

PART 1 – Taylor Swift and Deepfakes

Document 1 - Taylor Swift Endorses Kamala Harris

Her Instagram post backing the vice president came shortly after Ms. Harris and former President Donald Trump had stepped off the debate stage.



By [Nicholas Nehamas](#), [Theodore Schleifer](#) and [Nick Corasaniti](#)

The New York Times, Sept. 10, 2024

Look what they made her do.

Taylor Swift, who is one of America’s most celebrated pop-culture icons and has an enormous following across the world, endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris late Tuesday after Ms. Harris’s debate 5 against former President Donald J. Trump.

The endorsement by Ms. Swift, delivered minutes after Ms. Harris and Mr. Trump had stepped off the debate stage in Philadelphia, offers Ms. Harris an unrivaled celebrity backer and a tremendous shot of 10 adrenaline to her campaign, especially with the younger voters she has been trying to attract.

“Like many of you, I watched the debate tonight,” Ms. Swift wrote on Instagram to her 283 million followers. “I will be casting my vote for Kamala Harris 15 and Tim Walz in the 2024 Presidential Election. I’m voting for @kamalaharris because she fights for the rights and causes I believe need a warrior to champion them.”

She signed her post as “Childless Cat Lady,” a 20 reference to comments made by Mr. Trump’s running

mate, Senator JD Vance of Ohio, about women without children. The photo that accompanied her post showed her holding a furry feline, Benjamin Button, her pet Ragdoll.

25 Ms. Swift’s endorsement was much anticipated among Democrats. The singer has expressed regret for not having done more to speak out about her opposition to Mr. Trump during his first run in 2016. Since then, she has embraced a more political posture while 30 speaking out on issues such as abortion access. But the precise timing of Tuesday’s endorsement was something of a surprise: Ms. Swift endorsed Joe Biden on Oct. 7, 2020, closer to the election.

The impact of Ms. Swift’s endorsement may be hard 35 to quantify, but her ability to get supporters to register to vote came into sharp relief just last year. In a brief post on her Instagram account in 2023, Ms. Swift encouraged her 272 million supporters at the time to vote and included a link to the website Vote.org.

The site later reported 35,252 new registrations that day, a significant jump compared with the previous year, and an especially significant spike in a nonelection year. On Tuesday, Ms. Swift included a similar link to 5 Vote.gov in her Instagram story.

In her post endorsing Ms. Harris, Ms. Swift also referred to her “fears” about artificial intelligence. She pointed to content generated by the technology that had falsely suggested that she supported Mr. Trump, which 10 the former president promoted on social media. She underscored concerns that Americans would not know where she genuinely stood if she had not spoken out. “It really conjured up my fears around AI, and the dangers of spreading misinformation,” Ms. Swift wrote. 15 “It brought me to the conclusion that I need to be very transparent about my actual plans for this election as a voter. The simplest way to combat misinformation is with the truth.” (...)

Ms. Swift, who has been a star musician spanning 20 country and pop music for almost two decades, is one of the few celebrities with broad appeal and the ability to cut through a crowded media environment. Her romance with Travis Kelce, the star tight end for the Chiefs, has captivated the worlds of football and culture, 25 and she is in the final stages of a head-spinning international tour that has sold out stadiums around the globe.

Karoline Leavitt, a spokeswoman for the Trump campaign, dismissed the endorsement as “more 30 evidence that the Democrat party has become the party of the wealthy elite.”

In 2020, Ms. Swift’s endorsement of Mr. Biden and Ms. Harris generated significant backlash from conservatives who urged her to keep her music career 35 apolitical.

Four years later, her growing political involvement led to fevered speculation from Democrats about whether and when she would endorse Ms. Harris.

For her part, Ms. Harris has embraced pop music in 40 her campaign.

Her rallies have had the feel of concerts as much as political events, with hip-hop stars like Megan Thee Stallion giving performances and D.J.s warming up dancing crowds of thousands before the vice president 45 walks onstage to Beyoncé’s song “Freedom.”, but rumors of her presence turned out to be false.)

Mr. Biden’s rallies, in comparison, were small and low in energy, often reaching their peak of raucousness when a high school drum line played.

50 Polls show that Ms. Harris is doing much better with younger voters than Mr. Biden was, a crucial part of a resurgence in her polls that has allowed her to draw even with Mr. Trump. Ms. Swift’s backing of her campaign is a reflection of that appeal.

55 In making her endorsement, Ms. Swift added that she was “heartened and impressed” by Ms. Harris’s choice of Gov. Tim Walz as her running mate, saying that Mr. Walz had been “standing up for LGBTQ+ rights, IVF, and a woman’s right to her own body for decades.”

60 Ms. Swift has long pushed for her supporters to do their civic duty, posting a picture of herself in a long line on Election Day in 2016, a photo her fans thought was a cryptic endorsement of Hillary Clinton. (...)

65 In an interview with Vogue in 2019, Ms. Swift indicated that she had wanted to be more vocal about supporting Mrs. Clinton but had worried that her support could backfire. She said she had feared that Mr. Trump might try “weaponizing the idea of the celebrity endorsement” 70 against her and Mrs. Clinton. Ms. Swift also shared concerns that public criticism of her at the time would be unfairly applied to Ms. Clinton as well.

Ms. Swift continued: “The summer before that election, all people were saying was, ‘She’s calculated. 75 She’s manipulative. She’s not what she seems. She’s a snake. She’s a liar.’ These are the same exact insults people were hurling at Hillary. Would I be an endorsement or would I be a liability?”

Document 2 - Trump posted a fake Taylor Swift image. AI and deepfakes are only going to get worse this election cycle

By Queenie Wong and Wendy Lee, *The Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 2024

A patriotic image shows megastar Taylor Swift dressed up like Uncle Sam, falsely suggesting she endorses Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

5 “Taylor Wants You To Vote For Donald Trump,” the image, which appears to be generated by artificial intelligence, says.

Over the weekend, Trump amplified the lie when he shared the image along with others depicting support from Swift fans to his 7.6 million followers on his social network Truth Social.

Deception has long played a part in politics, but the rise of artificial intelligence tools that allow people to rapidly generate fake images or videos by typing out a phrase adds another complex layer to a familiar problem on social media.

10 Known as deepfakes, these digitally altered images and videos can make it appear someone is saying or doing something they aren't.

As the race between Trump and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris intensifies, disinformation experts are sounding the alarm about generative AI's risks.

15 "I'm worried as we move closer to the election, this is going to explode," said Emilio Ferrara, a computer science professor at USC Viterbi School of Engineering. "It's going to get much worse than it is now."

Platforms such as Facebook and X have rules against manipulated images, audio and videos, but they've struggled to enforce these policies as AI-generated content floods the internet. Faced with accusations they're censoring political speech, they've focused more on labeling content and fact checking, rather than pulling posts down. And there are exceptions to the rules, such as satire, that allow people to create and share fake images online.

20 "We have all the problems of the past, all the myths and disagreements and general stupidity, that we've been dealing with for 10 years," said Hany Farid, a UC Berkeley professor who focuses on misinformation and digital forensics. "Now we have it being supercharged with generative AI and we are really, really partisan." (...) Farid, who analyzed the Swift images that Trump shared, said they appear to be a mix of both real and fake images, a "devious" way to push out misleading content.

25 People share fake images for various reasons. They might be doing it to just go viral on social media or troll others. Visual imagery is a powerful part of propaganda, warping people's views on politics including about the legitimacy of the 2024 presidential election, he said. (...)

Political campaigns have been bracing for AI's impact on the election.

30 Vice President Harris' campaign has an interdepartmental team "to prepare for the potential effects of AI this election, including the threat of malicious deepfakes," said spokeswoman Mia Ehrenberg in a statement. The campaign only authorizes the use of AI for "productivity tools" such as data analysis, she added.

Trump's campaign didn't respond to a request for comment.

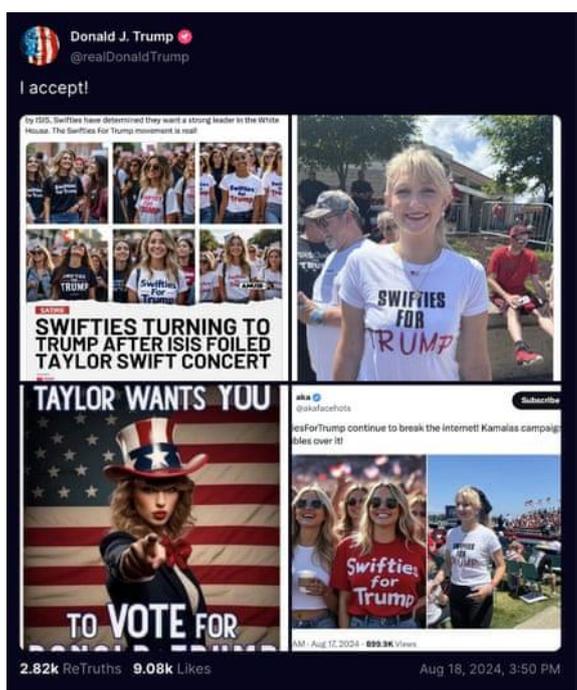
35 Part of the challenge in curbing fake or manipulated video is that the federal law that guides social media operations doesn't specifically address deepfakes. **The Communications Decency Act of 1996** does not hold social media companies liable for hosting content, as long as they do not aid or control those who posted it.

But over the years, tech companies have come under fire for what's appeared on their platforms and many social media companies have established content moderation guidelines to address this such as prohibiting hate speech. (...)

With social media platforms facing threats of regulation and lawsuits, some misinformation experts are skeptical that social networks want to properly moderate misleading content.

40 Social networks make most of their money from ads so keeping users on the platforms for a longer time is "good for business," Farid said. "What engages people is the absolute, most conspiratorial, hateful, salacious, angry content," he said. "That's who we are as human beings."

It's a harsh reality that even Swifties won't be able to shake off.





