

RO'Neill's initial response to reading Jonathan Haidt's essay for May 11

Thanks for the summary that appeared on the email. I thought it was very accurate. My comments reflect being an active Facebook user for many years, a selective user of YouTube for when I've broken something that I need to fix, but a mostly dissatisfied non-user for Instagram and Twitter.

In addition, I would accentuate the article's premise that the posts that trigger emotions, especially anger in out-groups, get the most shares and likes on Facebook. I also agree about confirmation bias been a very strong selective emotion, and share the worry that dissent on college campuses has been stifled by self censoring as a result of social media and wokeness. A future technology that should worry the both the left and the right is that artificial intelligence can spit out huge amounts of misinformation from both the left and the right as well as foreign countries. Deep fake video construction is here already and is likely to accelerate. it's naturally very convincing since we see it with our own eyes.

One way of testing these summary ideas is to see if it applies to other issues other than just polarization politically in the US today. One topic for an exercise's sake is legalization of marijuana and other soft drugs from the 1960s till now. Media of various types did introduce the two sides to each other's arguments, one pro marijuana despite possible lung cancer and inducing general laziness, versus the slippery slope argument that it typically leads to really hazardous drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine and opioids. Of course in the 60s the newspapers carried many articles that LSD would cause genetic defects and cause people to permanently lose their minds, whereas recent articles on Microdosing LSD make what appear to be dubious claims of greater creativity. Importantly, the number and percentage of disenfranchised poor inner-city minorities that are in prisons on marijuana charges today is outrageous in my opinion, and social media has actually helped in publicizing this serious problem. social media I think improved the cross-aisle discussions and didn't silence good citizens. It probably varies state by state, but it seems as though the political extremists usually didn't get more power because of social media on this more minor issue used as a test.

Of course the most important part from Haight is the mitigation section. Without really being a student of this I would advocate for ending closed

party primaries because it puts too much power in the hands of too few party leaders, leads to loss of choice at the polls for the moderate majority, and leads to extremism rather than moderation. Second, as part of the exhausted majority I would like to see more controls on FaceBook of unknown and untraceable content, especially that generated by bots. Last, When I think of my own childhood I especially agree that my grandkids and future generations should be allowed and encouraged to have more free play with other kids at playgrounds. There's obviously going to be some growing pains and lumps and bumps due to this, but that often teaches invaluable lessons as one matures to become an adult.