from left), former owner James Larkin, Chief Operating Officer Andrew Padilla, former owner Michael Lacey — are sworn in to testify before a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subcommittee on investigations in January 2017. Cliff Owen/AP Responsibility Cox draws this distinction of websites like Backpage — involved or connected with their content — and sites that are "pure intermediaries." He wouldn't say whether that term applied to Facebook or Google. Interestingly, the Internet giants themselves — as well as Wyden — talk about the law as being rooted in responsibility. "The real key to Section 230," Wyden says, "was making sure that companies in return for that protection — that they wouldn't be sued indiscriminately — were being responsible in terms of policing their platforms." Beckerman of the Internet Association describes Section 230 as "not a blanket amnesty" but a call for responsible policing of platforms. The Internet companies say that on sex trafficking, they actively help investigate cases — and that generally, without Section 230, websites would resort to more censorship or decide to know as little as possible about what happens on their platforms. But Danielle Citron, a University of Maryland law professor who authored the book Hate Crimes in Cyberspace, argues that responsibility is exactly what is missing from the law. "Yes, let's think about the consequences for speech," she says, pointing to the flip side of the freewheeling Internet. "There are countless individuals who are chased offline as a result of cyber mobs and harassment." People rally in 2014 at the Washington state Supreme Court, which heard a case filed by three victims of sex trafficking against Backpage.com, saying the website helped promote the exploitation of children. Rachel La Corte/AP A rift among companies Politically, the story of Section 230 has recently taken a surprising turn. The Backpage saga has galvanized lawmakers to act on bills amending Section 230 with the goal of stemming online sex trafficking. The legislation allows more state and civil lawsuits against websites related to online sex trafficking, for "knowingly assisting, supporting or facilitating" crimes. The Senate passed the bill Wednesday, sending it to President Trump for his signature. The White House has supported the legislation. And for the first time, 44after years of staunch defiance, the Internet Association came out in support of legislation to change Section 230, shocking smaller Internet companies and digital-rights groups by breaking ranks. The industry giants are narrowly threading the needle. After the bill passed the House, the Internet Association said the industry not only is "committed to ending trafficking online" but also "will defend against attempts to weaken these crucial protections" of Section 230. "We all share the same goal," the association's Beckerman told NPR, "and that's to ensure that victims are able to have justice they need, but also enable our companies to stop this practice." Not the last challenge Wyden points out that these are the very same platforms facing massive scrutiny for being manipulated by Russian operatives during the 2016 election, making it a politically touchy moment for the companies to fight over sex-trafficking legislation. "The big companies have a lot of egg on their face over the election, and nobody wants to be seen as being soft on sex trafficking," he says. Wyden and Cox have opposed the legislation to amend Section 230, along with groups including Engine and the Center for Democracy and Technology. Opponents of the bill say it could lead to crimes moving deeper into the dark web and to websites resorting to more censorship or ignorance of what happens on their platforms to avoid liability. Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, author of the Senate bill, says the tech community "overreacted" to amending Section 230 "to the point that they weren't willing to look at the obvious problem, which is that it's been abused to sell people online." Wyden says all this should be a wake-up call for Silicon Valley: "If the technology companies do not wake up to their responsibilities — and use the power 230 gives them — to better protect the public against sex trafficking and countries that try to hack our political system, you bet that companies can expect (this legislation) will not be the last challenge for them."

### Extra Cards

#### Human Trafficking’s main platform is on social media, letting the companies continue to run using codes to bypass moderators

Withers 2019

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Social media has been an important tool in creating awareness and sparking activism around sexual assault. Survivors have come forward in droves to tell their stories of assault and harassment through social media platforms, which has undoubtedly resulted in greater public awareness of the pervasiveness of this problem worldwide. Unfortunately, social media has also opened new avenues for sexual violence against women. Human trafficking is one major example of this. As the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women approaches on November 25, let’s shine a light on the role social media plays in facilitating this violence, and figure out how to stop it. Traffickers often groom and control their victims through online platforms. Between 2015 and 2018, the National Human Trafficking Hotline documented almost 1,000 cases of potential victims of sex trafficking alone who were recruited through internet platforms, most often Facebook, but also Instagram, Snapchat, Craigslist, online dating sites, and chat rooms. A recent nationally representative survey of more than 1,000 American kids age 13 to 17 found that 70 percent of them used social media multiple times a day. Predators can easily pose online as someone looking for a date in order to build trust and recruit victims. Traffickers often identify vulnerable young people through their social media presence. For example, posts that may suggest low self-esteem, problems at home, or loneliness can signal to a trafficker that a person may be easily victimized. Recruiting victims online is generally much less risky than recruiting victims in person. Sometimes when victims are recruited through social media sites, they never even meet their traffickers in person. A 2018 study found that 55 percent of domestic minor sex trafficking survivors who became victims in 2015 or later reported meeting their traffickers for the first time using text, a website, or a mobile app. The study also found that 58 percent of victims eventually met their traffickers face to face, but 42 percent of those who initially met their traffickers online never met their traffickers in person but were still trafficked. In these cases, the power over the victims tends to be exerted through grooming and manipulation, as well as coercion and threats that equal “sextortion.” According to the FBI, sextortion is a serious crime that occurs when someone threatens to distribute your private and sensitive material if you don’t provide them images of a sexual nature, sexual favors, or money. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children began tracking this trend in 2013. The center has seen a dramatic increase in sextortion cases reported. There are numerous cases of women being victimized by traffickers who threaten to post their nude photos online if they do not comply with the traffickers’ demands. One example is Maya, who was featured in a short documentary film by one of my former students, Strong Survival. Maya was forced into sex trafficking through a modeling scam when she was 12 years old. For their first “modeling outing,” her female trafficker took explicit photos of Maya, which she threatened to release publicly as a way to keep Maya cooperating for years. Sextortion commonly begins with the tactic Maya’s trafficker used; it can also start with secretly recorded explicit videos during video chats or reciprocation requests, such as “I’ll show you if you show me.” In the commercial sex realm, the internet has created a massively expanded marketplace and a whole new product for human traffickers to sell—remote, interactive sexual acts streamed directly to individual purchasers. As Polaris points out, with a credit card and a couple of clicks, anyone can shop for virtually anything they want, from the comfort and privacy of their own homes. The sale of sexual services via social media sites is usually less obvious than on traditional advertising sites. Sometimes those who aren’t specifically looking for it would never notice the information about pricing, location, or contact information because it is often posted in comments threads. Traffickers also use social media for deceptive or fraudulent job advertisements. Some traffickers recruit victims through illegitimate job offers for models, nannies, or dancers. Sometimes these deceptions are facilitated through fake business profiles, sham event pages on Facebook, or posts on sites like Craigslist. Traffickers may also contact potential victims directly, claiming to be a recruiter for a modeling agency or the owner of another kind of legitimate business. The trafficker will also usually spend some time interacting with potential victims to build trust before an “official job offer” is made in order to increase the likelihood that the victim will trust the trafficker and perceive the job to be real. Research has found that migrant workers who have been trafficked into the U.S. for labor often perceive job postings on Facebook to be more valid and trustworthy than those on other sites. As the use of technology continues to increase, trafficking and sexual violence facilitated by digital platforms will also continue unless we do more to stop it. Facebook must become more vigilant about prohibiting images or posts that depict violence against women. Facebook has a strict policy against nudity and sexually explicit content, but often permits graphic, triggering, and demeaning posts about women.

