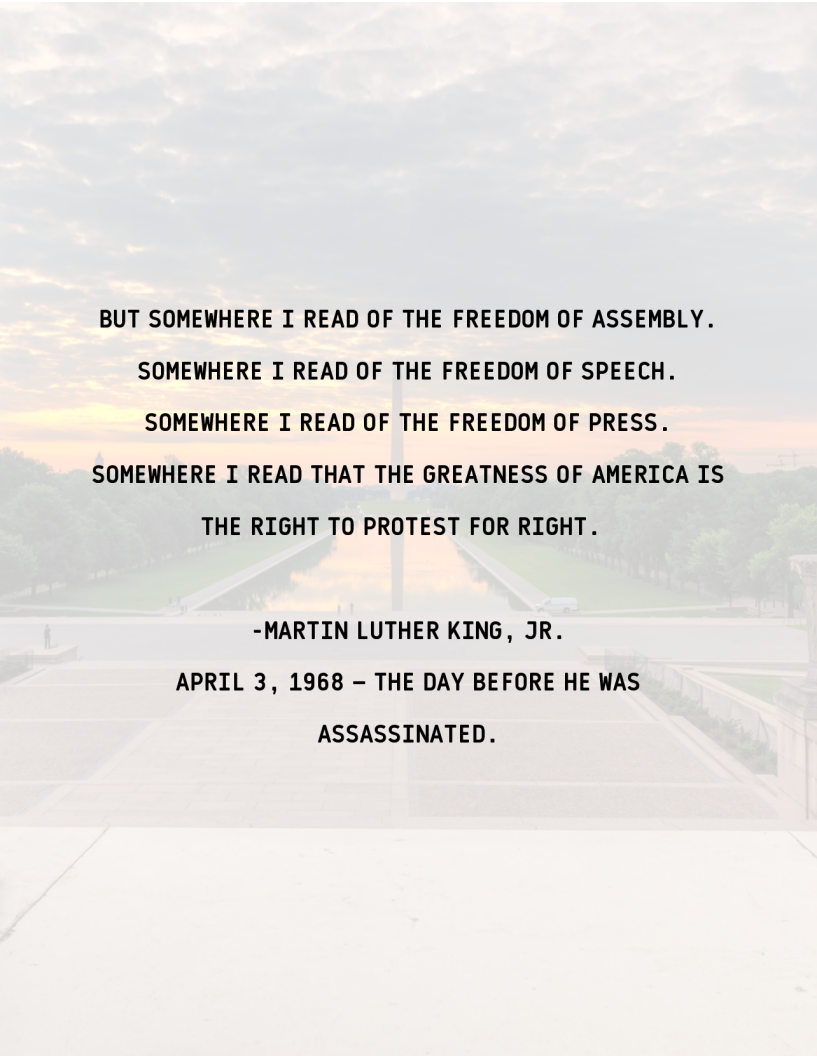


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INTRODUCTION

Independent media and freely available information play critical roles in a democratic society. However, today's media and information landscapes are complex and difficult to navigate. The evolution of these landscapes has led to intense media competition and widespread availability of contradictory information, which in turn has generated concerns about bias, misinformation and disinformation, and individual consumption habits that contribute to polarization and divisiveness. The introduction of artificial intelligence [AI] to politics and society has only deepened these concerns.



**BUT SOMEWHERE I READ OF THE FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY.
SOMEWHERE I READ OF THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH.
SOMEWHERE I READ OF THE FREEDOM OF PRESS.
SOMEWHERE I READ THAT THE GREATNESS OF AMERICA IS
THE RIGHT TO PROTEST FOR RIGHT.**

-MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

**APRIL 3, 1968 – THE DAY BEFORE HE WAS
ASSASSINATED.**

Today, 73% of U.S. adults believe in the importance of a free press [Pew, 2024]. At the same time, trust in the media continues to decline, with notable partisan and age gaps [Pew, 2021; Pew, 2022].

In the backdrop of declining trust, media consolidation continues uninterrupted. Today, fewer than six media conglomerates own 90 percent of the broadcast media in the U.S. [Guatney, 2023].

