

# Free Speech, Regulations and Censorship

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**By Dave Havir**

BIG SANDY, Texas—When we look at the countries around the world, we see the challenges of people trying to live with liberty and freedom. Even in times of peace, government systems provide an atmosphere where leaders accumulate power and money, while the general populace suffers.

And how do the leaders continue to establish their power base to collect more money?

Whether the style of government is a dictatorship or a form of democracy, the leaders seek power through their elections and their official narrative (which is often called propaganda).

In this article, I want to address the narrative topic. I will post some recent articles that have to do with free speech, regulations and censorship. You will see articles with contrasting points of view. The first two articles are posted in their lengthy entirety (all 7,083 and 1,684 words)—to give the full progressive point of view. The last five articles (3,333 words) give the conservative point of view. (If the longer articles start to wear you out, you can always jump ahead to the shorter articles.)

As you study this subject, I recommend that we all keep our eyes on the ball.



Looking back to April 2022, an article by Barack Obama titled “Disinformation Is a Threat to Our Democracy” was posted at [barackobama.medium.com](http://barackobama.medium.com) on April 21, 2022. Following is the article.

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Hello, Stanford. It is great to be in California and back in beautiful Palo Alto. Coming here always makes me want to go back to college, although an 18-year-old Barack Obama would not have gotten in. I got more serious, later.

I want to thank the Cyber Policy Center here at Stanford for hosting this event. I want to thank Tiana for that outstanding introduction, and for all the work that you are doing. I want to thank a great friend and a remarkable public servant and Ambassador of Russia, during very difficult times, and one of my top advisers, Michael McFaul, for being here.

Michelle and I set up the Obama Foundation to train the next generation of leaders, and I think you saw in Tiana, the example of the kind of remarkable leadership that's out there, with the talent and vision to lead us forward, as long as old people get out of the way.

During some of the darkest days of World War II, American philosopher, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote the following, "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."

We're living through another tumultuous, dangerous moment in history. All of us have been horrified by Russia's brutal invasion of the Ukraine. A nuclear-armed despot's response to a neighboring state whose only provocation is its desire to be independent and democratic. An invasion of this scale hasn't been seen in Europe since World War II, and we've all witnessed the resulting death and destruction, and the displacement, in real time.

The stakes are enormous, and the courage displayed by ordinary Ukrainians has been extraordinary and demands our support. Unfortunately, a war in the Ukraine isn't happening in a vacuum. Vladimir Putin's aggression is part of a larger trend, even if similar levels of oppression and lawless and violence and suffering don't always attract the same levels of attention if they happen outside of Europe,

Autocrats and aspiring strongmen have become emboldened around the globe. They're actively subverting democracy, they're undermining hard-won human rights, they're ignoring international law.

Democratic backsliding is not restricted to distant lands. Right here, in the United States of America, we just saw a sitting president deny the clear results of an election and help incite a violent insurrection at the nation's capital. Not only that, but a majority of his party, including many who occupy some of the highest offices in the land, continue to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the last election, and are using it to justify laws that restrict the vote, making it easier to overturn the will of the people in states where they hold power.

But for those of us who believe in democracy and the rule of law, this should serve as a wake-up call. We have to admit that, at least in the years since the Cold War ended, democracies have grown dangerously complacent.

Too often, we've taken freedom for granted. What recent events remind us, is that democracy is neither inevitable nor self-executed. Citizens like us have to nurture it. We have to tend to it and fight for it, and as our circumstances change, we have to be willing to look at ourselves critically, making reforms that can allow democracy, not just to survive, but to thrive.

That won't be easy. A lot of factors have contributed to the weakening of democratic institutions around the world. One of those factors is globalization which has helped lift hundreds and millions out of poverty, most notably in China and India, but which, along with automation has also ended entire economies, accelerated global inequality, and left millions of others feeling betrayed and angry at existing political institutions.

There is the increased mobility and urbanization of modern life, which further shakes up societies, including existing family structures and gender roles. Here at home, we've seen a steady decline in the number of people participating in unions, civic organizations and houses of worship, mediating institutions that once served as a kind of communal glue.