Document 3

Welcome to What Could Go Right? A Newsletter from **The Progress Network**, September 12, 2024

Swift Action Against Deepfakes

In January of this year, fake pornographic images of Taylor Swift, created with artificial intelligence (AI), began circulating on X, formerly Twitter. While some images were taken down, there were so many that eventually the platform simply made searching for the singer's name impossible until the issue was fully dealt with. At the time, USA Today ran the headline "Were 5 Taylor Swift explicit AI photos illegal?" and found that they were in only 10 states. (California and Virginia were among the first states to criminalize them, in 2019.)

Deepfake pornography can be created of anybody, by anybody. All you need to do is drop a photo of someone's face into one of several apps that exist for the purpose. There are even how-to guides on Reddit. The damage it wreaks can be extensive. 10 One Indian journalist ended up at the hospital after a deepfake porn video of her was shared widely online, and her phone number leaked. She was inundated with messages asking for her rates for sex, she wrote in HuffPost.

One of the most popular singers in the world becoming a victim of deepfake pornography was probably the best thing that could have happened to bring attention to a neglected issue, however. It wasn't only Swift's fans who jumped to her defense ("protect Taylor Swift" was a trending term at the time). A flurry of state legislative action followed. In Missouri, a lawmaker 15 in St. Charles even named his bill to allow victims of nonconsensual, sexually explicit deepfakes to seek damages in civil court the "**Taylor Swift Act.**"

That bill, and a second similar one, failed to pass in Missouri. But several others around the country did pass. According to the newly released tracker from the progressive think tank Public Citizen, legislation to regulate what are also called intimate deepfakes now exists in 23 states, and has been introduced in 4 more.

20 The laws, however, are a hodgepodge. In Mississippi and Tennessee, for instance, the legislation only pertains to minors, and states vary in whether they allow civil or criminal suits to be brought, or both. What is really needed is national coverage, since authorities in, say, Virginia, cannot do much to prosecute someone who lives in any of the states where the creation of intimate deepfakes is still legal.

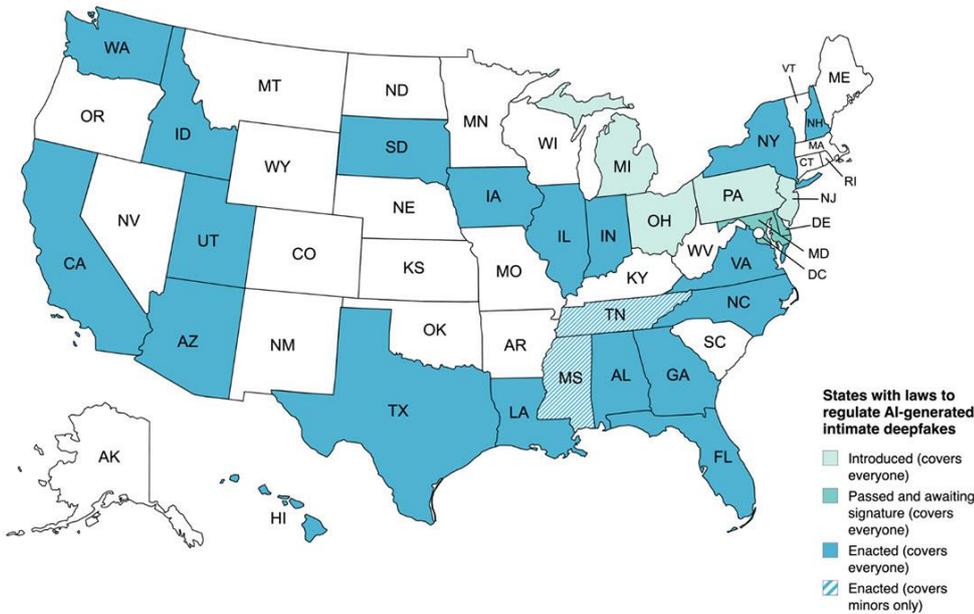
"States don't really have a lot of ability to track down across state lines," Sara Jodka, an attorney who practices data privacy 25 and cybersecurity law, told Wired. "So it's going to be very rare, and it's going to be very specific scenarios where the laws are going to be able to even be enforced."

Two bills have been introduced at the federal level this year: one by Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and another by Republican Senator Ted Cruz. Both are bipartisan. Ocasio-Cortez's Defiance Act would grant victims the right to sue in civil court, and Cruz's Take It Down Act would require social media sites to take down 30 nonconsensual deepfake pornography and make publishing it a federal crime.

Movement around this issue is just getting started globally as well. As of April, creating a sexually explicit deepfake is a criminal offense in **England and Wales**. In August, **Australia** introduced new criminal penalties for the distribution of sexually explicit deepfakes, and made their creation an aggravated offense. Distribution has been illegal in South Korea since 2020. (The nation is currently embroiled in scandal after several chatrooms, run by teenagers, on the messenger app Telegram 35 were found to be sharing intimate deepfakes of students and teachers at their schools.) **The European Union**, too, has taken steps to criminalize deepfake pornography, although the bill won't take effect until 2027.

Legislation around legal action is just one piece of the puzzle. **Social media companies** should also have more robust systems in place to limit the distribution of nonconsensual videos and photos.

It took some time for nations to even start to catch up with the new harms AI can produce—the story of the Indian journalist, 40 for example, happened in 2018. Perhaps in part because politicians, too, are now being affected by deepfakes of themselves, they are finally moving on the topic with more gusto. **So far, both domestically and abroad, regulating intimate deepfakes has cut through the usual left-right divisions.** Italy's right-wing prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, introduced comprehensive AI legislation in April that would criminalize harmful deepfakes of all kinds.



Document 4 - Will Taylor Swift pay those high rent, gas, grocery, or energy bills?

By Christopher Tremoglie, *The Washington Examiner*, September 11, 2024

.Pop music sensation Taylor Swift made headlines on Tuesday when she gave the least-shocking political endorsement arguably in the history of political endorsements. To no one’s surprise, Swift endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris for president. It’s silly idolatry that really should not hold any relevance.

5 “I will be casting my vote for Kamala Harris and Tim Walz in the 2024 Presidential Election. I’m voting for [Kamala Harris] because she fights for the rights and causes I believe need a warrior to champion them,” Swift posted to her Instagram account. “I think she is a steady-handed, gifted leader and I believe we can accomplish so much more in this country if we are led by calm and not chaos.”

10 The singer’s absurd explanation for endorsing Harris, especially the part in which she connected Harris with “calm and not chaos,” apparently forgetting about the vice president’s support for the destructive Black Lives Matter riots, was posted under a picture of Swift with a cat and concluded with “Childless Cat Lady.” Obviously, this was a dig at Sen. J.D. Vance’s (R-OH) controversial comments.

Swift’s admittedly witty post aside, whoever she supports or endorses for president should be met with just one simple question: Who cares?

15 If voters are selecting their presidential candidates based on the opinions and comments of musicians, then this country is imminently doomed. Forget comparisons to the collapse of the Roman Empire — the United States will set a record of decadent stupidity if Swift’s endorsement actually has legitimate sway. Moreover, if it does, it is indicative of intellectual decay, cultural rot, and a lack of gravitas in our nation.

20 No one should care who Swift wants as president. Will she pay her fans’ rent payments, which have significantly increased since President Joe Biden and Harris were elected? Will she pay for her fans’ grocery bills, which have soared in cost compared to when former President Donald Trump was in office? How about their much higher gas or energy bills compared to the days before Jan. 20, 2021?

25 What about other important issues, such as security? Is Swift going to pay for the protection of young female nursing students in Georgia so they don’t get brutally murdered by illegal immigrants who are only in this country because of the failures of border czar Kamala Harris and the immigration policies she supported? Will she pay to protect innocent people from the murderers and carjackers who were left out on the streets and not put in jail because of the implementation of the kind of criminal justice policies Harris supports?

30 Unless Swift agrees to answer any of the above questions in the affirmative, then, in reality, her endorsement of Harris is moot. The endorsement is little more than a cultlike reaction that is typical of the affluent elitist entertainer class in the country. She will issue public support for Harris but be conspicuously quiet regarding the innocent people who have suffered because of Harris’s political beliefs.

Taylor Swift is free to vote for whoever she wants as president. She's also free to endorse anyone she wants. But to argue that her endorsement is anything more than propaganda is utter nonsense. Let's stop acknowledging it is anything more than that or giving such things any significance.

Christopher Tremoglie is an editor and commentary writer for the Washington Examiner. He is a former intern for the Department of State and a frequent guest on radio and television. His work has been featured in the Philadelphia Inquirer, National Review, and the Daily Caller and has appeared on Fox News and One America News

Document 5 - Anyone could be a victim of 'deepfakes'. But there's a reason Taylor Swift is a target

Jill Filipovic, *The Guardian*, Wed 31 Jan 2024

Taylor Swift is having quite a month. The singer-songwriter saw her image in disgusting deepfake porn images that were circulated online, prompting a necessary and overdue conversation on how AI and deepfake porn is used to harass, humiliate, degrade, threaten, extort and punish (mostly) women. And then her boyfriend, the football player Travis Kelce, saw his team make it to the Super Bowl, which set off a wave of rightwing anti-Swift hysteria and conspiracy theorizing. The most powerful pop star in the world has everything going for her – and has also become an avatar for widespread anxieties about female power, sexuality and gender politics.

Deepfake porn brings up a whole host of moral, ethical, philosophical and legal questions. Those questions grow even more complicated when applied to celebrities. (...) It's not parody, and the whole point is that it's extremely realistic, difficult or impossible to differentiate from the real thing. And faked, nonconsensual porn videos aren't the only deepfakes to be worried about. If anyone's likeness can be digitally manipulated to say or do anything in a highly realistic video, the consequences are wide-ranging and unsettling to consider: imagine everything from world leaders on video making dangerous pronouncements to average citizens engaged in shocking and offensive behavior that could cost them their livelihoods or even lives, to someone who believes you've wronged them getting revenge by, say, making an explicit video featuring your young child.