Advances in Artificial Intelligence further complicate matters. AI has reinforced racial biases and is often viewed with suspicion [Coeckelbergh, 2022]. Overall, it is hard for people to navigate the complexities of today's media and information landscapes.

Local journalism is not immune to this trend, and some argue that the disappearance of locally owned and operated news and information sources negatively impacts the quality of our democratic politics [The state of local news, 2023].

One of Democrats' chief antagonists to return to Congress

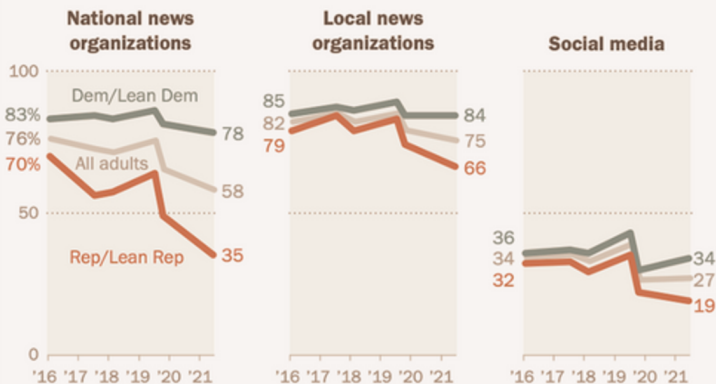
SECTION DIRECT

How...

NORTHWE

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 ...



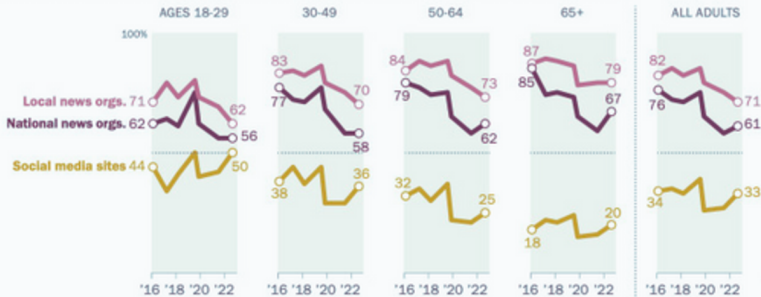
Note: In 2016, trust of information from social media was only asked of and based on internet-using U.S. adults.

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

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U.S. adults under 30 are now almost as likely to trust information on social media sites as information from national news outlets

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



Note: In 2016, trust of information from social media was only asked of and based on internet-using U.S. adults. In the question on trust in the information from social media sites, the examples used have changed over time; for more detail on the specific wording, see the topline. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 18-Aug. 21, 2022. For dates of other surveys, see the topline.

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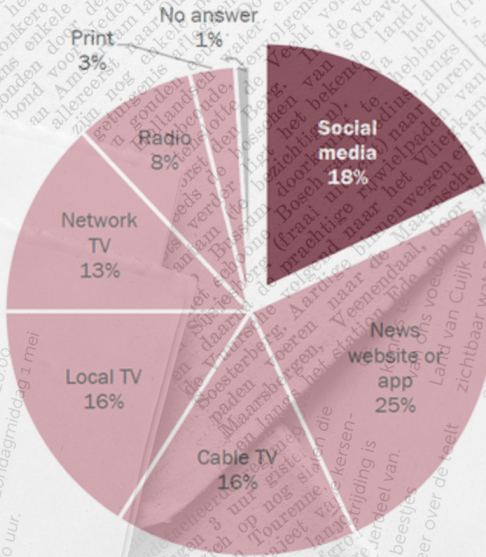
How can we create less complex and more navigable media and information landscapes that produce reliable and trustworthy news and information? What are the media's responsibilities? What are our responsibilities?

One approach is increasing the regulation of the production and distribution of news and information, but more regulation might challenge liberties enshrined in the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment while absolving us of our responsibilities.

At the same time, liberties like free speech and free press are often valuable tools to those looking to undermine American democracy [Gershberg and Illing, 2022]. There is no easy answer to how we can move forward.