#### Misinformation on social media is creating violence worldwide, with 10 reasons why

Benkelmen and Funke 2019

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This week, France became the latest country to be stricken with misinformation-related violence. On Monday, French police arrested 20 people accused of attacking Roma people in the suburbs of Paris. In one attack, about 50 people armed with sticks and knives attacked Roma living in a slum and set fire to their cars. The Guardian reported that the attacks occurred following the re-emergence of an old online hoax that warns people about white vans that are being used to kidnap women and children — a false claim that has roots in medieval stereotypes about the Roma. Interestingly, the misinformation spread on both Facebook and Snapchat; the latter has mostly escaped scrutiny for its role in spreading bogus claims. “This seemed exactly like those WhatsApp rumors that were spreading in Tamil Nadu state in India,” said Derek Thomson, head of France 24 Observers, which covered the attacks. “It’s astonishing, it’s terrifying. I report a lot in countries with mob mentalities, and I’m proud of European culture. It’s sort of unimaginable to me that there would be a lynching of someone, a mob attack on someone — but this is what it was.” Thomson said his team found no evidence of deliberate disinformation like in India; the rumors appear to have spread spontaneously, possibly sparked by an incident in which two minors told police of an abduction attempt but later admitted they were lying. And no one has been killed yet in the anti-Roma attacks in Paris. But elsewhere, child kidnapping rumors on social media continue to incite violence around the world. In August, a vigilante mob of more than 100 people burned two men alive in a small town in the central Mexican state of Puebla, the BBC reported. The murder came after a false rumor spread on WhatsApp claiming “a plague of child kidnappers” had entered the country with the goal of harvesting the organs of children. In India, dozens of people have been killed in public lynch mobs following the spread of rumors on WhatsApp. BuzzFeed News reported in September that, in nearly all those attacks, child kidnapping rumors were the catalyst. Despite the spread of this kind of misinformation-related violence worldwide, social media platforms have taken no major public actions to try and stem it. WhatsApp has taken piecemeal steps to try and limit the virality of misinformation on the platform, while Facebook has mostly deferred responsibility to its fact-checking partners. Meanwhile, companies like Facebook, Pinterest and YouTube took swift action last month to curb the spread of anti-vaccine conspiracies after facing pressure from American lawmakers. As we reported over the summer, there’s a legitimate question about the extent to which the violence in India, Mexico and now France has been directly caused by misinformation on social media or enabled by a lack of proper law enforcement. But it’s clear that tech platforms are playing at least some role — and, as exhibited by the moves they’ve made against antivaxxers, action is possible. …technology It isn’t just Facebook. Over the past few years, YouTube executives delayed taking action against videos that contain harmful content like hate speech and misinformation to keep engagement high, according to a Bloomberg story that cites more than 20 current and former employees. Facebook is considering hiring editors to select “high-quality news” to show users in an apparent effort to combat misinformation, The Guardian reported. CEO Mark Zuckerberg also floated the idea of paying publishers whose work was accepted into a dedicated news section as a reward for publishing credible content. On his blog, Mike Caulfield, director of blended and networked learning at Washington State University Vancouver, wrote that personal information like degrees and experience can be easily gamed and faked on LinkedIn. Meanwhile, Bellingcat has a useful guide for extracting information from LinkedIn profiles to aid in digital investigations. …politics Singapore is the latest country to publish draft legislation that would effectively make producing misinformation illegal. The Financial Times reported that the bill would let the government publish corrections alongside allegedly false claims about public institutions. If passed, the bill would also punish people who post false information with “malicious intent” with fines of up to $740,000 and jail sentences of up to 10 years. India’s general election is scheduled to start next week, and misinformation has become front and center. The Atlantic published an in-depth article about how bogus claims, rumors and propaganda have spread like wildfire in the past few months. The New York Times reported that platforms like Facebook are struggling to cope with the scale — despite taking down hundreds of accounts and pages for inauthentic behavior. Taiwan is banning video streaming services from Chinese-owned companies. The Financial Times reported that the goal is to limit the spread of Chinese propaganda and disinformation aimed at undermining the ruling ruling Democratic Progressive party. Taiwan is also one of the countries that has debated adopting an anti-misinformation law, which would make it a criminal offense to publish false claims online. …the future of news WorldNetDaily, one of the oldest American right-wing conspiracy sites, has been “sucked into a tornado of unpaid bills, pink-slipped employees, chaotic accounting, declining revenue and diminishing readership,” The Washington Post reported. BuzzFeed News reported that older Americans are more likely to be targets of online misinformation — and they’re not getting the digital literacy help they need. In Ukraine, Russia’s latest disinformation strategy was to pay Facebook users to turn over their private accounts. Then, The New York Times reported, Russian agents would use those accounts to publish political ads or spread false stories. Each week, we analyze five of the top-performing fact checks on Facebook to see how their reach compared to the hoaxes they debunked.

1. For yet another year, The Washington Post’s Abby Ohlheiser diligently catalogued some of the top April Fools’ Day pranks and hoaxes.
2. Speaking of April Fools’, all those hoaxes could actually be good for researchers studying misinformation.
3. In the United States, the Jussie Smollett case has spawned a few hoaxes falsely claiming the actor has committed a hate crime. And of course George Soros is mentioned.
4. Verificat, a new fact-checking outlet focused on covering Catalonia politics, launched this week.
5. The Washington Post Fact Checker has updated its ongoing database of Donald Trump’s false or misleading claims: 9,014 false or misleading claims over 773 days.
6. PolitiFact announced a new fact-checking partnership with Kaiser Health News.
7. Writing for CJR, Maya Kosoff checks in on the state of notorious misinformer Alex Jones. Charlie Warzel at The New York Times also weighed in.
8. The BBC wrote about the status of Facebook’s partnership with fact-checking outlets.
9. Lead Stories has publicly stopped using the term “fake news” in its fact checks.
10. The Pope is still warning people about misinformation. Yeah, really.