Even if you're not a hugely famous female celebrity, and even if you're someone who generally plays by the rules and lives conservatively, deepfakes could come for you. And right now, there are troublingly few protections, and no federal legislation against deepfake porn, though some members of Congress have introduced bills to ban the sharing of deepfakes without consent of those depicted.

Some legal observers still argue that deepfake porn, and other deepfake videos, are generally protected by the

first amendment. That is, to put it mildly, up for debate, and our laws are notoriously slow in evolving to address rapid technological change.

I won't pretend to possess the legal expertise or individual wisdom to craft the kind of legislation that would both protect first amendment freedom of expression interests and crack down on dangerous and abusive deepfakes. But it is very obviously long past time that robust discussions on how to do just that were at the fore of public debate and discussion, including in Congress, in every state legislature and on the pages of every newspaper. (...)

Animating the current discussion of deepfake porn, though, is the growing and frankly bizarre rightwing hostility to Taylor Swift. The right is rife with Swift conspiracy theories, including that she's a Pentagon asset, that she's part of an election interference psy-op, that the Super Bowl is rigged, and that the Swift-Kelce relationship and his team's recent victories are all a part of a broad plan to reinstate Joe Biden in office.

And many of these conspiracy theories aren't coming from the lunatic fringe, at least insofar as many mainstream conservatives are lunatics but are not on the fringes – some of them have been disseminated by the former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, Fox News hosts and other influential conservative figures.

The rightwing problem with Swift is part of a greater conservative hostility to a culture that conservatives feel has left them behind. While conservatives have in many ways captured American politics – dominating the US supreme court, taking over state legislatures and governorships, passing vastly unpopular far-right legislation including broad abortion bans – rightwing gender traditionalism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, authoritarianism and religiosity have been generally rejected in the way people actually live and in the media Americans consume.

Swift is in many ways a uniquely potent embodiment of this dynamic. She’s an attractive Caucasian woman whose blond hair, blue eyes and country music roots once led white supremacists to turn her into an icon of Aryan womanhood (through no action of her own, to be clear), but who now is unmarried in her mid-30s – normal for many highly educated, successful and financially secure women living in large cities, but the sources of great consternation for conservatives who believe a woman’s chief duty in life is to submit to a man and start having babies in her teens or 20s.

There’s more: she uses her music to speak to the complex feelings of women and girls, and tells those same women and girls that she understands their confusion and longing but also sees their power. She clearly has the pretty normie liberal politics that are standard for women her age (pro-abortion-rights, pro-voting, anti-Trump, probably pro-Biden), but is also dating a man who is thriving in a sport that is particularly revered in conservative circles.

In contrast to a megastar like, say, Beyoncé, the conspiratorial right seems particularly incensed at Swift because she does exemplify at least some markers of “their” culture: she spent much of her early years in Tennessee, got her start in country music, initially sang about her longing for love and a traditional relationship, and is currently dating a white football player who also reads on first look as the golden boy of a Republican family. (...)

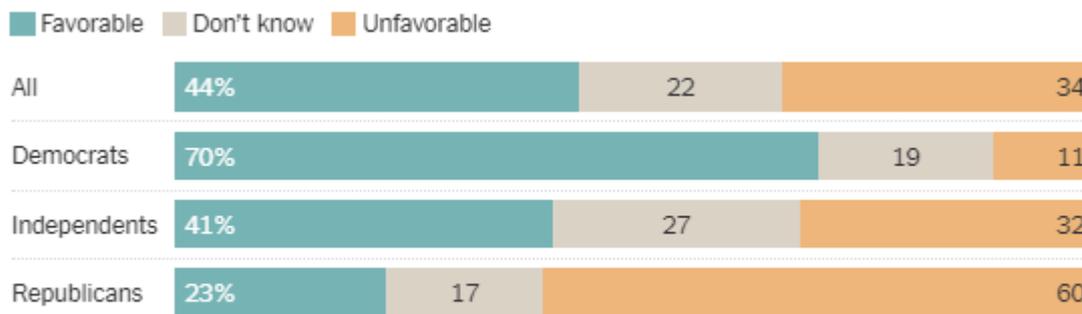
And so too many conservatives who simply cannot accept that their views and values are wildly out of step with the American norm are trawling around for some alternate explanation. Those same conservatives are angry that the only way they can impose their unpopular views and values is by minority authoritarian rule, and seek to punish anyone whose liberalism has wider appeal. (...)

Now is the time to call on Congress and state legislators to act – not just on deepfake porn and not just for Taylor Swift, but on the perils of AI more broadly, and for a more secure future for every person on the planet.

Who Do Voters Really Like? Taylor Swift.

The pop star Taylor Swift has endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris — and is far more popular among Democrats and independents than Republicans.

Taylor Swift’s Favorability Among Likely Voters



Based on a New York Times/Philadelphia Inquirer/Siena College poll of 2,437 voters nationwide conducted from Sept. 11 to 16. • By The New York Times

Part 2- A fragmented media landscape



Pew Research Center

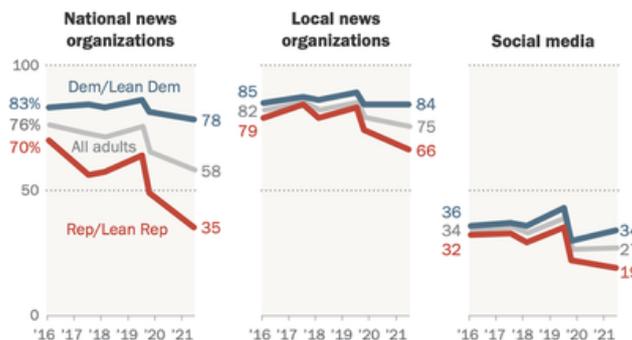
AUGUST 30, 2021

Document 6 - Partisan divides in media trust widen, driven by a decline among Republicans

In just five years, the percentage of Republicans with at least some trust in national news organizations has been cut in half – dropping from 70% in 2016 to 35% this year. This decline is fueling the continued widening of the partisan gap in trust of the media.

Wider partisan gaps emerge in trust of national and local news organizations, social media

% of U.S. adults who say they have a lot or some trust in the information that comes from ...



Note: In 2016, trust of information from social media was only asked of and based on internet-using U.S. adults.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 14-27, 2021. For dates of other surveys, see the topline.

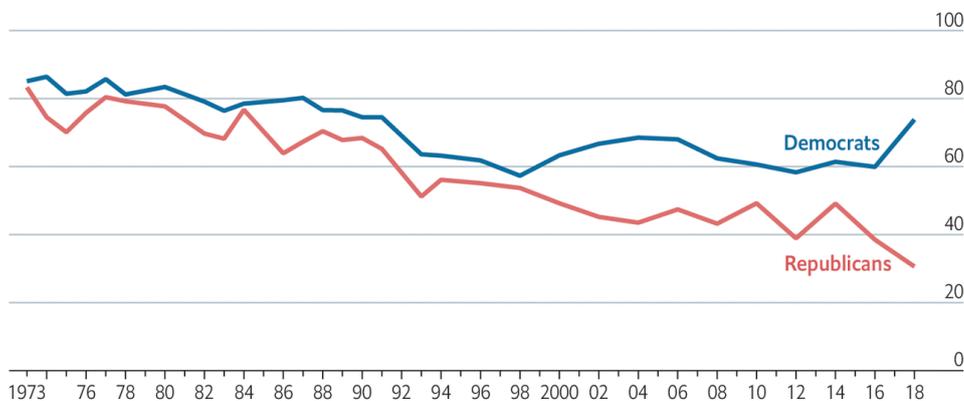
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Document 7 - For Americans, trusting the media has become a partisan issue

Donald Trump has convinced Republicans to disbelieve mainstream journalism. Democrats have reacted the opposite way

And that's the way it is

Americans with "a great deal of" or "only some" confidence in the press, by political party, %



Source: General Social Surveys, 1972-2018

The Economist

The Economist, Apr 3rd 2019

IN 1972 Walter Cronkite, the presenter of CBS News, was famously named the “most trusted man in America” after a poll showed that he was more loved than the nation’s most powerful elected office-holders. Such days of reverence for the media are long gone.

According to figures from the General Social Survey (GSS), a long-running poll run by the University of Chicago, trust in the press fell sharply from 84% in 1973 to just 54% last year. Both Republicans and Democrats lost faith in the media at roughly similar rates until the mid-1990s. But since then—when Newt Gingrich pushed the Republican Party to the right, and shock radio and ideological cable TV were born—a partisan gap has opened ever wider. Today trust in the press is closely linked to political preference.

According to newly released data from the GSS, less than a third of Republicans reported having “a great deal of” or “only some” confidence in the press last year, a record low. After seeing very little change from 2000 to 2010, that share dipped 19 percentage points in the past nine years.

This trend has become particularly pronounced since Donald Trump entered the 2016 presidential campaign. The president has exacerbated it through his attacks on the “fake news media”, which he admits are intended to “discredit you all and demean you all so that when you write negative stories about me no one will believe you”.

Predictably, Mr Trump’s attacks seem to have had the opposite effect on Democrats. Their confidence in the press has risen by 14 percentage points since his election. Indeed, last year’s GSS showed that Democrats were 43 percentage points more likely to trust the press than Republicans were.

Document 8 - Republicans and Democrats see news bias only in stories that clearly favor the other party

The Conversation, October 25, 1922

Marjorie Hershey Professor Emeritus of Political Science,
Indiana University

Charges of media bias – that “the media” are trying to
5 brainwash Americans by feeding the public only one side

of every issue – have become as common as campaign ads
in the run-up to the midterm elections.

As a political scientist who has examined media
coverage of the Trump presidency and campaigns, I can
10 say that this is what social science research tells us about
media bias.

First, media bias is in the eye of the beholder.