About one-in-five U.S. adults say they get their political news primarily through social media

% of U.S. adults who say the most common way they get political and election news is ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 29-Nov. 11, 2019.
Americans Who Mainly Get Their News on Social Media Are Less Engaged, Less Knowledgeable

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KEY TERMS

Algorithms: "a fixed series of steps that a computer performs in order to solve a problem or complete a task." [Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary]

Artificial Intelligence: "computer programs that are 'trained' to solve problems that would normally be difficult for a computer to solve. These programs "learn" from data parsed through them, adapting methods and responses in a way that will maximize accuracy." [Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary]

Large Language Models: Artificial intelligence system capable of learning "context and meaning [of human queries] by tracking relationships in sequential data" such as the words in a sentence, to generate human-like responses. [Nvidia. Large Language Models Explained]

Digital Divide: "the gap between those with sufficient knowledge of and access to technology and those without." [ACT Center for Equity in Learning]

Misinformation: "information that is false, but not intended to cause harm." [Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary]

KEY TERMS

Disinformation: "false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm." [Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary]

Malinformation: information that is true but that is shared with the intent to cause harm or undermine public trust. [Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary]

Meme: term usually refers to "captioned photos or GIFs that spread online," and that are often "humorous or critical of society. They are increasingly being used as powerful vehicles of disinformation." [Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary]

Deepfakes: "algorithmically generated images, and other forms of visual disinformation used by nefarious actors to infiltrate online spaces in attempts to manipulate opinions and dis-organize communities." [Media Justice]

Data: "information, especially facts or numbers, collected to be examined and considered and used to help decision-making, or information in an electronic form that can be stored and used by a computer." [Cambridge Dictionary]

KEY TERMS

Commentary: "spoken or written discussion in which people express opinions about someone or something." In the context of media "refers to a genre of journalism that provides interpretations and opinions on current events, rather than factual reporting." [The International Encyclopedia of Communication]

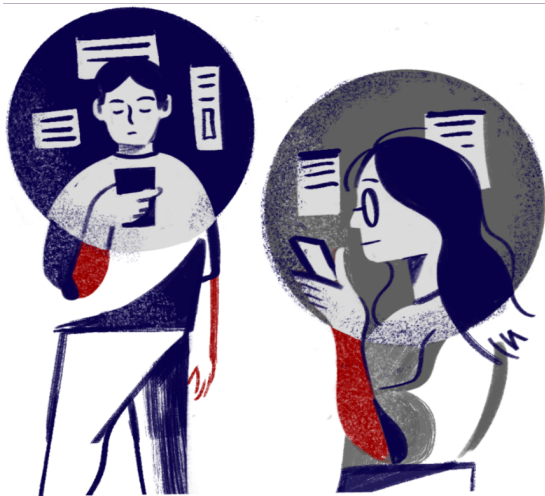
News Media: "forms of mass media that focus on delivering news to the general public." [Wikipedia]

Legacy Media/Old Media: "The mass media institutions that dominated prior to the Information Age; particularly print media, film studios, music studios, advertising agencies, radio broadcasting, and television;" based on a one-way stream of communication with users. [Wikipedia]

Social Media: "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content." [Merriam-Webster Dictionary] Depends on network effect to be sustainable or profitable. Uses algorithms and advertising to reach consumers.

PERSONAL STAKE QUESTION

What are your experiences with or observations of misinformation, disinformation, deep fakes, or artificial intelligence in the context of politics and society?



GUIDING QUESTIONS: OBJECTIVITY AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS

1. How do you consume media?
2. Do you think that the media you consume is biased, and do you think we as consumers have a responsibility to diversify the media we consume?
3. Does the media you consume show diverse perspectives and people?
4. Today, many people get their news from social media platforms instead of legacy media. Do you think it matters?
5. Does the education system have a responsibility to teach media literacy?