#### Worldwide trends of attacks on immigrants and minorities planned on social media

Laub 2019

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A mounting number of attacks on immigrants and other minorities has raised new concerns about the connection between inflammatory speech online and violent acts, as well as the role of corporations and the state in policing speech. Analysts say trends in hate crimes around the world echo changes in the political climate, and that social media can magnify discord. At their most extreme, rumors and invective disseminated online have contributed to violence ranging from lynchings to ethnic cleansing. The response has been uneven, and the task of deciding what to censor, and how, has largely fallen to the handful of corporations that control the platforms on which much of the world now communicates. But these companies are constrained by domestic laws. In liberal democracies, these laws can serve to defuse discrimination and head off violence against minorities. But such laws can also be used to suppress minorities and dissidents. Incidents have been reported on nearly every continent. Much of the world now communicates on social media, with nearly a third of the world’s population active on Facebook alone. As more and more people have moved online, experts say, individuals inclined toward racism, misogyny, or homophobia have found niches that can reinforce their views and goad them to violence. Social media platforms also offer violent actors the opportunity to publicize their acts. In Germany a correlation was found between anti-refugee Facebook posts by the far-right Alternative for Germany party and attacks on refugees. Scholars Karsten Muller and Carlo Schwarz observed that upticks in attacks, such as arson and assault, followed spikes in hate-mongering posts. In the United States, perpetrators of recent white supremacist attacks have circulated among racist communities online, and also embraced social media to publicize their acts. Prosecutors said the Charleston church shooter, who killed nine black clergy and worshippers in June 2015, engaged in a “self-learning process” online that led him to believe that the goal of white supremacy required violent action. The 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooter was a participant in the social media network Gab, whose lax rules have attracted extremists banned by larger platforms. There, he espoused the conspiracy that Jews sought to bring immigrants into the United States, and render whites a minority, before killing eleven worshippers at a refugee-themed Shabbat service. This “great replacement” trope, which was heard at the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, a year prior and originates with the French far right, expresses demographic anxieties about nonwhite immigration and birth rates. The great replacement trope was in turn espoused by the perpetrator of the 2019 New Zealand mosque shootings, who killed forty-nine Muslims at prayer and sought to broadcast the attack on YouTube. In Myanmar, military leaders and Buddhist nationalists used social media to slur and demonize the Rohingya Muslim minority ahead of and during a campaign of ethnic cleansing. Though Rohingya comprised perhaps 2 percent of the population, ethnonationalists claimed that Rohingya would soon supplant the Buddhist majority. The UN fact-finding mission said, “Facebook has been a useful instrument for those seeking to spread hate, in a context where, for most users, Facebook is the Internet [PDF].” The same technology that allows social media to galvanize democracy activists can be used by hate groups seeking to organize and recruit. It also allows fringe sites, including peddlers of conspiracies, to reach audiences far broader than their core readership. Online platforms’ business models depend on maximizing reading or viewing times. Since Facebook and similar platforms make their money by enabling advertisers to target audiences with extreme precision, it is in their interests to let people find the communities where they will spend the most time. Users’ experiences online are mediated by algorithms designed to maximize their engagement, which often inadvertently promote extreme content. Some web watchdog groups say YouTube’s autoplay function, in which the player, at the end of one video, tees up a related one, can be especially pernicious. The algorithm drives people to videos that promote conspiracy theories or are otherwise “divisive, misleading or false,” according to a Wall Street Journal investigative report. “YouTube may be one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century,” writes sociologist Zeynep Tufekci. YouTube said in June 2019 that changes to its recommendation algorithm made in January had halved views of videos deemed “borderline content” for spreading misinformation. At that time, the company also announced that it would remove neo-Nazi and white supremacist videos from its site. Yet the platform faced criticism that its efforts to curb hate speech do not go far enough. For instance, critics note that rather than removing videos that provoked homophobic harassment of a journalist, YouTube instead cut off the offending user from sharing in advertising revenue. How do platforms enforce their rules? Social media platforms rely on a combination of artificial intelligence, user reporting, and staff known as content moderators to enforce their rules regarding appropriate content. Moderators, however, are burdened by the sheer volume of content and the trauma that comes from sifting through disturbing posts, and social media companies don’t evenly devote resources across the many markets they serve. A ProPublica investigation found that Facebook’s rules are opaque to users and inconsistently applied by its thousands of contractors charged with content moderation. (Facebook says there are fifteen thousand.) In many countries and disputed territories, such as the Palestinian territories, Kashmir, and Crimea, activists and journalists have found themselves censored, as Facebook has sought to maintain access to national markets or to insulate itself from legal liability. “The company’s hate-speech rules tend to favor elites and governments over grassroots activists and racial minorities,” ProPublica found. Addressing the challenges of navigating varying legal systems and standards around the world—and facing investigations by several governments—Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg called for global regulations to establish baseline content, electoral integrity, privacy, and data standards. Problems also arise when platforms’ artificial intelligence is poorly adapted to local languages and companies have invested little in staff fluent in them. This was particularly acute in Myanmar, where, Reuters reported, Facebook employed just two Burmese speakers as of early 2015. After a series of anti-Muslim violence began in 2012, experts warned of the fertile environment ultranationalist Buddhist monks found on Facebook for disseminating hate speech to an audience newly connected to the internet after decades under a closed autocratic system. Facebook admitted it had done too little after seven hundred thousand Rohingya were driven to Bangladesh and a UN human rights panel singled out the company in a report saying Myanmar’s security forces should be investigated for genocidal intent. In August 2018, it banned military officials from the platform and pledged to increase the number of moderators fluent in the local language. How do countries regulate hate speech online? In many ways, the debates confronting courts, legislatures, and publics about how to reconcile the competing values of free expression and nondiscrimination have been around for a century or longer. Democracies have varied in their philosophical approaches to these questions, as rapidly changing communications technologies have raised technical challenges of monitoring and responding to incitement and dangerous disinformation. United States. Social media platforms have broad latitude, each establishing its own standards for content and methods of enforcement. Their broad discretion stems from the Communications Decency Act

# 1nc

### Framework

#### Value autonomy

Taylor 2017

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Autonomy, in Western ethics and political philosophy, the state or condition of self-governance, or leading one’s life according to reasons, values, or desires that are authentically one’s own.

#### Criterion consequentialism

Britannica 2009

Britannica consist of legitimate science or are evidence based through the use of credible scientific sourcing.3/04/2009 Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. “Consequentialism” -VL

Consequentialism, In ethics, the doctrine that actions should be judged right or wrong on the basis of their consequences. The simplest form of consequentialism is classical (or hedonistic) utilitarianism, which asserts that an action is right or wrong according to whether it maximizes the net balance of pleasure over pain in the universe. The consequentialism of G.E. Moore, known as “ideal utilitarianism,” recognizes beauty and friendship, as well as pleasure, as intrinsic goods that one’s actions should aim to maximize. According to the “preference utilitarianism” of R.M. Hare (1919–2002), actions are right if they maximize the satisfaction of preferences or desires, no matter what the preferences may be for. Consequentialists also differ over whether each individual action should be judged on the basis of its consequences or whether instead general rules of conduct should be judged in this way and individual actions judged only by whether they accord with a general rule.

### Contention 1: Speech moderating silences minority voices

#### Section 230’s reform would decrease the freedom of speech of individuals on social media

Bambauer 2020

Derek E. Bambauer is a professor of law at the University of Arizona, where he teaches internet law and intellectual property. 07/01/2020 The Brookings Institution “How Section 230 reform endangers internet free speech” <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-section-230-reform-endangers-internet-free-speech/> -VL

