

## **DISINFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY: THE DYNAMICS OF A MODERN DICHOTOMY**

### **Note from the Author:**

In order to determine my topic of research, I reflected on what I had learned in my academic career up until this point and narrowed down what I was genuinely interested in. With my background in the study of mass communications, I knew I wanted to discuss something relevant to today's rapidly changing media sphere. I believe it is more relevant now than ever to analyze how information is being consumed and digested. My studies have given me a holistic perspective about the globalization of the media under neoliberalism and understanding its role under a free-market system. My academic niche thus far has been focused on the ways in which the arts play a role in protest and social change. Thus, I wanted to research something that combined my love for technology, art, culture and media. Furthermore, I was inspired to write about the problem of political polarization in the United States after seeing the impact the disinformation had on my own family during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an international relations scholar, I wanted to incorporate case studies that offered a global perspective. I chose the Middle East and Latin America as the two other regions to discuss because I was inspired by two region-studies courses I took at the University of Texas at Austin: *The Tones of Inequality* and *The Soundtrack of Revolutions*.

## **INTRODUCTION: THE LINKAGE OF OUR SOCIAL FABRIC**

In a rapid world of ever changing technology, integrated, global social webs in the media and on the internet keep us connected. Yet, despite this interactive network being a platform for the sharing of new ideas and solutions, it can also be a sticky web full of modern issues, especially when considering the role that economic and political systems play behind the scenes. This development has created a linkage in our social fabric, but under global capitalism, there must be an analysis of the power structures that affect the flow of information within countries that are in an active fight for true democracy. Although the Internet has transformed protest and the way in which activist groups are able to form, it has not much improved democracy as a whole. Many countries continue to learn the lesson that misinformation and propaganda are powerful; they can persuade susceptible people to buy into lies that are harmful and further oppress groups that are not fairly represented in the political sphere. This proves to be significant as we live in the information age because maintaining the objective truth is key to building a society that is educated and informed. Thus, it is necessary to examine different forms of disinformation that are most prevalent in today's political and media environments and assess their implications on democracy.

Through an analysis of multiple case study examples, the question is raised: How does the spread of information within the media and on the internet affect global democracy? These examples include the political uprising of the Arab Spring, the presidential election campaigns of Donald Trump in the United States and presidential election campaign of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil followed by their subsequent insurrections. On one hand, the increased spread of information through the media and on the internet has allowed for an increase of global democracy through promoting transparency, bringing citizens together to organize politically, and overcoming traditional power structures. On the other hand, it has led to a decrease in global democracy through discrediting protests, creating echo chambers that increase

polarization, and undermining the legitimacy of elections. This concept will be reviewed under a cause-and-effect analysis, as this paper will discuss how the conversation around disinformation will unravel in the future in order to look for solutions.

## **BACKGROUND: DISINFORMATION WITHIN A POST-TRUTH ERA**

Disinformation refers to false or misleading information that is intentionally spread with the aim of deceiving people or manipulating their beliefs or actions. It is often spread through various forms of media, including social media, news outlets, and other communication channels. Disinformation can take many forms, from intentionally misleading news articles to manipulated images or videos. This can have serious consequences, as it can lead to the spread of false beliefs, the manipulation of public opinion, and even the incitement of violence. The spread of disinformation is an increasing concern for democratic societies around the globe. In modern media environments, exposure to misinformation can be harmful and can have negative consequences for democratic governance as well as trust in news media and journalism. In the United States, 68 percent of Americans identify “made-up news” as a significant threat to trust in government (Tenove, 2020).

Some scholars have even argued that we are entering a post-truth era with an alternative epistemology and thus an alternative reality (Dan 2021). Communications scholar Anya Schiffrin writes that polling data suggests that we live in a country where a large part of the populace is either unable or unwilling to accurately educate themselves on the reality of their country and leaders. An uninformed citizenry of this type is unable to act in its own best interest when electing leaders and representatives. If misinformation and fake news campaigns truly do challenge citizens' attempts to educate themselves, or, even worse, actively manipulate citizens into believing false information, then the very foundations of democracy are at risk (Schiffrin 2017).