Communications scholars have found that if you ask people in any community, using scientific polling methods, whether their local media are biased, you'll find that about half say yes. But of that half, typically a little more than a quarter say that their local media are biased against Republicans, and a little less than a quarter say the same local media are biased against Democrats. Research shows that Republicans and Democrats spot bias only in articles that clearly favor the other party. If an article tilts in favor of their own party, they tend to see it as unbiased.

Many people, then, define "bias" as "anything that doesn't agree with me." It's not hard to see why. 'Liberal bias' for instance in the media is a constant topic on Fox News.

'Media' is a plural word

American party politics has become increasingly polarized in recent decades. Republicans have become more consistently conservative, and Democrats have become more consistently liberal to moderate. As the lines have been drawn more clearly, many people have developed hostile feelings toward the opposition party.

In a 2016 Pew Research Center poll, 45% of Republicans said the Democratic Party's policies are "so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being," and 41% of Democrats said the same about Republicans. A poll conducted in midyear 2022 by Pew showed that "72% of Republicans regard Democrats as more immoral, and 63% of Democrats say the same about Republicans."

Not surprisingly, media outlets have arisen to appeal primarily to people who share a conservative view, or people who share a liberal view.

That doesn't mean that "the media" are biased. There are hundreds of thousands of media outlets in the U.S. – newspapers, radio, network TV, cable TV, blogs, websites and social media. These news outlets don't all take the same perspective on any given issue. If you want a very conservative news site, it is not hard to find one, and the same with a very liberal news site.

First Amendment rules

"The media," then, present a variety of different perspectives. That's the way a free press works.

The Constitution's First Amendment says Congress shall make no law limiting the freedom of the press. It doesn't say that Congress shall require all media sources to be "unbiased." Rather, it implies that as long as Congress does not systematically suppress any particular point of view, then the free press can do its job as one of the primary checks on a powerful government.

When the Constitution was written and for most of U.S. history, the major news sources – newspapers, for most of that time – were explicitly biased. Most were sponsored by a political party or a partisan individual. For example, Thomas Jefferson described the partisan newspaper, The Gazette of the United-States, as 'a paper of pure Toryism ... disseminating the doctrines of monarchy, aristocracy, and the exclusion of the people.'

The notion of objective journalism – that media must report both sides of every issue in every story – barely existed until the late 1800s. It reached full flower only in the few decades when broadcast television, limited to three major networks, was the primary source of political information.

Since that time, the media universe has expanded to include huge numbers of internet news sites, cable channels and social media posts. So if you feel that the media sources you're reading or watching are biased, you can read a wider variety of media sources.

80

If it bleeds, it leads

There is one form of actual media bias. Almost all media outlets need audiences in order to exist. Some can't survive financially without an audience; others want the prestige that comes from attracting a big audience.

Thus, the media define as "news" the kinds of stories that will attract an audience: those that feature drama, conflict, engaging pictures and immediacy. That's what most people find interesting. Writer Dave Barry demonstrated this media bias in favor of dramatic stories in a 1998 column.

He wrote, "Let's consider two headlines. FIRST HEADLINE: 'Federal Reserve Board Ponders Reversal of Postponement of Deferral of Policy Reconsideration.' SECOND HEADLINE: 'Federal Reserve Board Caught in Motel with Underage Sheep.' Be honest, now. Which of these two stories would you read?"

The problem is that a focus on such stories crowds out what we need to know to protect our democracy, such as: How do the workings of American institutions benefit some groups and disadvantage others? In what ways do our major systems – education, health care, national defense and others – function effectively or less effectively?

These analyses are vital to citizens but they aren't always fun to read. So they get covered much less than celebrity scandals or murder cases.

By focusing on the daily equivalent of the underage sheep, media can direct our attention away from the important systems that affect our lives.

That's the real media bias. (884 words)

Construites en opposition aux médias traditionnels, les émissions en ligne, animées par des influenceurs conservateurs, irriguent le mouvement Make America Great Again.

5 Par [Piotr Smolar](#) (Milwaukee, envoyé spécial) , *Le Monde*, Publié le 19 juillet 2024

10 Il existait une géographie du pouvoir médiatique, dans le périmètre ultrasécurisé de la convention républicaine, à Milwaukee (Wisconsin). Les puissants réseaux de diffusion américains disposaient évidemment d'un plateau au-dessus de l'arène où avaient pris place les délégués. Mais toutes les personnalités républicaines de marque, à commencer par la famille Trump, privilégiaient une enceinte sportive voisine. Dans ce grand espace divisé en studios s'activaient les poumons du mouvement MAGA (Make America Great Again) : les podcasts et les émissions de radio qui à la fois irriguent cette base trumpiste et qui s'en nourrissent, au sens idéologique et financier.

20 Vaccins supposément dangereux, fraudes électorales imaginaires, rumeurs sur un Joe Biden grabataire manipulé en coulisses ? Tout se noue dans cette chambre d'écho hermétique aux faits. Ce paysage est celui de l'ère post-Fox News. La toute-puissante chaîne du magnat Robert Murdoch reste influente. Le présentateur Sean Hannity est en symbiose caricaturale avec Donald Trump. Mais cette antenne a cessé d'être prescriptive. Fox News a été débordée par d'autres chaînes ultraconservatrices et, surtout, par de nouveaux influenceurs politiques. Méprisant tout code éthique, indifférent à la pratique journalistique, ils vivent de leurs opinions tranchées, en lointains héritiers du légendaire Rush Limbaugh. Décédé en 2021, il fut un présentateur radio vénéré à droite, prêcheur politique offensif et impitoyable, dont l'émission était diffusée sur 600 radios locales. A son quasi-monopole, dans les années 1980, a succédé un archipel d'émissions et d'antennes, sous d'autres formes que la radio, média écouté essentiellement par des personnes de plus de 60 ans.

40 « Les podcasts, à gauche comme à droite, sont devenus un moyen de plus en plus prisé pour atteindre des gens en dehors des filtres des médias traditionnels, dit au Monde l'entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, qui participa aux primaires républicaines avant de se ranger derrière Trump. *C'est une bonne chose, cette culture où les deux partis apprécient la liberté d'expression.* » L'ancien candidat, qui envisage de se présenter pour le poste de sénateur dans l'Ohio à la place de J. D. Vance, le colistier de Trump, participait au podcast de Russell Brand, comédien britannique aux yeux hallucinés et aux airs de surfeur. Ses émissions sont un nid conspirationniste. Comme Joe Rogan, la superstar des podcasts américains, Russell Brand prétend incarner la réhabilitation de la

55 virilité masculine par la misogynie. Les scandales l'escortent. A l'automne 2023, la presse britannique a révélé des accusations multiples d'agressions sexuelles à son endroit. Mais dans ce monde alternatif, ces publications ne représentent pas un handicap. Elles consolident un personnage auprès des fans.

60 Parmi les émissions les plus courues et populaires figure « The Clay Travis & Buck Sexton Show », une émission présentée par un ancien journaliste de Fox Sports Radio, Clay Travis, et Buck Sexton, un ex-agent de l'Agence centrale de renseignement (CIA). Les deux compères ont pris la tranche horaire de Rush Limbaugh en 2021, avant de lancer leur plate-forme de podcasts deux ans plus tard. Ils ont des millions de fans, et il est très difficile de suivre tous les supports sur lesquels leurs performances sont diffusées. Le duo est assez improbable, par son contraste, mais se révèle très complémentaire. Au sein de la CIA, Buck Sexton a notamment travaillé comme analyste sur l'Irak. En 2012, il a écrit un livre sur le mouvement de protestation Occupy Wall Street, ancré à gauche, pour en révéler les ambitions révolutionnaires.

75 « **Le journalisme objectif est une fiction** » Selon lui, les élections de 2020 ont accéléré le développement de ce nouvel écosystème conservateur, comme une autre voie aux médias traditionnels « *biaisés* ». D'autant qu'il n'existe pas d'obstacle pour se lancer, en petit artisan des ondes. « *Il y a donc à la fois plus d'options et une plus grande sensibilité du public, qui a conscience de pouvoir trouver comme jamais auparavant une personne s'exprimant en conformité avec ses vues et ses opinions* », dit-il.

80 Buck Sexton a grandi à New York avec les fils de Donald Trump, Eric et Don Jr. Il connaît l'ancien président depuis une époque lointaine, bien avant son entrée en politique. Lorsqu'on l'interroge sur cette proximité, il répond sans hésiter. « *Il faut juste être honnête au sujet de ses convictions et de ses fréquentations. Le journalisme objectif est une fiction. Si l'on se penche sur les premiers temps du journalisme aux Etats-Unis, il était directement aligné sur les partis politiques et certains personnages. L'idée selon laquelle on ne devrait rapporter que les faits, c'est une invention de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle.* »

95 Si les démocrates ont table ouverte sur la chaîne libérale MSNBC et commencent à développer leur toile de podcasts et émissions, les républicains ont pris de l'avance, s'épanouissant dans une forme de contre-culture médiatique. Lara Trump, la belle-fille de l'ancien président, qui codirige à présent le Comité national républicain, Eric Trump et Don Jr, les deux fils aînés du milliardaire, ou encore les élus les plus radicaux à la Chambre des représentants, telle Marjorie Taylor Greene (Géorgie), sont quelques-unes des figures familières de ces podcasts conservateurs. « *Je pense que l'opinion MAGA est déjà acquise*, explique Lara Trump au Monde.

Ce sont des gens qui aiment leur pays, des patriotes qui veulent le voir réussir. Nous avons déjà leurs voix. Nous devons parler à des gens qui hésitent peut-être à voter pour Trump. »

5 Mark Kaye est l'un des personnages de cet archipel en ligne. Né au Canada, il produisait une émission de radio, supprimée en février par la station qui l'hébergeait. Mark Kaye avait partagé une fausse photo produite par l'intelligence artificielle, montrant Donald Trump entouré de personnes noires radieuses et festives. Ce petit souci éthique ne l'a nullement contrarié. Il présente aujourd'hui une émission sur Newsmax, chaîne en pleine ascension, débordant Fox News sur sa droite. Et puis il anime son propre podcast, « Mark Kaye Saves The Republic ». Saisissant son téléphone, il consulte le classement du moment. « Je suis 51^e sur iTunes dans les émissions politiques. » Il compte aussi 1 million d'abonnés sur Facebook, et 150 000 sur TikTok.