ALGORITHMIC BIAS: MEDICAL INDUSTRY

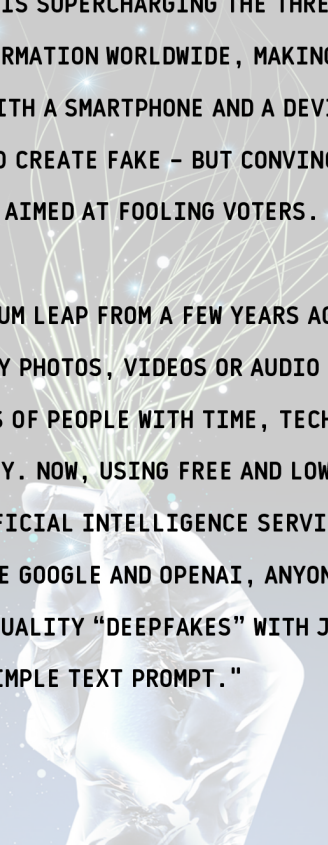
In 2007 the Vaginal Birth after Cesarean Delivery algorithm was designed to assess the safety of giving birth vaginally for patients, and illuminating women at risk of uterine ruptures. While the training data focused on factors such as the woman's age, it predicted that Black and Hispanic women were less likely to have a successful vaginal birth after having a C-section than non-Hispanic white women.

Effectively, the algorithm identified symptoms of inequality based on instructional racism and attributed these as medical factors to guide prognosis. In 2017, research revealed that error and that it caused doctors to perform more C-sections on these on Black and Hispanic women than on non-Hispanic white women [Vas et al., 2019]. While few large-scale deployments of AI currently exist, the above issue demonstrates just one of the concerns of its application [Panch et al., 2019]. Moreover, most positive results from AI systems using patient data are fraught with issues [Fraser et al., 2018]. Regardless, we can expect a growing reliance on AI in healthcare [Mittermaier et al., 2023]

ALGORITHMIC BIAS: MORTGAGE LENDING

Credit scores have a long history of intentional and legalized discrimination that still display racial bias [Wu, 2024], however AI bias has amplified the effects when an algorithm was applied to mortgage lending.

Compared to white applicants, lenders were; 40% more likely to turn down Latino applicants, 50% more likely to turn down Asian/Pacific Islander applicants; 70% more likely to turn down Native American applicants, even if all candidates met the same criteria [Martinez and Kirchner, 2021]. Further, 80% of black mortgage applicants were denied [Hale, 2021]. By adopting seemingly non-partial algorithms to large data sets, the AI bias has contributed to institutional racism that will probably create more data about homeownership rates that can be used to perpetuate its bias.