## **CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE: LIMITATIONS OF DEMOCRACY**

Democracy is the most universal political ideal of our day. Since the turn of the century, we've seen a spate of new movements promising to deliver real democracy, in contrast to ostensibly democratic institutions that they describe as exclusive, coercive, and alienating (From Democracy to Freedom). However, when discussing democracy, it is important to contextualize it as a system under the confines of global capitalism. Many political scholars critique liberal democracy, arguing that it concentrates power in the hands of a few, whether it be the wealthy, political elites, or corporate interests. This concentration of power often results in policies that benefit the few at the expense of the many. While liberal democracy emphasizes the importance of representation, the reality is that marginalized and underrepresented groups are often excluded from decision-making processes, leading to policies that do not reflect the needs or interests of these groups.

Our modern idea of democracy is often unable to address structural inequality and the root causes of social problems, as it relies on market-based solutions and the belief that individual freedoms will solve societal issues. This approach fails to account for the systemic factors that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. This form of democracy tends to be unresponsive to popular movements and grassroots organizing, as it prioritizes the interests of the ruling class and corporate interests over the needs and demands of the people. While liberal democracy promotes the idea of democratic participation, the reality is that many people are excluded from the political process due to barriers such as voter suppression, inaccessible political structures, and limited resources to participate. This can lead to a lack of engagement and a sense of alienation from the political system. Thus, a modern dichotomy is created: An overload of information causes communities of honest people to become disillusioned from the very systems that are meant to protect them. Regardless of its limitations under capitalism,

there continues to be a constant fight for something that resembles what true democracy might look like, even though the concept is somewhat of an enigma.

## **THE NORMATIVE ROLES OF MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY**

One of the main pillars of democracy is equitable access to information in order for citizens to be able to make informed decisions. Therefore, under this pretense, it is important to note that there are indeed democratic advantages to living in the information age. In the context of media, normative roles refer to the ideal or desirable functions that media should perform in a democratic society. These roles are based on the idea that the media should have a responsibility to promote democratic values and the public interest, rather than simply serving the interests of powerful actors such as governments or corporations.

Communications scholar Kaarle Nordenstreng proposes four normative roles that the media can play in a democratic society: monitory, collaborative, facilitative, and critical. In the Monitory role, the media act as watchdogs of the government and other powerful institutions in society. The media is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the actions of these institutions, exposing corruption and wrongdoing, and holding those in power accountable (Christians, 2009). The monitory role of the media is crucial in ensuring that the public is informed about the actions of their government and other institutions and can make informed decisions about who to support. In the collaborative role, the media works collaboratively with other institutions in society to promote democratic values and the public interest. The media collaborates with civil society organizations, academic institutions, and other groups to promote dialogue, debate, and the exchange of ideas. The collaborative role of the media is important in promoting a diverse range of perspectives and ensuring that all voices are heard in public discourse.

Furthermore, in the facilitative role, the media acts as a facilitator of public deliberation and participation. The media provides a platform for citizens to express their views and engage in informed debate about issues of public concern. The facilitative role of the media is important in promoting a healthy democratic culture and encouraging citizens to take an active role in the democratic process (Christians, 2009). In the critical role, the media acts as critics of society and its institutions, questioning assumptions and challenging power. The media provides a critical perspective on the actions of governments, corporations, and other powerful actors, and encourages citizens to think critically about the world around them. The critical role of the media is important in promoting accountability and transparency in society and ensuring that the public is informed about issues of public concern. The media has a vital role to play in promoting democracy, and these four normative roles are important in ensuring that the media are able to fulfill this role effectively.

## **EXPOSING CORRUPTION AND INCREASING TRANSPARENCY**

First and foremost, the media and the internet can serve as powerful tools to promote transparency and accountability in governments, institutions, and corporations. In simple terms, the information age has made it easier to access information about government actions and decisions, making it easier to hold elected officials accountable. This increased transparency helps to ensure that government actions are more democratic and less prone to corruption. Using transparency to rebuild or enhance legitimacy and trust in the relationships between governments and citizens can contribute to greater confidence and assurance in these systems. This engagement in authenticity opens doors through widening the policy processes needed to improve the public sector's capacity to meet rising citizen and community needs (Wanna, 2018).