Everywhere one looks in Washington one finds proposals to reform Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which grants internet platforms legal immunity for most of the content posted by their users. Former Vice President Joe Biden wants to repeal it and even has an ally of sorts in President Donald Trump, who is using threats to explode Section 230 against his perceived enemies in Silicon Valley. One congressional proposal would condition immunity on an impossible standard of neutral content moderation. Another would condition immunity on undermining encryption. Some of these proposals are not intended to become law. If they did, the courts would likely strike some down as violations of the protections for freedom of speech guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment. Instead, they are intended as blunt tools of coercion—attempts to jawbone internet platforms into favoring a particular point of view. Even if Congress and the Trump administration fail to enact new rules, the additional pressure on internet platforms is likely to have a chilling effect that will make it harder for all users to communicate openly. Jawboning platforms gives political figures the best of both worlds: They can push internet firms to curate content that protects their own point of view without having to do the work of passing and then defending legislation mandating censorship. The movement for Section 230 reform Today, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok are the primary source of information for many Americans, just as network television and newspapers were in the 20th century. Social media sites have one key difference from those older media sources—their popularity comes from content that users create, rather than from the sites themselves. You can tweet at comedian Patton Oswalt, and he may well tweet back, without any involvement from Twitter aside from distributing your conversation. Normally, that’s good for everyone involved: Platforms get free content, and we get tools that enable easy communication with billions of other people. But this setup also makes platforms wary about taking risks. If I post criticism of a politician, the politician might threaten to sue the platform that carries the critique. For a social media site, the choice is clear: taking down my post avoids the threat of liability, and while I may object, I’m only one of millions of users. To reduce the risk that platforms will quash speech due to fears of lawsuits, in 1996 Congress protected internet intermediaries with a limited shield from liability. In most cases, platforms and other interactive computer services cannot be held liable for content created by someone else, such as one of their users (although they remain liable for information created by their employees). The immunity provisions of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act have important exceptions, such as for violations of federal criminal law, wiretapping statutes, intellectual property rules, and (most recently) online sex trafficking. But the safe harbor has been broad enough and stable enough to enable American firms to offer a vibrant array of internet activities. Recently, Section 230 has come under increasing political pressure, from members of both political parties in Congress and the executive branch. Most people would like to see greater limitations on some sort of internet content, whether it be non-consensual pornography (“revenge porn”), anti-vaccination claims, political advocacy by foreign countries, or fake news more generally. The Trump administration, angered by Twitter’s efforts to cabin the president’s tweets containing falsehoods or incitement to violence, promulgated an executive order that asks the Federal Communications Commission to issue regulations reworking Section 230; directs federal agencies to review their spending on platforms that engage in undesirable censorship; and orders the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. attorney general to assess whether internet firms are committing deceptive and unfair trade practices through their content moderation. Trump’s Department of Justice recommended that Congress remove 230’s protections for intermediaries that deliberately facilitate behavior that violates federal criminal law. In addition, the Justice Department proposes that platforms be required to implement mechanisms that allow users to complain about allegedly unlawful material, and that firms be mandated to keep records of reports and other activity that could aid law enforcement. Things might be even more stark if former vice president Joe Biden wins the presidency in November: Biden has called for the outright repeal of Section 230. Congress has also weighed in. Sen. Josh Hawley, the Missouri Republican, has introduced several pieces of legislation that would either condition Section 230’s immunity on verifiably neutral content moderation practices (an impossibility), or strip the liability shield altogether for firms that selectively curate political information. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has expressed a willingness to alter how Section 230 works. And there have been several bipartisan proposals. One, titled the EARN IT Act, would condition immunity on firms adopting congressionally mandated methods for eliminating child sex abuse material, which would include rolling back encryption protections for consumers. Another, the PACT Act, would require platforms to disclose the policies they use to police content, mandate that firms implement a user complaint system with an appeals process, and obligate firms to remove putatively illegal content within 24 hours. Although the time remaining in the current legislative session is short, there is considerable congressional attention on Section 230. At first glance, Section 230 seems ripe for reform. After all, it protects internet intermediaries from a broad swath of legal liability for content most people dislike, from falsehoods that defame someone to fake news to posts generated by bots. And, platforms are often our first source for information about important public issues, from protests to pandemics. But there are several major problems with the reform proposals put forward so far. The problem of scale The major internet platforms have to manage massive amounts of data. Twitter gets half a billion posts every day. Facebook has over 1.7 billion active daily users. YouTube has over 720,000 hours of video uploaded to its site each day. The scale of the data means that platforms have to rely primarily on automated software programs—algorithms—to curate content. And algorithms, while constantly improving, make mistakes: They flag innocent content as suspect, and vice versa. Proposals that seek to force platforms to engage in more monitoring—especially analysis before content is publicly available—will push internet firms to favor removing challenged content over keeping it. That’s precisely the chilling effect that Section 230 was intended to avoid. Increasing costs Additional procedures, such as appeals for complaints and requirements to track posts, will increase costs for platforms. Right now, most popular internet sites do not charge their users; instead, they earn revenues through advertising. If costs increase enough, some platforms would need to charge consumers an admissions fee. The ticket price might not be high, but it would affect people with less disposable income. That could widen the already existing digital divide. Even if Twitter earns enough money to keep its service free, the regulatory cost of these proposals could make it harder for start-up companies to compete with established internet companies. Rising costs would only worsen the antitrust and competition concerns that the Department of Justice and state attorneys general are already investigating. And there is no guarantee that reforms would justify their expense. Spam e-mail didn’t dry up when the United States adopted anti-spam legislation in 2003; it simply moved its base of operations abroad, where it is harder for American law enforcement to operate. Truth is in the eye of the beholder Some proposals for Section 230 reform ask companies to make difficult, if not impossible, decisions about contested concepts like truth and neutrality. Political truth looks very different depending on whether you ask Biden or Trump.

#### Shadow banning suppresses voices of resistance like on the app, Tik Tok

Mcluskey 2020

Megan Mcluskey is a reporter for TIME magazine. 07/22/2020 Time “These TikTok Creators Say They’re Still Being Suppressed for Posting Black Lives Matter Content” <https://time.com/5863350/tiktok-black-creators/> - VL