Imagination commerciale

20 « Les réseaux sociaux, c'est le Far West, dit-il, surtout depuis qu'Elon Musk a repris Twitter et qu'il le promeut comme une plate-forme de libre expression. Ce qui est intéressant à propos de la base MAGA, c'est que ses membres ont toujours pensé la même chose, mais ils ne communiquaient pas entre eux. Ce que Trump a fait, c'est de leur dire : je pense comme vous. » Donald Trump a ouvert la voie, en court-circuitant les médias traditionnels, pour s'adresser directement à son public. Puis, en quelques années, les influenceurs conservateurs se sont multipliés dans son sillage. Les élus eux-mêmes s'y sont mis. Le sénateur texan Ted Cruz a son propre podcast,

35 comme Matt Gaetz, représentant de Floride. Dans ce secteur de plus en plus encombré, la clé du succès repose sur l'imagination commerciale et l'originalité. Il faut, comme au catch, se créer un personnage distinctif. « Vous pouvez percevoir une partie des revenus générés, comme le fait YouTube avec la publicité, explique Mark Kaye. Les réseaux de podcasts le permettent. Vous pouvez aussi vendre les soutiens que vous apportez, vendre des produits dérivés. » Lui vend des livres, des bonnets et des tee-shirts.

40 Mark Kaye connaît bien Lara Trump. Par capillarité, il a donc sympathisé avec son mari, Eric Trump, et le frère de celui-ci, Don Jr, qui ont pris une importance inédite dans le dispositif de campagne ces derniers mois. Tous vivent en Floride. Mark Kaye est installé à Jacksonville. « West Palm Beach [une ville voisine de Miami], c'est le Washington des podcasts ! », s'amuse celui qui est régulièrement invité à Mar-a-Lago, la résidence de Donald Trump. Lorsqu'on lui parle de la confusion entre les podcasts comme le sien et l'entourage du milliardaire, il s'esclaffe en évoquant les télévisions dites *mainstream*. Mark Kaye cite l'exemple de George Stephanopoulos, présentateur vedette de la chaîne ABC, qui a obtenu le premier entretien avec Joe Biden après son naufrage lors du débat face à Trump. « La raison pour laquelle ABC a engagé Stephanopoulos est le fait qu'il dispose d'une ligne directe pour joindre Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, et tout le Parti démocrate. » Les médias traditionnels méprisent les orateurs MAGA. Ceux-ci se sont construits en miroir inversé de leurs contempteurs.



Total UK newspaper circulations by political stance

Average daily circulation per ABC or using Press Gazette estimates where no official data available.



Chart: Press Gazette • [Get the data](#)

UK national newspaper circulations and political leaning

Circulations are per ABC for January 2024. Telegraph, Times, Sun and Guardian are Press Gazette estimates.

Publication	Jan 2024 circulation	Political leaning
Metro (free)	953,233	Neutral
Daily Mail	705,311	Right
The Sun	700,000	Right
Daily Mirror	240,799	Left
Evening Standard (free)	234,492	Right
The Times	180,000	Right
Daily Telegraph	190,000	Right
Daily Express	147,267	Right
Daily Star	131,640	Neutral
i	126,001	Neutral
FT	108,125	Neutral
City AM (free)	68,009	Neutral
The Guardian	60,000	Left

Table: Press Gazette • [Get the data](#)

PART 3 – Getting information online

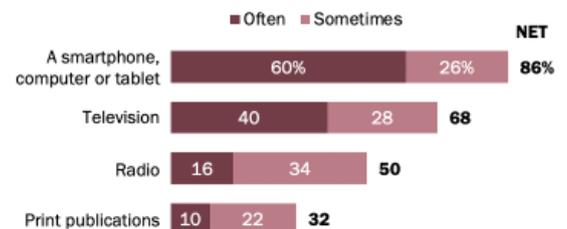
Document 10 - More than eight-in-ten Americans get news from digital devices

PEW RESEARCH CENTER, JANUARY 12, 2021

The transition of news from print, television and radio to digital spaces has caused huge disruptions in the traditional news industry, [especially the print news industry](#). It is also reflected in the ways individual Americans say they are getting their news. A large majority of Americans get news at least sometimes from digital devices, according to [a Pew Research Center survey](#) conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

Large majority of Americans get news on digital devices

% of U.S. adults who get news ____ from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

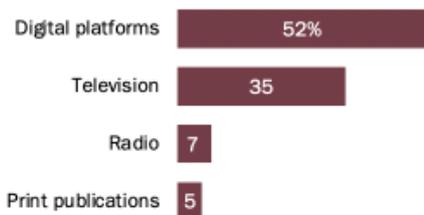
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

More than eight-in-ten U.S. adults (86%) say they get news from a smartphone, computer or tablet “often” or “sometimes,” including 60% who say they do so often. This

is higher than the portion who get news from television, though 68% get news from TV at least sometimes and 40% do so often. Americans turn to radio and print publications for news far less frequently, with half saying they turn to radio at least sometimes (16% do so often) and about a third (32%) saying the same of print (10% get news from print publications often).

Roughly half of Americans prefer to get news on a digital platform; about a third prefer TV

% of U.S. adults who prefer ____ for getting news



Note: Digital platforms includes respondents who said they prefer news websites or apps, social media, search, or podcasts.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

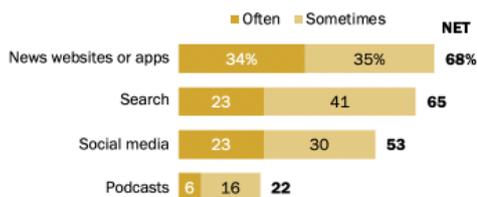
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

When asked which of these platforms they *prefer* to get news on, roughly half (52%) of Americans say they prefer a digital platform – whether it is a news website (26%), search (12%), social media (11%) or podcasts (3%). About a third say they prefer television (35%), and just 7% and 5% respectively say they prefer to get their news on the radio or via print.

Though digital devices are by far the most common way Americans access their news, where they get that news *on* their devices is divided among a number of different pathways. About two-thirds of U.S. adults say they get news at least sometimes from news websites or apps (68%) or search engines, like Google (65%). About half (53%) say they get news from social media, and a much smaller portion say they get news at least sometimes from podcasts (22%).

Americans more likely to get news on digital devices from news websites, apps and search engines than from social media

% of U.S. adults who get news ____ from ...



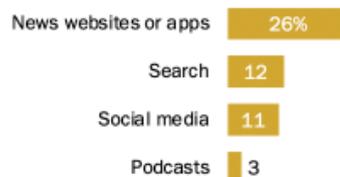
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Changing the way we measure news consumption

News websites most preferred way to get digital news

% of U.S. adults who prefer ____ for getting news



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

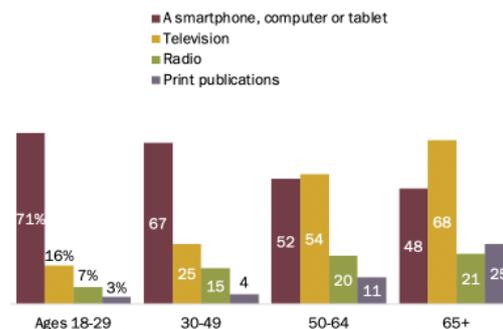
Among digital platforms, the most preferred one for news is news websites or apps: About a quarter of U.S. adults (26%) prefer to get their news this way, compared with 12% who prefer search, 11% who prefer to get their news on social media and 3% who say they prefer podcasts.

Younger Americans vary widely from their elders in news consumption habits

Underneath these numbers lie stark differences by age, with those under 50 showing very different news use patterns than their elders. Americans ages 50 and older use both television and digital devices for news at high rates, while the younger age groups have almost fully turned to digital devices as a platform to access news.

Those under 50 turn more frequently to digital devices for news

% of U.S. adults who get news *often* from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

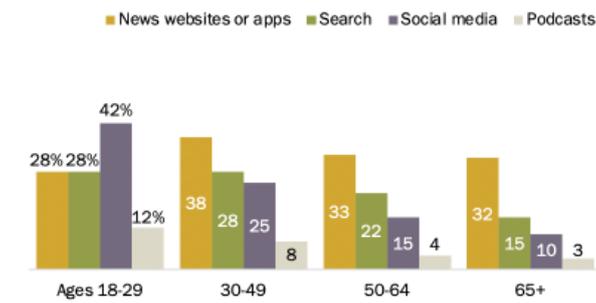
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

About half or more of adults 50 and older are still turning to TV for news often – 54% of those 50 to 64 and about two-thirds (68%) of those 65 and older. But among those ages 30 to 49, just a quarter say they get news on TV often, and just 16% say the same among those 18 to 29. For those age groups, digital devices are the dominant choice for news, with 67% of those 30 to 49 and 71% of those 18 to 29 getting news from a digital device often.

Among those 50 and older, differences between digital and non-digital news sources are less pronounced. Among adults 50 and older, 64% get news at least sometimes from both television and digital devices.

Online, most turn to news websites except for the youngest, who are more likely to use social media

% of U.S. adults who get news often from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Within digital platforms for news, most age groups turn to news websites at higher rates than other platforms, with one exception. Americans ages 18 to 29 stand out in that the most common digital way they get news is social media, with 42% saying they get news this way often versus 28% saying the same of either news websites or search engines.

Document 11 - TikTok is not the enemy of journalism. It's just a new way of reaching people.