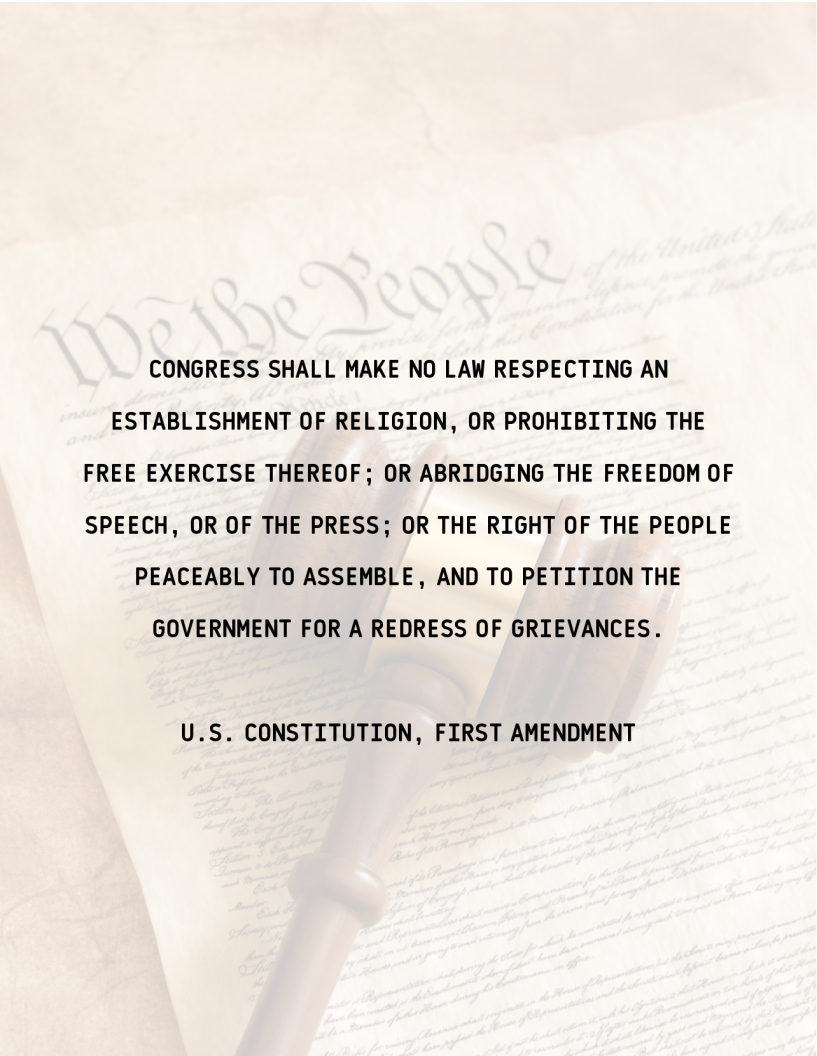


FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS [2024]: "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS SUPERCHARGING THE THREAT OF ELECTION DISINFORMATION WORLDWIDE, MAKING IT EASY FOR ANYONE WITH A SMARTPHONE AND A DEVIOUS IMAGINATION TO CREATE FAKE – BUT CONVINCING – CONTENT AIMED AT FOOLING VOTERS .

IT MARKS A QUANTUM LEAP FROM A FEW YEARS AGO , WHEN CREATING PHONY PHOTOS , VIDEOS OR AUDIO CLIPS REQUIRED TEAMS OF PEOPLE WITH TIME , TECHNICAL SKILL AND MONEY . NOW , USING FREE AND LOW-COST GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICES FROM COMPANIES LIKE GOOGLE AND OPENAI , ANYONE CAN CREATE HIGH-QUALITY “DEEPPAKES” WITH JUST A SIMPLE TEXT PROMPT . ”

GUIDING QUESTIONS: THE ROLE OF A.I.

1. What are your observations of A.I.'s impact on politics? Do you see A.I. as a tool with the potential to advance democracy, or do you see it more as a threat?
2. Should there be oversight or regulation when it comes to the development of artificial intelligence? And if so, can you think of specific organizations or institutions that ought to be tasked with this?
3. Should there be a mandate for A.I. developers to be transparent about how they train their models?
4. What might be trade-offs or pitfalls in constraining developments in this area? Might there be benefits that are worth it?
5. What impact does A.I. have on human creativity and freedom?

A wooden gavel with a light-colored head and a darker handle rests diagonally across a parchment document. The parchment is aged and yellowed, with the words "We the People" written in a large, elegant cursive script at the top. Below this, the text of the First Amendment is visible in a smaller, similar script. The gavel's head is positioned over the words "CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN".

**CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN
ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE
FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF
SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE
PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE
GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES.**

U.S. CONSTITUTION, FIRST AMENDMENT

Guiding Questions:

Freedom of Speech

1. Do you believe the government should be able to restrict ideas or speech considered harmful or hateful?
2. What is the social and political impact of misinformation and disinformation? Do you think protecting the freedom of the press leads to factual errors, misinformation, and disinformation?
3. Why might media consolidation and less local journalism be a problem? How can it be resolved?
4. Should a social media platform be held accountable for the quality of information shared on it? If so how?
5. What are the tradeoffs involved if the government has more regulatory power over speech and the press?

Resources

Citizen Literacy [University of
Louisville Libraries]

Democracy and AI [Harvard Kennedy School]

How to Spot Fake News [Factcheck.org]

Media Literacy in the Age of Deepfakes
[MIT Center for Advanced Virtuality]

Media Literacy Resources [Southern
Poverty Law Center]

Credits

Babette Faehmel (SUNY Schenectady Community College)

Ashley Mercado-Liegi (SUNY Stony Brook University)

Joseph Scanlon (SUNY Monroe Community College)

SUNY Civic Education and Engagement and Civil Discourse Fellows

2024

For more information on civic resources or civic opportunities in the SUNY system, please contact civicrofellovs@suny.edu