Videos being taken down, muted or hidden from followers: These are all issues that some TikTok creators say they’re facing for posting Black Lives Matter content. In the wake of releasing a statement in June apologizing to members of its Black community who have felt unsafe, unsupported, or suppressed, TikTok continues to face bias allegations from Black creators and others posting Black Lives Matter content. This issue has become prevalent as TikTok, the most downloaded non-gaming app worldwide in 2020, has transformed into a hub for activism as the year has progressed. A number of creators who TIME spoke to say they have either experienced noticeable declines in viewership and engagement on their videos after posting content in support of the Black Lives Matter movement or noticed recent instances where they felt that TikTok’s community guidelines weren’t being fairly applied to Black creators. Even on the heels of TikTok’s pledge to effect positive change for its Black creators, some users say they’re still seeing similar patterns of unequal treatment play out on the platform. When asked to address the claims of sources in this story, Kudzi Chikumbu, the Director of Creator Community of TikTok U.S., tells TIME that TikTok “unequivocally” does not engage in shadow banning, an umbrella term under which these types of discrimination claims often fall. Referring to the alleged practice of limiting the spread of content without notifying creators that it violates any community guidelines, shadow banning has become an increasingly widespread concern among users on not only TikTok, but also Twitter and Instagram. Due to the nature of the concept of shadow banning, it’s difficult to substantiate whether it is or isn’t happening. Some point toward the bias in the habits of active users as the most influential indicator of what content users see rather than intentional direct racism. However, TikTok’s rise in popularity amid coronavirus coupled with assertions that it’s been censoring videos by people of color, and specifically, Black creators, have brought the question of whether the app supports its Black creators to the forefront. Following the May 19 Black Out movement organized by Lex Scott, the founder of Black Lives Matter Utah, that called on TikTok users to stand in solidarity against censorship of and racism against Black creators, TikTok came under fire for what it said was a “technical glitch” that affected the view count displays on videos tagged with the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #GeorgeFloyd even though those hashtags had garnered upwards of 1 billion views as protest content skyrocketed. After the issue was flagged by a Twitter user on May 28, TikTok released a statement on Twitter on May 29 saying that the glitch was also affecting random words like #hello and #cat before resolving the problem that same day. This incident took place as Black Lives Matter activism was surging on a number of social media platforms in response to a global uprising against police brutality and racism in the U.S., drawing a powerful level of attention to it. TikTok and ByteDance, the Chinese company that owns TikTok, are far from the only apps on which users have logged complaints about apparent bias. But while glitches on platforms as big as TikTok aren’t uncommon, with a July 9 issue that caused likes and views on TikToks to temporarily disappear — it was resolved that same day — fueling unsubstantiated speculation that the app was shutting down in the U.S., some TikTokers who TIME spoke to say the hashtag issue was simply the final straw in terms of their view of TikTok’s treatment of Black creators. “When someone says something and they have a clear pattern of behavior that shows that something else might be the case, then you can’t ignore that,” Chinyelu Mwaafrika (@chinforshort), a 20-year-old TikToker from Indianapolis who shares both comedic and social justice-related content, says. “TikTok as an app is not friendly to Black creators. Whether that’s because of the way that it’s programmed or because of the way that users interact and engage with content, it’s not an app that you see a lot of Black creators getting hugely successful on.” Although some users say they have still been experiencing issues since, in its June 1 apology, the company pledged to better support its Black community and take steps toward a more inclusive environment. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube have also been known to tweak their algorithms in ways that affect engagement for existing creators, so it’s not unprecedented in the early history of social media platforms. “To our Black community: We want you to know that we hear you and we care about your experiences on TikTok,” TikTok U.S. General Manager Vanessa Pappas and Chikumbu said in the statement. “We welcome the voices of the Black community wholeheartedly.” TikTok has previously admitted to suppressing posts from physically disabled, LGBTQ and overweight users as part of what it said was a set of what was intended to be “anti-bullying” policies, raising questions for some users about what they see and what gets filtered by TikTok’s algorithm — which uses a number of factors, including likes, shares and accounts followed, to predict what users will be interested in seeing on their For You feeds. Low view counts After documenting some of his experiences at Black Lives Matter protests in Los Angeles on TikTok in early June, 19-year-old Kam Kurosaki (@kamkurosaki), who went viral in May for sharing a video of his dad dancing to Ariana Grande, says that despite having over 80,000 followers, the views on his videos began dropping into the low thousands. “I was out protesting and sharing [videos] and when I went back to my normal content, I saw that my videos went from getting thousands if not hundreds of thousands of views to barely getting 1,000,” he says. “With that being the direct next event after my Black Lives Matter posts, it was kind of hard to see it as anything but shadow banning.” Side-by-side comparison of TikTok user Kam Kurosaki's video analytics for a June 8 Black Lives Matter post and subsequent June 11 post Side-by-side comparison of TikTok user Kam Kurosaki's video analytics for a June 8 Black Lives Matter post and subsequent June 11 post Kam Kurosaki—TikTok The breakdown of how users view certain videos also plays a role in the issue of content exposure, says 19-year-old Onani Banda (@thedopestzambian). When creators look at their video analytics, they can see what percent of a post’s views came from users watching it on their For You page, followers seeing it on their Following feed, or people going to their personal profile and clicking on it directly from there. TikTok user Onani Banda's video analytics for Black Lives Matter posts on May 29 and May 31 TikTok user Onani Banda's video analytics for Black Lives Matter posts on May 29 and May 31 Onani Banda—TikTok Banda says that after two videos in which she spoke about supporting the Black Lives Matter movement garnered a much lower view count (less than 6,000 to date) than she expected from over 100,000 followers, she discovered that the majority of the views they did get came from Personal Profile clicks. “I still have those two videos up and they’re some of the least viewed on my account,” she says. “I’ve never privated them [hidden them from view], but 60-70% of their views come from Personal Profile, meaning users would have to actively seek them out to see them. My followers are not seeing them.” For You feeds and community guideline violations On June 8, TikTok detailed how its recommendation system surfaces videos in the For You feed, addressing how it’s working to protect against engagement biases that may currently affect the system. “Developing and maintaining TikTok’s recommendation system is a continuous process,” Pappas and Chikumbu said in the statement. But, noting that to this day she feels the number of views her videos get generally doesn’t square with her follower count, a lack of content by Black creators appearing on her For You page was just one of the issues with TikTok that 25-year-old Emily Barbour (@emuhhhleebee) spoke about in a May 20 video that she says she posted because she felt like she was shadow banned. “I very vividly remember the week of the May 19 Black Out, I had so much engagement and I had gained like 65,000 followers,” she says. “And then the very next day nobody was seeing any of my posts. I made a post and it sat on my profile for about three hours before anybody even saw it. That’s when I actually made a post asking if anybody else felt like they were shadow banned. That was the first time where it was blatant.” Issues with Tiktok’s community guidelines have also dogged Barbour since joining the app, she says. After seeing a video in early July in which another creator appeared in blackface, she screen recorded it to share with her followers before reporting the post for hate speech. She also reported another video made by the same user saying it was “incredibly racist.” However, she says that while the video she made with the screen recording was quickly muted for violating copyright guidelines, after reviewing her report, TikTok ruled that neither of the other user’s videos violated its community guidelines. “My followers reported back in the comments saying they went to report the videos and within minutes were met with the same ‘does not violate community guidelines’ messages,” she says. “Both were up for over two days before [being taken down], even with thousands of people reporting them before I saw them.” It’s experiences like that, Barbour says, that have contributed to her negative feelings about TikTok. “I feel like this not only shows the unfair treatment that Black creators face on the app, even when trying to make it safer for others, but also showcases the racial bias that exists on TikTok,” she says. Moderating videos is one of the issues the company is now working to address, Chikumbu says. “Some of the work that we’re doing for the Black community to make sure they feel supported is that we’re investing in our technology and moderation strategies to better handle potentially violative content and design a little more user-friendly appeals process,” he says. “Bias in the user base” For Jailyn Feliz (@jailynisfeliz), a 20-year-old TikToker from Charlotte, N.C., the experience she’s had with TikTok’s algorithm feels like another chapter in the history of the suppression of Black voices at a time when the issues of race and policing in America are a national conversation. “The history of people being silenced is ongoing,” she says. “The fact that it’s kind of taken on a new form isn’t surprising, but it’s upsetting. We’re trying to make change and continue to get people to notice what’s wrong. You can work against the algorithm if you push with comments and liking and sharing so we have to lift each other up because who else will.” While how the recommendation system works can play a role, Mwaafrika says that he thinks that some of these issues are the result of the demographics of TikTok’s users. “I think there’s definitely a conversation to be had about bias in the user base,” he says. “It’s an app that’s dominated by white people and of course you’re going to like the content of people you can relate to. I think that, along with the algorithm suppressing content from Black creators, it’s also worth talking about the fact that a lot of white users on this app don’t support Black creators.” Collaborating with users of diverse backgrounds is one measure TikTok has undertaken in response to the questions of bias that have been raised about the platform. After expressing some of her personal concerns about success for Black TikTok creators, 26-year-old Bria Jones (@HeyBriaJones), who posts a variety of lifestyle videos, says that she began working with the company to help remedy inclusivity issues. “While the concerns of many Black creators are valid, I think the issue with Black creators is much deeper than the algorithm,” she says. “Similar to the real world, the internet is not a level playing field. TikTok recognizes these gaps and is actively working to make the app more inclusive and is working with Black creators like myself to get there. It will take work and we are not there yet, but we are moving towards that and I am happy that TikTok invited me to hold them accountable.” Considering how TikTok popularity can open the door to a slew of other opportunities — as it has for white TikTok stars like Charli D’Amelio, Loren Gray and Addison Rae — 20-year-old Raisha Doumbia (@pastramionrai) says that Black creators need to start getting the recognition they deserve. “A lot of times when you get successful on TikTok, there are multiple opportunities and other businesses want to work with you,” she says. “[Businesses] can’t find those people if they’re being shadow banned.” Doumbia says that one of the times she noticed a decline in views was after posting a video in early June about Iyanna Dior, a Black transgender woman, being attacked by a mob in Minneapolis. “I have 100,000 followers, but some of my videos only get like 800 [views] and people will tell me that they didn’t get to see them even though they follow me,” she says. “A lot of times my views don’t match up to my followers. It just doesn’t make sense.” “We don’t really have anywhere else to go” Ensuring that fellow Black creators know that they’re not alone is one of the main reasons 17-year-old Joshua Teshome (@surelyjosh) says that he feels it’s important to speak out about alleged instances of bias. “[TikTok is] literally the easiest app to get big on, and we want to have as fair a chance as the white creators do,” he says. “We just want to be equal.” Ultimately, the creators who TIME spoke to are hopeful that things will improve on TikTok and want to continue using the app for the audience. “The way things are now, I’m definitely unhappy about it and I’m definitely not going to stop talking about it. But I like creating content and TikTok is the only place where I have any sort of real following,” Mwaafrika says. “We know TikTok isn’t really the best place to be if you want people to see your content as a Black creator, but we don’t really have anywhere else to go.” For users who want to show support, Mwaafrika says that it’s time to assess what compels people to like certain videos and not others. “I know I’m definitely motivated by biases when I like things,” he says. “I like seeing Black creators on my For You page, so I tend to like more Black creators. So I think that if you do see a Black creator on your For You page, even if you don’t find [their video] particularly funny, someone else might, and might not see it without the attention you’re giving them. I think it’s important for everyone to look out for one another.”