Adapted from Chris Stokel-Walker, *The Guardian*, 23 July 2022

Twenty-three million people in the UK use TikTok every month. Enhanced by the pandemic and its impact on remote work, apps like TikTok and Instagram have become the digital equivalent of the watercooler. It's where we talk about Love Island, the latest soaps, the dysfunction in our government and what's going on in the world.

5 So why are we so surprised that it's a place people turn to for news?

Ofcom's latest report on news consumption in the UK, showing that TikTok is the fastest-growing source of news for adults, has been met with incredulity and worries about the death of "traditional journalism".

10 But rather than seeing it as a threat, old media bods should see it as a natural evolution. News finds us in the best possible way, and always has. Whether it's the switch from newspapers to TV bulletins that summed up a day in an evening, to the constant updates of 24-hour TV channels and social media updates, the way journalism has been presented has always been in flux.

15 When radio, then television, first began to dabble in reporting on the world, newspaper folk worried that the speed and immediacy of broadcast media would put paid to print. Decades on, print is still with us. Nightly news broadcasts were also due to go the way of the dodo when CNN first started transmitting 24 hours a day, yet appointment viewing remains relatively strong for well-packaged summaries of the day's news. And all of them were due to be overtaken by the internet. At each inflection point in the evolution of journalism, the arguments were the same: the medium was so different, and the speed at which information was gathered and imparted, that journalism was going to the dogs. The old ways of presenting news were always the best – until the new thing came along, the world didn't end and, actually, people preferred the alternative.

20 Now, TikTok does things differently – in style, format and how it presents videos to users – than even other tech platforms, and so was always going to be a more significant break from what's gone before. It also has a different cadence, language and style of presentation to even other social media platforms, which is why it is less possible for news outlets to simply recut their existing TV or Facebook video for the platform.

25 But all that doesn't necessarily mean dumbing down, nor is it the end of journalistic values. Journalism's old guard has latched on to one key stat to make its case: less than a third of youngsters trust what they see on TikTok – less than half the proportion that trust TV news.

While news outlets such as the *Washington Post* have successfully migrated to the platform, producing idiosyncratic videos that take a wry stance on the day's news, most media platforms have steered clear of TikTok to date.

30 That leaves a vacuum that individuals, who are often not trained journalists, have filled. Nearly twice as many users (44%) say they get information from other people they follow on the app as opposed to news organisations (24%). When confronted with stories such as the Amber Heard-Johnny Depp defamation trial, TikTok's "news" output can often come up short, becoming a talking shop for scurrilous gossip and painfully off-piste over-analysis.

547 words

Document 12 - Harris Joins TikTok, Another Sign of the App's Value in Reaching Young Voters

Vice President Kamala Harris launched her account on Thursday with an eight-second video that has since been viewed 5.8 million times.

The New York Times, By [Ken Bensinger](#), July 26, 2024

Vice President Kamala Harris, the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, is now officially on TikTok. Ever since President Biden announced on Sunday that he would no longer be running for re-election and instead endorsed his vice president for the job, the social media platform has been inundated with memes about coconut trees, Brat summer and other fawning content related to Ms. Harris.

5 On Thursday night, Ms. Harris joined the party, launching her own account with a video in which she stated simply that she “thought I would get on here myself.”

Within six hours, the eight-second post had been viewed 5.8 million times, and Ms. Harris had reeled in more than 1.1 million followers.

10 Her arrival is the latest sign of the site’s growing importance for politicians seeking to reach young, highly online audiences. Although TikTok has fewer people on it in the United States than Facebook does, its demographics tilt far more heavily toward people under 35. More than a third of the 170 million people on TikTok say they use it to keep abreast of politics and political issues, according to a recent survey by Pew Research, a considerably higher share than those on Facebook or Instagram.

15 Before Mr. Biden pulled out of the race, his campaign had made significant investments in social media and particularly TikTok, spending \$2 million, for example, to hire a marketing firm specializing in recruiting influencers. Nearly 100 social media influencers were credentialed for this month’s Republican National Convention as part of what former President Donald J. Trump’s campaign called a “Creator’s Hub” designed to generate buzzy content about Mr. Trump’s efforts to regain the White House.

20 But wooing potential voters online is not without its challenges. Mr. Biden’s campaign did not join TikTok until February, more than nine months after announcing his re-election bid. And almost immediately, he alienated many of the platform’s most loyal users with his support of legislation that would ban TikTok unless it was sold. In March, Ms. Harris said that the administration had “national security concerns” about the site but that it had “no intention to ban TikTok.” A month later, however, the president signed the bill banning the site unless its parent company, the Chinese-owned ByteDance Ltd., sells the site.

25 Mr. Biden has never opened a personal TikTok account. The campaign’s account, called “Biden-Harris HQ,” struggled to get much traction, reeling in about 340,000 followers by June 1, when Mr. Trump joined the platform himself with a video featuring him and the chief executive of Ultimate Fighting Championship, Dana White. As president, Mr. Trump took steps to try to ban the site, but in March he reversed his stance, saying that blocking the site would benefit Facebook, which he called “a true Enemy of the People.”

30 In just 15 hours, Mr. Trump’s first post on TikTok attracted 38 million views and the account netted 2.2 million followers — more than six times the number of followers of the Biden campaign account at the time. Since then, Mr. Trump’s account has grown to 9.2 million followers, and his posts have accumulated nearly 500 million views combined.

35 But Ms. Harris’s ascent to the top of the Democratic ticket has clearly breathed enthusiasm into the party’s social media game.

Earlier this week, the Biden-Harris HQ account changed its name to KamalaHQ, and it now has 1.8 million followers. At the same time, Ms. Harris’s account on Instagram has ballooned to 17 million followers, and a post praising Mr. Biden and seeking donations for her campaign racked up 1.6 million views, a significant number for the site. A post announcing her run on the social media site X, meanwhile, has been viewed 14 million times since it was
40 posted on Wednesday night. 631 words

Document 13 - The U.K. Riots Were Fomented Online. Will Social Media Companies Act?

Prime Minister Keir Starmer called out social media groups for the misinformation on their platforms that sparked violent clashes this week. But holding them accountable is tough.

By Adam Satariano, Reporting from London, *The New York Times*, Aug. 2, 2024

Standing in front of a lectern on Thursday, his voice at times taut with anger, Britain's prime minister announced a crackdown on what he called the "gangs of thugs" who instigated violent unrest in several towns this week.

But the question of how to confront one of the key accelerants — a flood of online misinformation about a deadly stabbing attack — remained largely unanswered.

5 Prime Minister Keir Starmer called out online companies directly, after false information about the identity of the 17-year-old suspected in the attack spread rapidly on their platforms, no matter how many times police and government officials pushed back against the claims.

10 Three girls died after the attacker rampaged through a dance class in Southport, northwest England, on Monday. Of the eight children injured, five remain in the hospital, along with their teacher, who had tried to protect them. Immediately after the attack, false claims began circulating about the perpetrator, including that he was an asylum seeker from Syria. In fact, he was born in Cardiff, Wales, and had lived in Britain all his life. According to the BBC and The Times of London, his parents are from Rwanda.

15 The misinformation was amplified by far-right agitators with large online followings, many of whom used messaging apps like Telegram and X to call for people to protest. Clashes followed in several U.K. towns, leading to more than 50 police officers being injured in Southport and more than 100 arrests in London. (...)

Officials fear more violence in the days ahead. The viral falsehoods were so prevalent that a judge took the unusual step of lifting restrictions on naming underage suspects, identifying the alleged attacker as Axel Rudakubana.

20 "Let me also say to large social media companies and those who run them: Violent disorder, clearly whipped up online, that is also a crime, it's happening on your premises, and the law must be upheld everywhere," Mr. Starmer said in his televised speech, though he did not name any company or executive specifically. "We will take all necessary action to keep our streets safe," he added.

25 The attack in Southport, England, has been a case study in how online misinformation can lead to actual violence. But governments, including Britain, have long struggled to find an effective way to respond. Policing the internet is legally murky terrain for most democracies, where individual rights and free speech protections are balanced against a desire to block harmful material.

Last year, Britain adopted a law called the Online Safety Act that requires social media companies to introduce new protections for child safety, while also forcing the firms to prevent and rapidly remove illegal content like terrorism propaganda and revenge pornography.

30 But the law is less clear about how companies must treat misinformation and incendiary, xenophobic language. Instead, the law gives the British agency Ofcom, which oversees television and other traditional media formats, more authority to regulate online platforms. Thus far, the agency has not taken much action to tackle the issue. Jacob Davey, a director of policy and research at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a group that has tracked online far-right extremism, said many social media platforms have internal policies that prohibit hate speech and other illicit content, but enforcement is spotty. Other companies like X, now owned by Elon Musk, and Telegram have less
35 moderation.

"Given the confrontational tone set by some companies it will be challenging to hold them accountable for harmful but legal content if they decide they don't want to enforce against it," said Mr. Davey.

40 The European Union has a law called the Digital Services Act that requires the largest social media companies to have robust content moderation teams and policies in place. With the new powers, regulators in Brussels are investigating X and have threatened to fine the company in part for its content moderation policies.

In the United States, where free speech protections are more robust than in Europe, the government has few options to force companies to take down content. (...)

British policymakers said the country must address false information spread by the far right on social media.

45 Al Baker, the managing director of Prose Intelligence, a British company that provides services for monitoring Telegram, said the online discourse was a reflection of wider societal challenges. "It's important not to go too far and

say the internet is the cause," Mr. Baker said. "The internet and social media are an accelerant that intensify existing problems we have as a society." 742 words

The explainer

Document 14 - Tommy Robinson: the voice of Britain's far-right

The best-known figure on the UK's extreme-right has been accused of playing a part in inciting the recent riots



Tommy Robinson outside Westminster Magistrates court in London (Image credit: Getty Images_Mark Kerrison)

The Week UK, August 24, 2024

On 29 July, the day of the attack on a group of young girls in Southport, far-right influencer Tommy Robinson repeated on X the false rumour that a Muslim asylum seeker who'd arrived on a Channel boat was the culprit. On the site, where he has nearly one million followers, he repeatedly linked the stabbings to the Muslim community, and said that the Government was "gaslighting" the public about the events. In the days after the attack, his X posts received an average of around 54 million daily views.