Furthermore, Investigative journalism and online whistleblowing platforms can expose human rights violations and other abuses of power, which can lead to reforms and increased

accountability. This monitory role of the media refers to the function of media as a watchdog, monitoring and scrutinizing the actions of those in power, including government officials and other powerful actors such as corporations and interest groups (Christians, 2009) This is particularly important in a democratic society, as it helps to ensure that the public interest is protected. However, the monitory role of media can be challenging to perform, particularly in contexts where media freedom is limited or where there are political or economic pressures on media organizations.

## **FACILITATING UPRISINGS AND PROMOTING DIVERSE VOICES**

In addition to exposing corruption, the spread of information through the media and on the internet can increase access to information and promote citizen participation in democratic processes. Social media and other digital platforms have made it easier for people to voice their opinions, organize protests and rallies, and connect with like-minded individuals to effect change. As an example of the complexity of the connection between the use of social media and political outcomes, some scholars remark that the lower costs of communication afforded by social media may increase the incidence of purely expressive action while having little effect on the incidence of high-risk action (Farell 2012). Other scholars agree that social media has become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements but notes that their role in mobilizing dissent in the short term is far less consequential than their long term help in establishing a civil society in which democratic politics can flourish (Shirky, 2011). Regardless, online platforms can facilitate communication and collaboration among citizens, activists, and civil society organizations, and provide opportunities for engagement in public debates and decision-making.

The internet has democratized the media landscape by allowing a greater diversity of voices to be heard. This means that people have access to a wider range of perspectives and

opinions, which can help to create a more vibrant and inclusive democratic society. Thus, social media plays an important role in transforming organized groups and informal networks, establishing external linkages, developing a sense of modernity and community, and drawing global attention (Brym, 2014) This increased engagement can help to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure that citizens have a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives.

## **LEAVING OBSOLETE POWER STRUCTURES BEHIND**

From mobile money to crowd-mapping crises and bringing citizens together to report on news, distribute information, and organize politically, digital technology has the potential to leave obsolete power structures behind (Schiffrin 2017). Digital technology allows for the creation of decentralized systems that do not rely on a central authority. This can disrupt power structures that rely on centralized control, as the technology allows for a more distributed and democratic decision-making process. The internet has made it easier than ever before to access information and share knowledge. This can empower individuals and groups who were previously marginalized or excluded from mainstream discourse, and help to challenge traditional power structures. Digital technology has disrupted traditional business models, particularly in industries like media and entertainment. This has given rise to new forms of media and entertainment that are not controlled by traditional power structures.

## **DISCREDITING PROTESTS THROUGH PROPAGANDA**

Although it can be used to promote democracy in some ways, information spread by the media and the internet has also undermined the functioning of democracy globally. Schiffrin discusses how social media was seen at first as a platform that would bring democracy to the world, but later understood to be a vehicle to spread disinformation. She argues that Global

demagogues stoked the fires of hatred online through the use of disinformation with constant attacks on the judiciary, the media, science, climate change scientists, and any institution that could undermine their agendas. The spread of information on the internet can also pose threats to privacy and freedom of expression. Governments and corporations can use surveillance and data collection to monitor and control the flow of information, and online censorship and restrictions on free speech can limit access to information and stifle dissent.

Furthermore, tactics involved in discrediting protests can include the spreading of rumors or false information about protesters and their motivations, or creating fake news stories that portray protesters in a negative light. This can be done by amplifying extreme views and creating a sense of "us vs. them" between protesters and those who oppose them. This can discredit the protests by portraying them as divisive and disruptive. Digital media can be used to label and stereotype protesters, which can discredit their cause and undermine their credibility. For example, protesters may be labeled as "extremists," "radicals," or "troublemakers" to create a negative image of them in the eyes of the public. The media can be used to highlight instances of violence and disorder at protests, while downplaying peaceful and lawful expressions of dissent.