Internal link

#### Cherry Picking information on the news puts people of color at a disadvantage

Sielger 2020

Kirk Sielge is a correspondent on NPR's national desk. 07/27/2020 NPR “'Patriot' Movement Conspicuously Absent From Portland's Federal Overreach Protests”

<https://www.npr.org/2020/07/27/895955738/patriot-movement-conspicuously-absent-from-portland-s-federal-overreach-protests> - VL

Over the weekend as large crowds of protesters in Portland chanted in support of Black lives and against an ongoing federal police crackdown around the courthouse, some heads turned when a few young men were spotted in the crowd wearing flak jackets over their Hawaiian shirts. These were purported to be members of the so-called Boogaloo Boys, a mishmash movement of extremists that calls for another civil war, among other things. "We don't support violence, I want to make that clear, we are not racist," said an apparent spokesman, in a video posted to Twitter by Portland freelance journalist Sergio Olmos. The men added that they were out on the streets in support of the protests, and agreed with many of the same things being called for by Black Lives Matter leaders and others. Extremists implying they're showing up to protest federal overreach in a liberal city seems like strange bedfellows. But in the Northwest, the far right has been protesting what it calls federal tyranny for years. In fact, experts say extremist groups on both ends of the spectrum have flourished in the region in part due to its vast geographic and cultural distance from Washington D.C. Four years ago, Oregon was also in the national spotlight for a protest that included vandalism of federal property: the 41-day armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Men in cowboy hats calling themselves Patriots tore down fences and bulldozed over land considered sacred to Native Americans. The Obama administration then estimated the siege caused close to a million dollars in damage to the bird refuge property and buildings. In Portland this summer, the damage tally is much smaller. The latest estimate from the Department of Homeland Security is $50,000, mostly attributed to vandalism and graffiti at and around the Mark O. Hatfield United States Courthouse. And the far right has mostly been quiet about the alleged federal crackdown, which is just fine with Eric Ward, executive director of Western States Center, a Portland group that tracks extremism in the Northwest. "We have our hands full with a quasi federal police force," Ward said. Ward's group is among those that have filed lawsuits against the Trump administration's presence in the Democratically-controlled city. "We don't now need quasi military formations on the streets of Portland to add to that," Ward said. For the past three years, far right extremists have regularly descended on Portland to clash with leftists. These protests were often a spectacle, almost always tense and sometimes violent. So few people here are eager to see any strange bedfellows alliances with far right patriots, who Ward contends are selfish and cherry pick from the Constitution. "With a few exceptions, they are made up of leaders who hold up the constitution with one hand and crush it with the other," Ward said. One far right leader who has lately shown some support for the issues raised by Black Lives Matter is Ammon Bundy, who even said he entertained attending a recent BLM rally near his home in Boise, Idaho. At the very Portland courthouse that's now the flashpoint of the NEW protests, Bundy was acquitted for leading that 2016 wildlife refuge occupation. "If you think that somehow the Black Lives Matter is more dangerous than the police, you must have a problem in your mind. If you think that Antifa is the one that's going to take your freedom, you must have a problem in your mind," Bundy told his followers in a video posted to Facebook recently. He added that federal police forces have turned into a huge bureaucracy and need to be defunded. The militia leader later claimed he was ostracized by his own supporters for saying that. Experts say that's because the far right generally views what's happening in Portland to be a liberal urban political fight. But western historian Patty Limerick says that could change. She says President Trump picked the wrong region for a standoff. There's a long and complicated history of fighting the federal government in Oregon in particular, and it crosses political boundaries. "By one point of view, President Trump might have had an advisor, and he didn't, who said, 'you know this thing where you're going to be sending these personnel from federal agencies into a western city, um, I wouldn't do that,'" Limerick says. Oregon Public Broadcasting reported the administration is planning to send even more federal officers to the city, in addition to the 114 already on the ground. The move comes as clashes between some protesters and federal agents appear to be showing no signs of abating. Portland will be going into its 61st continuous night of protests tonight.

### Contention 2: It takes away a platform for activists

#### Social media is a necessity for grassroot movements

Kweifio- Okai 2015

Carla Kweifio-Okai is the Communications Manager at International Women's Development Agency/ 02/16/2015 Guardian News and Media “Social media without grassroots action not enough for a winning campaign” <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/feb/16/social-media-without-grassroots-action-not-enough-for-a-winning-campaign> -VL

Don’t underestimate face-to-face campaigning Campaigners increasingly embrace online tools to get their messages across. Blogging sites, online personal or group profiles, and cyberspace are used to spread awareness about a campaign, interact with and motivate supporters to follow the campaign, and coordinate events. Tweets and likes make it easy for the campaigners to track their followers’ interaction and engagement, while flexibility in social networking gives a behind-the-scenes view of the campaign and consequently a sense of accessibility. But campaigns also involve a degree of mobilisation and a deeper level of participation that requires relational ties of some kind (as well as individual agency and ability). Thus, campaigning demands an element of fellowship – solidarity and companionship that characterise a more personal form of contact. For me, one of the best strategies is meeting and pressurising decision-makers to commit to change; it adds a more relational perspective to the campaign and ensures devotion to the cause. Voula Kyprianou, University of Sheffield, UK Campaigners can’t afford to ignore social media Social media has changed the way we campaign. It is the ultimate equaliser – giving people the chance to have their voices heard on the same stage as the world’s most powerful leaders. In the past decade we’ve seen online campaigning help bring down dictators, hold big business to account, elect presidents and encourage a whole new generation of young people to get involved in issues that matter. Of course, this is not to say that social media does not have its downsides, and the same tools that can be used for good can also be used to bully and oppress. But for campaigners to ignore this new platform would be equivalent to ignoring the rise of print media so many years ago. This is simply the way we communicate today, and I believe it’s still possible to maintain “grassroots” elements of campaigning in this new world. Campaigning on the streets is important, but there really is no comparison to the amount of people activists can reach online. So yes, social media is still a campaigner’s best friend. Annabelle Smith, University of Melbourne, Australia Social media campaigns still require a spark The encompassing force of globalisation is facilitating a movement towards an online world, characterised by the rapid sharing of social media information, which has the power to transcend traditional boundaries. However, is it possible to create significant change from an online platform? How can politicians be appropriately engaged? These are questions that cloud the effectiveness of such far-reaching campaigning. Undoubtedly, social media can be used as an effective tool for advocating change, but quality grassroots campaigning should be used as a catalyst for mobilising the vast quantity of “keyboard warriors”. Clearly, social media can be employed as a significant tool for empowerment and liberation, yet the online world is a gullible and impatient one; mistakes will doubtless be made. Nonetheless, social media represents the future of campaigning, so long as the sparks that mobilise the clicktivists continue. James Laycock, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands A successful campaign relies on online and offline action As a means of communication, advertisement, and expression, social media has become the norm. Many young people, in the developed and developing world alike, often have an arguably unhealthy attachment to their mobile device, as opportunities to socialise, research, and express oneself to the world through written word, recorded video, and carefully cropped pictures are a mere swipe of the finger away. Therefore, social media is pivotal to a grassroots campaign in regard to organisation, promotion, recruitment, policy and strategy briefing, and indoctrination of specific goals and beliefs. Without the use of a variety of user friendly and informative social media applications, a grassroots movement has little chance of making significant strides towards achieving its desired change. However, although this is an increasingly technological age, where some young people would consider it unfathomable to go without their smartphone, social media campaigns must also coincide with more old-fashioned techniques of campaigning such as going door to door, handing out information pamphlets in public places, campus demonstrations, and conducting town hall meetings. There simply is no substitute for direct human contact if one truly wishes to convey a message that is supposed to be convincing, inspiring, and motivating. Social media contributes substantially to spreading awareness and coordinating logistical movement, but face-to-face interaction is irreplaceable. Also, many older people do not use social media and it would be foolish to attempt to form a grassroots campaign without utilising every possible method of making the campaign stronger.