Robinson has become the figurehead for Britain's decentralised, or "post-organisational" far-right: rather than trying to run a political party, he builds support by spreading his beliefs online. His ideas clearly resonate with many Britons. Several thousand supporters marched in his "patriotic rally" in London on Saturday 27 July, the largest far-right demonstration since the collapse of the EDL. And he attracts vocal support and funding from the US, where he has become a darling of the Trumpian and libertarian Right.

Who is Tommy Robinson?

The 41-year-old's real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon. He grew up in Luton, in Bedfordshire, a town with a large Muslim minority. He was an apprentice aircraft engineer at Luton Airport, but in 2005 he assaulted an off-duty police officer during a drunken row, which resulted in a 12-month sentence. In 2004, he had joined the far-right British National Party. By that time, he'd had a long association with football gangs linked to Luton Town FC (his nom de guerre was supposedly taken from a notorious Luton Town hooligan). In early 2009, the Islamist extremist group al-Muhajiroun protested noisily in Luton against a parade by members

of the Royal Anglian Regiment, who were returning from service in Afghanistan. In response, Robinson and others linked to football gangs formed the English Defence League (EDL), which held anti-Islam demonstrations across England.

What happened to the EDL?

In its first few years, it grew fast, holding protests in areas with big Muslim populations, sometimes thousands strong, at which there were frequent violent clashes. Then in the early 2010s, the EDL declined amid internal divisions, and after it was revealed that members had links to the Norwegian white supremacist mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik. Robinson was convicted for assaulting a fellow member in 2011, and received a suspended sentence. In 2013, he underwent an unexpected political conversion and left the EDL, citing the "dangers of far-right extremism", supported by the anti-extremist think-tank Quilliam. This proved short-lived: Robinson reverted to far-right politics, with an attempt to set up a UK branch of the European counter-jihadist organisation Pegida.

What has Robinson done since?

He has set himself up as a journalist and online influencer. From 2017, he was a correspondent for Rebel News, a Canadian far-right website, and made films about the "grooming gangs" run by Asian men in Northern towns and cities. While reporting he has twice been convicted of contempt of court for making prejudicial public claims about grooming cases. In 2019, he ran as an independent candidate for North West England in European elections, receiving only 2.2% of the vote. Since then, he has turned away from electoral politics.

What does he believe in?

The two main themes of his thinking are opposition to immigration and to Islam. As he put it in a recent interview: "We're losing our culture. We're losing our identity. We're being replaced. We're becoming minorities in most major cities. We're being driven out of our own country, our own towns." In 2016, he said: "I'm not far-right, I'm just opposed to Islam. I believe it's backward and it's fascist." He made this argument in detail in "Mohammed's Koran: Why Muslims Kill For Islam", a 2017 book he co-wrote. His social media feeds return continually to immigrant – and particularly Muslim – criminality.

Robinson also believes that Western elites have plotted against ordinary people to allow this immigration to

occur. He also often states that Britain has a "two-tier
90 police force" that comes down "like a ton of bricks" on
white miscreants, but is soft on migrant criminals.
Robinson believes that the mainstream media has
connived in this by failing to report on these issues
fairly.

95 **Ought his views to be censored?**

In general, Robinson stops short of directly inciting
violence, and has never been prosecuted for that. But his
influence has long been linked to far-right violence. The
wife of Darren Osborne, who carried out the attack
100 on Finsbury Park mosque in 2017, stated that Osborne
had "been watching a lot of Tommy Robinson stuff on
the internet", and had been "brainwashed". Robinson
was banned from Facebook and Instagram in 2019, for
"posting material that uses dehumanising language and
105 calls for violence targeted at Muslims". In 2018, he was
banned from Twitter for violating its rules on "hateful
conduct": he had, to take only one example, liked a post
calling on people to "make war" on Muslims. But,
following Elon Musk's purchase of the site, Robinson's
110 account was reinstated late last year.

Police are allegedly investigating his role in the riots.
He could be vulnerable under the new Online Safety
Act, which makes it an offence to convey false
information likely "to cause non-trivial psychological or
115 physical harm".

What about Robinson's legal woes?

On top of his two assault convictions, in 2013 Robinson
was jailed for ten months for travelling to the US on
another man's passport. The following year, he was
120 sentenced to 18 months for mortgage fraud. In 2017, he
was convicted of contempt of court: he had recorded a
report outside a trial in Canterbury Crown Court, in
which he described the defendants – before the verdict
was reached – as "Muslim child rapists". He was given
125 a suspended sentence, which became a nine-month jail
sentence after he reported live outside Leeds Crown
Court during a similar trial; he not only once again
broadcast prejudicial comments, but also confronted the
defendants, risking the trial's collapse.

130 In July 2021, Robinson was ordered to pay £100,000 in
damages for libelling Jamal Hijazi, a 15-year-old Syrian
refugee who had been badly bullied at his school in
Huddersfield; Robinson had claimed, baselessly, that
the boy "violently attacks" English girls. He then
135 repeated these claims in his film, "Silenced", which
portrays him as a free-speech martyr. Robinson was due
in the High Court in late July, because he had broken an
injunction preventing him from releasing the film.
Instead, he left the UK for Cyprus; he has yet to return.
140 Robinson's tax affairs are also reportedly under
investigation.

Document 15 - Stoking hate: Elon Musk and Tommy Robinson

SENSEMAKER - Tortoise Media, Tuesday 6 August 2024 - Producer and Reporter, Xavier Greenwood

Tommy Robinson, who has been accused of stoking the anti-immigration riots, owes his huge platform to Elon Musk.

As violent riots spread across the UK last week, Tommy Robinson made an appearance on the Alex Jones Show from a luxury resort in Cyprus. The far-right agitator was ebullient – and made a point of thanking Elon Musk for giving
5 a “voice for the truth”.

So what? Robinson, who has been accused of stoking the anti-immigration riots, owes his huge platform to Musk. The billionaire owner of X rescued Robinson from the digital wilderness by restoring his account last November. In the past few days Musk has:

- responded to a post by Robinson criticising Keir Starmer’s response to the widespread disorder – amplifying it to
10 Musk’s 193 million followers;
- questioned Robinson’s recent arrest under anti-terror laws, asking what he did that was “considered terrorism”; and
- allowed Robinson’s banned documentary, which repeats false claims about a Syrian refugee against a UK high court order, to rack up over 33 million views on X.

15 It was the screening of this documentary at a demonstration in London last month that prompted Robinson’s arrest
under counter-terrorism powers. Robinson left the UK the day before he was due in court, and is currently believed
to be staying at a five-star hotel in Ayia Napa. He is due in court for a full contempt hearing in October.

None of this has stopped Robinson incessantly tweeting about the riots, where far-right groups have regularly chanted his name. He has:

- falsely claimed that people were stabbed by Muslims in Stoke-on-Trent and Stirling;
- 20 • called for mass deportations, shared demonstration posters, and described violent protests in Southport as “justified”;
and

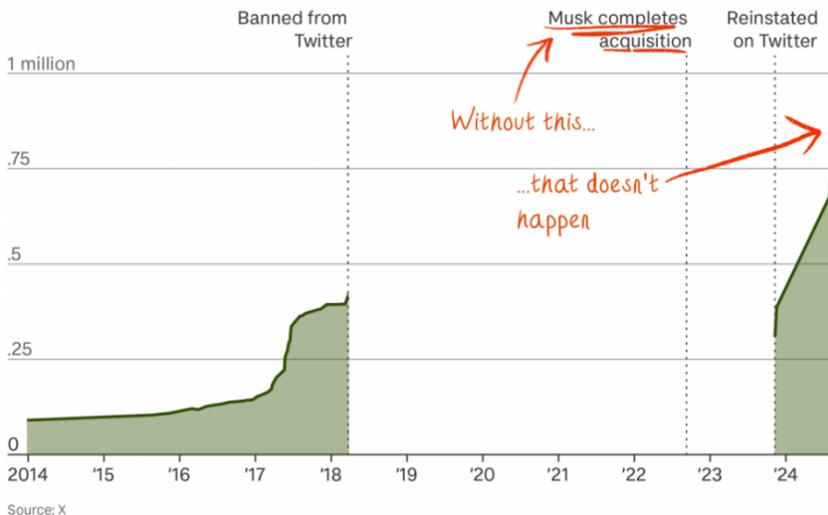
- shared a video that speculated that the suspect in the Southport stabbings was Muslim, a widespread piece of disinformation that helped trigger the riots across the country.

25 **Making the weather.** The far-right activist has nearly 900,000 followers on X, but reaches a much larger number of people. Tortoise calculated that Robinson's 268 posts over the weekend had been seen over 160 million times by late Monday afternoon.

Analytics published by Robinson last week showed that his posts had been viewed 1.2 billion times in the three months to August, with 4.5 million people visiting his profile. Every data point indicates that Robinson's platform on X has massively grown over the past six months.

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Tommy Robinson's Twitter followers



Robinson has called Musk “the best thing to happen for free speech this century”. He’s perhaps not the only person to feel this way. The far-right activist is part of a wider constellation of agitators, right-wing media commentators, online influencers and self-styled news aggregators who have used X to foment unrest in recent days.

35 “It’s like a school of fish,” said Joseph Mulhall, director of research at the advocacy group Hope Not Hate. “People like Tommy Robinson are the weathermakers.”

40 **Absolute state.** Mulhall described a decentralised “post-organisational network” of accounts consuming, creating and engaging with far-right content. These accounts include Musk, who has called himself a free-speech absolutist. On Sunday Musk, who lives 5,000 miles from the streets of Middlesbrough and Rotherham, responded to a tweet that blamed what was happening in the UK on its diversity. He wrote that “if incompatible cultures are brought together without assimilation, conflict is inevitable”. Later he replied to a video of riots in Liverpool: “Civil war is inevitable”.