## **ECHO-CHAMBERS AND INCREASING POLARIZATION**

The media and the internet can also influence public opinion and contribute to political polarization. The proliferation of partisan media outlets and social media echo chambers can reinforce existing beliefs and biases, leading to a fragmented and polarized public discourse. These disinformation campaigns can manipulate public opinion and undermine trust in democratic institutions. The spread of information through the media can lead to increasing polarization in several ways. First, digital media platforms use algorithms to personalize content for users, based on their previous browsing and search history. This can create a "filter bubble"

where users are only exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs and biases, while filtering out opposing viewpoints.

The next example is confirmation bias, in which people tend to seek out and believe information that confirms their existing beliefs, and dismiss or ignore information that challenges them. Digital media platforms can amplify this tendency by selectively presenting information that aligns with users' existing beliefs and biases. Social media algorithms prioritize content that generates high engagement, such as likes, shares, and comments. This can incentivize the creation and dissemination of sensational or polarizing content that is more likely to generate strong emotional reactions. The polarization of politics and society can lead to this aforementioned "us vs. them" mentality, where people identify strongly with their political or social group and view opposing groups as a threat. The result of these factors is that people can become increasingly entrenched in their existing beliefs and less likely to consider opposing viewpoints. This can lead to echo chambers, where people become more divided and less able to engage in productive dialogue and compromise.

## **UNDERMINING THE LEGITIMACY OF ELECTIONS**

Another way democracy can be threatened by disinformation is through the corrosion of elections. The spread of information through the media can lead to the undermining of the legitimacy of elections in several ways. First of all, disinformation campaigns can be spread through traditional media and social media to mislead voters about the election process, candidates, or outcomes. Disinformation can create confusion and undermine public trust in the electoral process.

The spread of information through digital media can also facilitate hacking and tampering with electoral systems. Hacking and tampering can change voter rolls, vote tallies, or election results, which can create doubts about the legitimacy of the election. The spread of

information through media can also deepen partisanship, which can lead to accusations of election fraud or irregularities. This can create a sense of distrust in the electoral process and undermine public confidence in the legitimacy of the election. The spread of information through digital media can also fuel conspiracy theories about the election process or the legitimacy of the election outcome. Conspiracy theories can create a sense of doubt and suspicion among voters, which can lead to a loss of faith in the electoral process.

### **CASE STUDY I: ARAB SPRING**

One example of how the spread of information through the media has both positive and negative effects is the case of the Arab Spring, which was a series of uprisings and protests that took place across the Middle East and North Africa region from 2010 to 2012. The protests were largely driven by a desire for greater political and economic freedoms, as well as opposition to authoritarian regimes. Protests during the Arab Spring in countries such as Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain were spurred in part by bloggers and social media commentators who used the platforms to galvanize people and encourage them to take to the streets. The role played by digital media technologies and platforms in the events linked to the recent political upheavals in the Arab world should really come as no surprise. Investment in online infrastructures has advanced more rapidly in this region than anywhere else in the world. Digital technology tracking showed that the annual rate of internet growth in the MENA region between 2006 and 2011 (23 percent) far outstripped the worldwide figure (14 percent).

Research among young people across the MENA region has shown that their involvement in the internet and other digital platforms, not least the blogosphere and social media, has led many to question traditional forms of governance, politics, economics and cultural values (Gunter 2016). Digital media had a role in the Arab Spring in the sense that they provided the very infrastructure that created deep communication ties and organizational

capacity in groups of activists before the major protests took place and while street protests were being formalized. Indeed, it was because of these well-developed, digital networks that civic leaders so successfully activated such large numbers of people to protest (Howard, 2013).

In this instance, most of the empirical research on the use of social media during the Arab Spring relies on usage data. Such data are of limited value in forming evidence-based generalizations about the relative significance of social media in making the uprising possible. For example, we know that in Egypt at the end of December 2010, about 22 percent of the population enjoyed Internet access and more than 80 percent owned cell phones. In January 2011, around 4.5 per cent of Egyptians were registered Facebook users, increasing to about 7.7 per cent by April 2011. In March, three-quarters of Egyptian Facebook users employed the Arabic interface (Byrm, 2014). In Egypt, for example, a variety of social-structural factors were more important than patterns of media usage in distinguishing demonstrators from those who say they supported the overthrow of Mubarak but did not participate in the demonstrations ('sympathetic onlookers'). However, it would be wrong to dismiss patterns of media usage as independent influences on the likelihood of becoming a demonstrator. While demonstrators were not more inclined than sympathetic onlookers were to use Twitter and Facebook as protest news sources, they did differ from sympathetic onlookers in so far as they were more likely to trust non-traditional communications media as reliable news sources and were more likely to get news about the protests from text messages via cell phone.