Impact Cuts a platform for individuals making movements

#### Arab Springs proves that social media is a necessity for grassroot movements and censorship discredits work from activists

Hempel 2016

Jessi Hempel is a senior writer at WIRED covering the business of technology. 01/25/2016 CNMN Collection “Social Media Made the Arab Spring, But Couldn't Save It” <https://www.wired.com/2016/01/social-media-made-the-arab-spring-but-couldnt-save-it/> -VL

FIVE YEARS AGO this week, massive protests toppled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, marking the height of the Arab Spring. Empowered by access to social media sites like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, protesters organized across the Middle East, starting in December 2010 in Tunisia, and gathered together to speak out against oppression, inspiring hope for a better, more democratic future. Commentators, comparing these activists to the US peace protesters of 1968, praised the effort as a democratic dawn for an area that had long been populated by autocracies. In a photo collection published by The New York Times a few months later, Irish writer Colum McCann wrote: "The light from the Arab Spring rose from the ground up; the hope is now that the darkness doesn’t fall."Social media, it turns out, was not a new path to democracy, but merely a tool. The darkness has fallen. Half a decade later, the Middle East is roiling in violence and repression. Activists are being intimidated into restraint by governments that are, with the exception of Tunisia, more totalitarian than those they replaced, if any government as such really exists at all. Meanwhile, militants have harnessed the same technology to organize attacks and recruit converts, catapulting the world into instability. Instead of new robust democracies, we have a global challenge with no obvious solution. The Arab Spring carried the promise that social media and the Internet were going to unleash a new wave of positive social change. But the past five years have shown that liberty isn't the only end toward which these tools can be turned.

Activists were able to organize and mobilize in 2011 partly because authoritarian governments didn’t yet understand very much about how to use social media. They didn’t see the potential, says NYU professor of politics Joshua Tucker, a principle investigator at the Social Media and Political Participation Lab at New York University. “There are a lot of reasons the people in power were slow to pick up on this,” he adds. “One of the things about not have a free press is it is harder to learn what was going on in the world.” Spreading Misinformation Today, governments take an aggressive hand in shutting down digital channels people use to organize against them. In Egypt, for example, where 26 million people are on Facebook (up from 4.7 million people in 2011), security forces arrested three people who administered nearly two dozen Facebook pages, according to Egyptian media reports. It also detained activists who had been involved in prior protests. And at the end of December, the government shut down Facebook’s Free Basics service, which had offered free Internet services to Egyptians on mobile phones. More than 3 million people had signed up for the program in just two months, according to Facebook. Meanwhile Turkey has made 805 requests for tweets to be removed since 2012, according to Twitter’s most recent transparency report; more than half were made last year. These governments have also become adept at using those same channels to spread misinformation. “You can now create a narrative saying a democracy activist was a traitor and a pedophile,” says Anne Applebaum, an author who directs a program on radical political and economic change at the Legatum Institute in London. “The possibility of creating an alternative narrative is one people didn’t consider, and it turns out people in authoritarian regimes are quite good at it.” The tools that catalyzed the Arab Spring, we've learned, are only as good or as bad as those who use them. Even when activists are able to get their messages out, they have trouble galvanizing people to actually take action. The sentiments that gain the largest audiences often contain religious elements, according to Mansour Al-hadj, who is a director at the Middle East Media Research Institute. “The message by itself without any religious element in it, wouldn’t work in the long run,” he says. “The activists’ accounts on Twitter and Facebook are very active and they have a lot of followers, but they cannot drive masses,” he says, because their sentiments are more moderate. Laced through media coverage of the Arab Spring was what turned out to be the naïve hope that people were inherently, unequivocally good and that unleashing their collective consciousness via social media would naturally result in good things happening. But it turns out that consciousness was not so collective after all. The tools that catalyzed the Arab Spring, we've learned, are only as good or as bad as those who use them. And as it turns out, bad people are also very good at social media. Militant groups like the Islamic State have been reported to recruit converts using Facebook and Twitter and use encrypted communications technology to coordinate attacks. To be sure, the Arab Spring protests—and the subsequent political protests from Occupy Wall Street to Russian demonstrations in 2012—were significant. They introduced a new form of political and social organizing, of "hyper-networked protests, revolts, and riots." But we’re just beginning to understand the impact of this new communications technology. Social media, it turns out, was not a new path to democracy, but merely a tool. And for a few brief months, only the young and the idealistic knew how it worked.

### Extra cards

#### Social Media app restrictions cut grassroot movements and trends

Hutchinson 2020

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After various users complained that their Instagram posts were being restricted due to usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, Instagram has issued an explanation, saying that the posts are indeed being limited, but not because of any intentional action by the platform to limit the discussion.

As explained by Instagram, the massive increase in usage of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag has resulted in its systems incorrectly assessing the influx as spam. Instagram is working to resolve the situation to ensure users can continue to engage in the discussion via their posts. TikTok also faced challenges processing a similar influx in discussion around the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag last week, which prompted some users to suggest that TikTok was looking to censor the discussion from the platform. Refinery28 reached out to TikTok for an explanation, and were told that it was a “pre-upload issue". Both Instagram and TikTok have separately shared their support for the protest action calling for systemic change to address racial injustice in the US. Instagram's parent company Facebook has also pledged $10 million in funding for programs focused on overcoming racial injustice - though Facebook is also facing an internal walk-out due to dissatisfaction among employees as to how the platform has addressed elements of the surrounding debate. A 360 Look at the People, Processes and Data of Re-Opening Retail in 2020 Explore what it means for retailers and restaurants that are re-opening and how they can ensure they start off strong while being safe. Learn more But in terms of perceived censorship, both platforms have said that this is absolutely not the case - in both cases, these are system issues which they are working to resolve in order to facilitate the ongoing discussion.