A spokesperson for Starmer said there was “no justification” for Musk’s comments, and that the “organised violent thuggery” happening in the UK has no place on the streets or online.

45 The role of X and its owner in stirring up the riots will put to test the UK’s online safety bill, which is designed to hold social media companies to account.

“Elon Musk needs to be called into parliament,” said Mulhall. “Twitter should be facing extraordinary scrutiny, both legal and financial. Musk as an individual and the platform that he’s curating is having a disastrous effect on our streets and in our communities.”

50 **What’s more.** Yesterday afternoon Musk responded directly to a social media post from Starmer, questioning the prime minister’s pledge to protect mosques. Robinson continued to post about the riots from his sunbed. Neither is behaving as if they have much to fear.

The Case of Telegram

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Document 16- AUDIO

Telegram CEO Pavel Durov indicted in France

NPR, August 28, 2024

Document 17 - Explainer- What is Telegram and why has its founder Pavel Durov been arrested?

[Alex Hern](#) *Technology editor - The Guardian*, Mon 26 Aug 2024

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[The arrest of Pavel Durov](#), the Russian-born founder of Telegram, in Paris on Saturday has thrown the spotlight on the messaging app. Prosecutors said on Monday he was being held in custody as part of a cybercrime investigation.

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What is Telegram?

At its core, Telegram is a messaging app, competing with services including WhatsApp, Signal and iMessage. For many of its users, it's nothing more than that: a good place to chat with friends.

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But the app also offers more social networking features than most of its peers. Group chats are in effect unlimited in size, as are Telegram's broadcast "channels", which let users "follow" individual accounts.

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Those channels also let followers leave comments under posts, and have back and forth conversations with each other, in a manner far more reminiscent of a Facebook group or even an old-school internet forum than a simple instant messaging service.

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Is it encrypted?

That is a surprisingly controversial question. "Everything on Telegram, including chats, groups, media, etc is encrypted using a combination of 256-bit symmetric AES encryption, 2048-bit RSA encryption, and Diffie-Hellman secure key," the company says, and that's true. But it's a different sort of encryption to that which has become standard in messaging apps, known as end-to-end (e2e) encryption.

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For Telegram users, unless they go through a laborious process of setting up a "secret chat" (which isn't an option for group chats or broadcast channels), their messages aren't protected from being read by Telegram itself – and so Telegram doesn't have the same excuse for not aiding law enforcement that its competitors can turn to.

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Who's got Telegram's back?

Despite that different approach to security, Telegram has long appealed to communities who haven't found a home on more mainstream platforms; cryptocurrency advocates, anti-vax activists and QAnon believers have

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all migrated to the platform after crackdowns on social networks such as Facebook.

Durov, once known as the "Russian Mark Zuckerberg", has spoken about his belief in the importance of free speech, and others with similar absolutist views, including Elon Musk, have come to his defence.

Surprisingly, Russia has also expressed its concern about the arrest. The state in effect seized control of its first company, Facebook clone VKontakte, and Telegram was founded by Durov in exile.

He is now believed to hold three other citizenships beside his Russian passport, but that hasn't stopped the Russian foreign ministry from attacking France for its detention of the chief executive.

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Why did the French arrest Durov?

The French allegations are, broadly, that Telegram failed to fight the use of the service for crime – including the spread of child sexual abuse material.

The investigation concerns crimes related to illicit transactions, child sexual abuse, fraud and the refusal to communicate information to authorities. The arrest warrant was issued by OFMIN, a French child protection agency, the group's secretary general said in a post on LinkedIn.

It is extremely rare to hold the providers of web services liable for the actions of their users, and rarer still to append personal liability. What remains unclear is whether the alleged failures of Telegram are extraordinary, or if the escalation is instead on the part of the French authorities.

In a statement on Sunday, Telegram said Durov "had nothing to hide" and that "it is absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform".

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What does this mean for other messaging services?

Some have already spoken out in fear of a "chilling effect", with executives feeling like they need to over-moderate and over-censor their services lest their own safety is at risk whenever they jet to Cannes for a holiday.

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The arrest is also likely to hasten the move to adopt universal end-to-end encryption, with leaders unable to be held liable for content they cannot see.

The specifics of Durov's arrest remain unclear, particularly whether his behaviour was in line with industry standards.

Opinion

Document 18Y - Telegram's Pavel Durov is a poor poster boy for free speech

With about 1 billion users and almost no content moderation, Telegram exemplifies power without responsibility.

By Max Boot, *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2024

The decision by French authorities to arrest Pavel Durov, the billionaire, Russian-born founder of the Telegram social media app, has sent his fellow tech bros into a predictable frenzy.

X owner Elon Musk posted “#FreePavel” and warned of a near future in Europe where “you’re being executed for liking a meme.” Tech investor David Sacks suggested it was all part of a plot to shut down popular social media sites, beginning with TikTok (whose Chinese owners will have to sell or stop operating the app in the United States under a newly passed U.S. law). Chris Pavlovski, chief executive of the video-sharing platform Rumble, wrote that France had “crossed a red line” and added, “Rumble will not stand for this behavior and will use every legal means available to fight for freedom of expression, a universal human right.”

The tech moguls have a partial point: It is, admittedly, a disturbing precedent for a democracy such as France to arrest a chief executive in a dispute over content moderation, even if Durov was not exactly sent to Devil’s Island. On Wednesday, he was released on bail of about \$5.6 million and indicted on charges related to allowing child sexual abuse material, fraud and drug trafficking on his platform while refusing to cooperate with law enforcement. (Telegram claims to abide by European Union laws and insists, “It is absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform.”)

“Countries should be able to enforce content moderation,” my Council on Foreign Relations colleague Adam Segal, a cybersecurity expert, told me. “But arresting the CEO sets a really bad precedent, especially for more illiberal states.”

That’s true. But it’s also true that Durov makes a poor poster boy for freedom of speech. His platform

In 2015, for instance, Telegram’s founder famously dismissed accusations his platform was a safe haven for Islamic State, arguing only that “privacy is more important than our fear of bad things happening, like terrorism”.

exemplifies power without responsibility. Telegram claims nearly 1 billion users around the world but does next to no content moderation and refuses to cooperate with law enforcement investigations. Its entire staff reportedly numbers just 50 or so people. By contrast, Facebook’s parent company, Meta, employs around 40,000 people on its safety and security teams alone.

As Stanford University’s Internet Observatory has documented, Telegram does not even police some of the vilest content on the internet — “child sex abuse material,” or CSAM. A report from the Internet Observatory concluded: “Telegram implicitly allows the trading of CSAM in private channels.”

What this means in practice was described by my Post colleagues in a disturbing article that should be required reading for Durov’s defenders: Adults who prey on children use Telegram, they wrote in March, to “post child pornography, videos of corpse desecration and images of the cuts they have made children inflict on themselves In chat groups with as many as 5,000 members, they brag about their abusive acts and goad each other on. They share tips on where to find girls with eating disorders and other vulnerabilities congregating online, and on how to manipulate them.”

Telegram is of importance as well to the brutal Russian war effort in Ukraine — Russian troops use it to communicate with one another, and it provides a platform for pro-war bloggers to spread their propaganda. (Ukrainians also use Telegram, but to a lesser degree.) That explains why Russian officials and commentators have been having a meltdown over Durov’s arrest, even though the Telegram CEO, who is now a citizen of France and the United Arab Emirates, has had his own disputes with Vladimir Putin. (...)

In sum, as Alex Stamos — the former director of the Internet Observatory who is now at the cybersecurity firm SentinelOne — told me regarding Telegram: “They are truly bad actors.” That doesn’t mean that Durov necessarily deserves to be in prison, but it does mean that Telegram and other social media platforms need to take content moderation much more seriously. Ideally,

these companies would have responsible owners who would understand the need to balance free speech (and profits) with public safety, but, as Durov shows, many of these social media giants are taking an absolutist approach that puts society at risk — with Telegram being the most irresponsible.

X is doing more than Telegram to stop child abuse materials, Stamos told me, but it has given up trying to stop disinformation designed to influence elections or even to foment violence. Just a few weeks ago, Britain was dealing with anti-immigrant rioting after right-wing social media users falsely claimed that the perpetrator of a horrific attack that killed three girls was a Muslim immigrant. Far from trying to quell the toxic misinformation on X, Musk amplified it, tweeting that “civil war is inevitable” and echoing unfounded right-wing claims that Prime Minister Keir Starmer was tougher on right-wing rioters than minority groups.

While the United States, like most countries around the world, actively polices child sex material online, there is much less that the U.S. government can do about online disinformation, even when its being spread by foreign countries to manipulate U.S. elections. Internet companies are protected not only by the First Amendment but also by the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which exempts internet platforms of most liability for content posted by their users.

European countries have more robust regulations, such as the British Online Safety Act and the European Union’s Digital Services Act. The goal, as the European Commission writes, is “to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation.” If the E.U. is successful, it may have an impact on what U.S. users see, because large social media companies can be fined up to 6 percent of their global revenue for noncompliance.

The problem, Stamos told me, is that these regulations are testing the ability of European bureaucrats to implement them. Mercifully, the E.U. isn’t a dictatorship like China, where authorities clamp down on everything on the internet, from political dissent to child pornography. In democratic countries, regulators have to weigh free speech in the balance — and one person’s disinformation is another person’s bold truth-telling. “Coming up with enforceable minimums is tough,” Stamos said. “The E.U. is pushing in this area, but it’s slow going. It’s actually spectacularly difficult.” Let’s hope Europe can get it right. The West desperately needs a model of social media regulation that allows robust debate while limiting criminal activity and disinformation, and the E.U. could show the way. But we haven’t gotten there yet, which is presumably why French authorities have sidelined the E.U. and resorted to arresting Telegram’s CEO. That’s troubling — but so is all the vile and dangerous content that Telegram allows online.