Furthermore, Protesters in the Arab Spring had more or less quietly endured a host of deprivations (widespread poverty, high unemployment, slow economic growth, low upward mobility, deep corruption, and debilitating state repression) until early 2011, at which time they took to the streets and demanded regime change. According to the new narrative, they were enabled in part by new means of communication that can be democratized because of their low entry costs and unique capacity to turn users into information producers. They used Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and cell phone text messages to express outrage, organize protests, and

warn comrades of real-time threats (Byrm, 2014). There is much anecdotal evidence that political activists benefited hugely from blogging and microblogging tools and social networking sites such as Facebook. It has even been claimed that, without these tools, the uprisings would not have taken place at the pace they did and in some instances might not have been possible at all. More reflective analyses have acknowledged that blogs and social media played some part in the mobilization (Gunter 2016).

At the same time, during the Arab Spring, disinformation played a significant role in shaping the narrative and outcomes of the protests. Though it is true that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter played a significant role in helping protesters organize, both government actors and non-state actors used disinformation tactics to influence public opinion, sow confusion, undermine the legitimacy of the protests, and promote their own agendas. In this case, the government and interest groups had the ability to use social media to track and undermine legitimacy of opposition and spread propaganda. Mostly, tactics were used to spread false information about protesters. Government-controlled media outlets in several countries, such as Egypt and Syria, portrayed protesters as violent, radical, and foreign-backed (Al-Jaber, 2016). They also spread rumors about the protesters' motives and goals, in an attempt to turn public opinion against them. In some cases, governments or non-state actors carried out false-flag operations, where they posed as protesters or activists in order to spread disinformation, incite violence, or discredit the protests. Overall, the use of disinformation during the Arab Spring highlights the power of information in shaping public opinion and the outcomes of social and political movements.

## **CASE STUDY II: UNITED STATES**

Political polarization from the media in the United States has been a growing trend in recent years, and the 2016 US Presidential Election was no exception. Political polarization

during the 2016 US Presidential Election was influenced by the spread of disinformation which had an impact on a variety of factors, including political rhetoric, media bias, and social media algorithms. Donald Trump's rhetoric during his presidency and re-election campaign was often divisive and inflammatory. He frequently used language that was seen as racist, xenophobic, and misogynistic, which alienated many voters. This polarization can make it difficult for people to engage in constructive dialogue and can lead to a breakdown of trust in institutions and the democratic process. When assessing American democracy specifically, it is important to note how the problem of misinformation on the Internet has come at a dangerous time, when growing resentment over inequality and the worsening state of the American middle class have stoked a deep mistrust in institutions of education, science, and media.

Furthermore, there is a significant divide in the US media landscape, with many media outlets catering to specific political ideologies. This has led to the creation of echo chambers where people consume news and information that reinforces their existing beliefs and biases. Under this landscape, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have contributed to political polarization. These platforms use algorithms to show users content that they are most likely to engage with, which can lead to the creation of filter bubbles. During the 2020 election, there were numerous false claims of voter fraud and election rigging, which further polarized public opinion. These claims were amplified by Trump's supporters and spread through social media. Political Scientist Philip Howard began studying disinformation during the 2016 elections in the US and uncovered information about disinformation shared over Twitter. Howard and his colleagues at the Computational Propaganda Research Project at the Oxford Internet Institute analyzed 7 million tweets that used hashtags related to the 2016 election in 16 swing states (Howard, 2017). They discovered that Donald Trump spent nearly 70 million on Facebook ads. They also found outstanding amounts of news from Russian outlets, Wikileaks, and "junk news" sources flooding Twitter just before the elections. Howard and his colleagues also noted that in these 16 swing states, levels of "junk" and polarizing news exceeded those of the United States

as a whole (Schiffrin, 2017). This study proved that Facebook's advertising algorithms allow advertisers to reach a targeted audience for political gain. Unfortunately, the company provides no public record of the political advertisements it serves to users, and there is no systematic way for analysts to measure the spread of fake news.