#### Online communities infiltrate the left and right with information shifting bias

Arif et all 2018

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11/2018 University of Washington An excerpt from “Acting the Part: Examining Information Operations Within

#BlackLivesMatter Discourse” Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction - VL

Nurturing Division: Enacting Caricatures of Political Partisan Accounts Our findings show RU-IRA agents utilizing Twitter and other online platforms to infiltrate politically active online communities. Rather than transgressing community norms, these accounts undertook efforts to connect to the cultural narratives, stereotypes, and political positions of their imagined audiences. Understanding this performative aspect of RU-IRA accounts is critical for understanding how the work of information operations not only includes activities of disseminating true or false information on social media, but also activities to reflect and shape the performances of other (not RU-affiliated) actors in these communities. Taking a perspective based on the theory of structuration [21], the impact of these accounts cannot be considered in a simple cause and effect type model, but instead should be examined as a relationship of mutual shaping or resonance between the affordances of the online environment, the social structures and behaviors of the online crowd, and the improvised performances of agents that seek to leverage that crowd for political gain. Importantly, this activity did not limit itself to a single “side” of the online conversation. Instead, it opportunistically infiltrated both the politically left-leaning pro-#BlackLivesMatter community and the right-leaning anti-#BlackLivesMatter community. Though the tone of content shared varied across different accounts, in general these accounts took part in creating and/or amplifying divisive messages from their respective political camps. In some cases (e.g. @BleepThePolice), the account names and content shared reflected some of the most highly charged and morally questionable content. Together with the high-level dynamics revealed in the network graph (Figure 2), this observation suggests that RU-IRA operated-accounts were enacting harsh caricatures of political partisans that may have functioned both to pull like-minded accounts closer and to push accounts from the other “side” even further away. Though we cannot quantify the impact of these strategies, our findings do support theories developed in the intelligence field that suggest one goal of specifically Russian (dis)information operations is to “sow division” within a target society [32, 45]. This study also offers some insight into how such an effort works, by leveraging the affordances and social dynamics of online social media.

#### Social Media companies are given the choice to decide what is true or false information “authenticity checking” movements

Arif et al 2018

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The Challenge of Regulating through Authenticity As social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) begin to acknowledge the problem of information operations and to devote resources and attention towards addressing it [53], one repeated refrain has been that these companies do not want to be “arbiters of truth” or seen as censoring political content. This is likely because they are wary of removing posts by ideological believers of that content. This is important here, because the vast majority of accounts in the conversations described in this research—the nearly 22,000 other accounts in our Twitter collection—would likely fall into the category of ideological believers (not RU-IRA agents). 20:22 A. Arif et al. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, Vol. 2, No. CSCW, Article 20, Publication date: November 2018. Reluctant to take on the role of deciding what kinds of ideologies are valid and/or appropriate, the platforms are therefore faced with a challenge of developing other criteria for determining what kinds of activities to promote, allow, dampen, or prevent on their platforms. One recent focus has been on “authenticity” [53]—which could be defined as whether an account is who it pretends to be and whether the account believes the content it is sharing and/or amplifying. The RU-IRA invested considerable time in developing online personas for their operations, yet these accounts do not qualify as authentic by these criteria. So, this developing strategy demonstrates a potential way forward that allows the platforms to walk the fine line between criticisms of rampant manipulation and concerns about censorship. Still, our research suggests that those wishing to deceive are working hard to establish the appearance of “authenticity”. To underscore that point, personas featured in this research were “authentic” enough for @jack (Twitter’s CEO) and at least one of our researchers to retweet, and we assume it will be challenging for platforms to determine authenticity for the vast number of active accounts. We do not know how difficult or easy it was for Twitter to identify the RU-IRA accounts featured here, but we can assume that developing mechanisms for determining authenticity—and even refining the criteria for what authenticity means—represents an important and challenging direction for future work.

#### Social Media companies gatekeeping information discredits movements

Karr 2016

Timothy Karr is the Senior Director of Strategy and Communications 08/29/16 The Root ” How Censoring Facebook Affects the Fight for Black Lives” <https://www.theroot.com/how-censoring-facebook-affects-the-fight-for-black-live-1790856542> -VL

Earlier this month, Baltimore County police tried to serve a black mother with an arrest warrant for failing to appear in court for a traffic violation. But the picture many saw told only one side of the story. Police killed the woman, Korryn Gaines, and her 5-year-old son was wounded in the altercation. She had attempted to share her encounter with police using Instagram. The police urged Facebook, which owns Instagram, to deactivate her accounts. In response, Facebook cut Gaines’ live stream from its feed. This wasn’t an isolated incident. In July, Diamond Reynolds used Facebook Live to record the immediate aftermath of the horrific police shooting of her boyfriend, Philando Castile. Once footage hit 1 million views, Facebook temporarily removed the video. A Facebook spokesperson claimed this was due to a “technical glitch,” but many media reports suggest otherwise. For many, Facebook has come to represent a public square—a place where we can assemble with others, share information and speak our minds. But it isn’t public. It’s a private platform where everyone’s rights to connect and communicate are subject to Facebook’s often arbitrary terms and conditions. The Constitution protects everyone’s right to record police officers in the public discharge of their duties. But this right goes only as far as your smartphone. Once people decide to share the resulting videos—including those that expose shocking police abuses—the potential for state and private forces to censor the footage becomes very real. Facebook claims to take down or block videos that glorify violence and says that it will grant law-enforcement requests to suspend accounts in cases where there is an “immediate risk of harm,” but that’s a vague and difficult standard to apply, and one that’s subject to police discretion. The Gaines and Reynolds videos remind us that social media companies like Facebook, Google (which owns YouTube) and Twitter ultimately control our ability to share the images that have fueled the Movement for Black Lives. The fact that these companies can arbitrarily remove our speech, images and videos has serious consequences for those struggling to expose racial injustice to a wider audience. Earlier this week, more than 40 social justice and digital-rights groups sent Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg a letter (pdf) urging the company to clarify its policy on honoring police requests to censor videos and other content. The groups, which include the Center for Media Justice, ColorOfChange.org, Daily Kos, Free Press and SumOfUs, also asked Facebook to restore Gaines’ videos from her encounter with police so the public can decide whether the police violated her rights. In the second half of 2015, Facebook received 855 requests from government and local authorities, including local police forces, for “emergency” action related to users’ accounts. According to Facebook, these actions included the blocking of user access to accounts as well as the handover of user information. Over that time period, the company complied with nearly 3 out of every 4 such requests. This raises several questions: Will police demand that Facebook cover up potential abuses that witnesses have recorded and then shared on the platform, even when there is no real risk of immediate harm? And how will it respond when the risk of harm comes from police violence itself? Shouldn’t our right to record such interactions with law enforcement include our right to share these recordings with others? Facebook needs clear guidelines and processes that are transparent to users on how it determines whether to block someone’s stream or deactivate an account. It shouldn’t allow police to demand takedown requests to avoid scrutiny or cover up abuse. We need to know when and why Facebook and other social media platforms have granted these requests, with clear standards for the future. “Risk of harm” is a factor, but one could interpret that standard to justify censoring almost any interaction with law enforcement—and especially those in which an interaction escalates because of a person’s race. The fight for racial equity in the media is often a fight against media monopoly, especially when these companies are white-owned and operated. And Facebook is a face of monopoly in the age of social media. New gatekeepers like Facebook must make confronting racism a priority. Yes, Zuckerberg has been outspoken in his support for racial justice—even hanging a Black Lives Matter sign outside company headquarters. But we must urge him to ensure that his company’s actions match his words. Providing clarity and accountability on Facebook’s policy for suspending accounts and blocking images of police encounters is a start.