Trump has frequently criticized the mainstream media, calling them "fake news" and accusing them of bias against him. By discrediting the media, he has created a climate where people are more likely to believe false information and conspiracy theories. Following his loss in the election, Trump and some of his supporters made numerous calls for protests and even violence in response to the election results. White-supremist conspiracy groups such as QAnon saw a rise in influence on media platforms during this time. This led to the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries (Jeppesen). In the aftermath of the insurrection on Capitol Hill, the role social media played in these events came into the media spotlight. For years, fringe ideologues had used online platforms undisturbed to promote their extreme ideologies and conspiracies and recruit a large number of sympathizers to their extremist causes. This is proof that citizens can turn on themselves against their own best interest, and thereby impact the social structure that politicians are actively trying to influence.

### **CASE STUDY III: BRAZIL**

In the American elections, the channel for the dissemination of fake news was primarily Facebook, while in Brazil, it was WhatsApp. The two networks are part of the same business group, which also owns Instagram, which represents an industry giant, as the company controls the three largest social networks in the world. The post-truth strategy that marked the elections in the United States was repeated in the race for president of Brazil— so much so that one of Donald Trump's strategists, Steve Bannon, was hired by the campaign from Bolsonaro. Brazil is

one of the largest democracies in the world, and it has a long history of election interference and disinformation campaigns. In the 2018 Brazilian presidential election, disinformation played a particularly prominent role, with some experts calling it a "disinformation war."

Even WhatsApp recognized the irregular use of the platform in the election (Mendonça, 2020). Although the General Personal Data Protection Law has been in force in Brazil since August 2018, a global information market has used refined psychometric techniques to automatically distribute content that may be of interest to people with certain profile characteristics on digital social networks (Pires de Castro, 2022). It is through these networks that the spread of fake news reaches an exponential audience. Jair Bolsonaro's victory for president of Brazil in 2018 is seen as a clear example of this movement. In Bolsonaro's case, disinformation campaigns on WhatsApp were used to undermine the legitimacy of elections by first attacking his political opponents in order to spread false information about their policies and their pasts. For example, he claimed that his opponent in the presidential runoff, Fernando Haddad, was going to distribute "gay kits" to schools if he won the election, which was false (Mendonça).

Furthermore, disinformation campaigns were used to suppress voter turnout, particularly among groups that are less likely to support certain candidates or parties. For example, there were campaigns that spread false information about polling stations being closed or moved, in an attempt to discourage people from voting. In addition to domestic disinformation campaigns, there have also been instances of foreign interference in Brazilian elections. In the 2018 election, a group of Brazilian business people reportedly funded a campaign to spread false information on WhatsApp, which was then shared widely among Brazilian voters. Bolsonaro and his supporters have also questioned the integrity of the electoral process in Brazil, particularly when it comes to electronic voting. They have spread false information about voter fraud and irregularities, which undermines public trust in the democratic process.

Another commonality between Bolsonaro and Trump is how they have been both criticized for downplaying the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and spreading false information about the virus. For example, Bolsonaro made controversial statements about the virus, including calling it a "little flu," and promoting unproven treatments like hydroxychloroquine. Without scientific proof, malaria drugs are widely used in Brazil against the covid global pandemic. This is driven by movements against the application of the vaccine that preach for "freedom" (Machado, 2021).

## **RESPONSIBILITY AND SOLUTIONS**

With the spread of global disinformation at an all time high, it is necessary to ask the question of who is responsible for standing up for the truth by fighting disinformation. Ultimately, this fight is a shared responsibility that involves various stakeholders, including governments, media organizations, technology companies, civil society groups, and individuals. Governments can take steps to regulate the spread of false information and promote media literacy, while media organizations and technology companies can work to verify information and combat disinformation on their platforms. There are several solutions that governments can implement to stop disinformation. First and foremost, governments can invest in media literacy programs to help citizens recognize and evaluate disinformation. These programs can teach individuals critical thinking skills and provide them with the tools they need to identify and combat fake news.

Also, governments can enforce existing laws and regulations that apply to disinformation, such as laws against hate speech, libel, and defamation. This can involve working with social media platforms and other online platforms to remove fake news and other harmful content. Governments can create regulations that require social media platforms to take measures to combat disinformation, such as implementing fact-checking systems and labeling

false content. Some countries have already passed laws that hold social media platforms accountable for the content that appears on their sites. Another thing governments can do is support independent fact-checking organizations by providing funding or other resources. These organizations can help to verify information and identify false content, which can help to combat the spread of disinformation.

Furthermore, governments can encourage transparency and accountability by requiring political campaigns to disclose their funding sources and by creating mechanisms for citizens to report disinformation. This can help to hold those who spread false information accountable for their actions. Lastly, governments can promote media diversity by supporting independent media outlets and ensuring that a variety of viewpoints are represented in the media. This can help to combat the spread of disinformation by providing citizens with a broader range of perspectives on important issues.

Ultimately, there are many solutions that governments can implement to stop disinformation, and it will likely require a multi-faceted approach that involves education, regulation, and collaboration with social media platforms and other stakeholders. Civil society groups can also play a critical role in promoting media literacy and holding those who spread disinformation accountable. On a micro-level, individuals have a responsibility to critically evaluate the information they consume and share, and to report false information when they encounter it. Fighting disinformation requires a collective effort from all stakeholders to ensure that accurate information is available to citizens and that democratic institutions are not undermined by the spread of false information.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the increased spread of information through the media and on the internet has led to both positive and negative impacts on global democracy. While it has promoted

transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in democratic processes, it has also led to the spread of disinformation, propaganda, and fake news, resulting in polarization and the undermining of elections. The spread of disinformation is a growing concern for democratic societies around the world, and it is important to examine its implications on democracy. Despite the limitations of democracy under global capitalism, there is still a fight for a system that resembles true democracy. All the while, the role of media and digital technology in promoting transparency, citizen participation, and challenging traditional power structures cannot be overstated. The increased access to information, the ability to expose corruption and human rights abuses, and the democratization of the media landscape have all contributed to a more vibrant and inclusive democratic society. However, it is important to recognize that these developments are not without their challenges, including limited media freedom and political and economic pressures on media organizations.

Equivocally, the spread of disinformation and propaganda through media and the internet is a growing threat to democracy worldwide. It can discredit protests, polarize public opinion, and undermine the legitimacy of elections. Disinformation campaigns can be used to manipulate public opinion, create division, and erode trust in democratic institutions. This can lead to a fragmented and polarized public discourse, where compromise and dialogue become increasingly difficult. The Arab Spring is an example of how digital media played a crucial role in organizing and mobilizing protesters, leading to the downfall of authoritarian regimes. However, disinformation also played a significant role in shaping the narrative and outcomes of the protests. The case of the United States demonstrates how disinformation has contributed to political polarization and influenced political rhetoric, media polarization, and social media algorithms. While digital media can enable democratic participation and facilitate the spread of information, it is essential to recognize that it can also be used to manipulate public opinion and undermine democracy. In the case of Facebook and WhatsApp, which are both owned by the same business group, these conglomerates have played a significant role in disseminating false

information during elections. The 2018 Brazilian presidential election was marked by a disinformation war, where false information was spread to undermine the legitimacy of elections and suppress voter turnout. In addition, both Bolsonaro and Trump have been criticized for downplaying the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting unproven treatments, which has had serious consequences for public health.

The widespread use of social media and the increasing sophistication of disinformation campaigns highlight the need for increased regulation and oversight of digital platforms to ensure that democracy is not undermined by the spread of false information. It is important for individuals to be vigilant and critically evaluate the information they consume, and for governments to take steps to protect the integrity of the democratic process. We must work to promote transparency and accountability, and to ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard and represented. Only then can we hope to safeguard and strengthen our democratic systems for future generations. As we move forward, it is important to continue to work towards a more transparent and accountable society, where the voices of all citizens can be heard and where traditional power structures are challenged and disrupted. Under these circumstances, we can create a society that is truly democratic and inclusive for all. The conversation around disinformation and its impact on democracy will continue, and solutions must be found to address this issue and promote a more informed and educated society.

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