Internationally, the rise of China as well as chronic political dysfunction, here in the U.S. and in Europe, not to mention the near collapse of the global financial system in 2008, has made it easier for leaders in other countries to discount democracy's appeal. And as once marginalized groups demand a seat at the table, politicians have found a new audience for old-fashioned appeals to racial and ethnic, religious or national solidarity.

In the rush to protect us from them, virtues like tolerance and respect for democratic processes start to look, not just expendable, but like a threat to our way of life.

So if we're going to strengthen democracy, we'll have to address all of these strengths. We'll have to come up with new models for a more inclusive, equitable capitalism. We'll have to reform our political institutions in ways that allow people to be heard and give them real agency. We'll have to tell better stories about ourselves and how we can live together, despite our differences.

And that's why I'm here today, on Stanford's campus, in the heart of Silicon Valley, where so much of the digital, because I'm convinced that right now one of the biggest impediments to doing all of this, indeed, of the biggest reasons for democracies weakening is the profound change that's taking place in how we communicate and consume information.

Now let me start off by saying I am not a Luddite, although it is true that sometimes I have to ask my daughters how to work basic functions on my phone. I am amazed by the internet. It's connected billions of people around the world, put the collected knowledge of centuries at our fingertips. It's made our economies vastly more efficient, accelerated medical advances, opened up new opportunities, allowed people with shared interests to find each other.

I might never have been elected president if it hadn't been for websites like, and I'm dating myself, MySpace, MeetUp and Facebook who allowed an army of young volunteers to organize, raise money, spread our message. That's what elected me.

And since then, we've all witnessed the ways that activists use social media platforms to register dissent and shine a light on injustice and mobilize people on issues like climate change and racial justice.

So the internet and the accompanying information revolution has been transformative. And there's no turning back. But like all advances in technology, this progress has had unintended consequences that sometimes come at a price. And in this case, we see that our new information ecosystem is turbocharging some of humanity's worst impulses.

Not all of these effects are intentional or even avoidable. They're simply the consequence of billions of humans suddenly plugged in one instant 24/7 glob-

al information stream. Forty years ago, if you were a conservative in rural Texas, you weren't necessarily offended by what was going on in San Francisco's Castro District because you didn't know what was going on.

If you lived in an impoverished Yemeni village, you had no insight into the spending habits of the Kardashians. For some such exposure may be eye opening, perhaps even liberating, but others may experience that exposure as a direct affront to their traditions, their belief systems, their place in society. Then you have the sheer proliferation of content and the splintering of information and audiences. That's made democracy more complicated.

I'll date myself again. If you were watching TV here in the United States between about 1960 and 1990, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *The Jeffersons*. Chances are you were watching one of the big three networks. And this had its own problems, particularly the ways in which programming often excluded voices and perspectives of women and people of color and other folks outside of the mainstream. But it did fortify a sense of shared culture and it came to the news, at least, citizens across the political spectrum tended to operate using a shared set of facts, what they saw, what they heard from Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley or others.

Today, of course, we occupy entirely different media realities, fed directly into our phones. You don't even have to look up. And it's made all of us more prone to what psychologists call confirmation bias, the tendency to select facts and opinions that reinforce our preexisting worldviews and filter out those that don't.

So inside our personal information bubbles, our assumptions, our blind spots, our prejudices aren't challenged, they're reinforced. And naturally we're more likely to react negatively to those consuming different facts and opinions. All of which deepens existing racial and religious and cultural divides.

It's fair to say then that some of the current challenges we face are inherent to a fully connected world. Our brains aren't accustomed to taking in this much information this fast, and a lot of us are experiencing overload. But not all problems we're seeing now are a byproduct of this new technology. They're also the result of very specific choices made by the companies that have come to dominate the internet generally and social media platforms in particular. Decisions that, intentionally or not, have made democracies more vulnerable.

Now I'm at Stanford. Most of you know the story by now. Twenty years ago, pillars of web search were comprehensiveness, relevance and speed. But with the rise of social media and the need to better understand people's online behavior, in order to sell more advertising, companies want to collect more data. More companies optimized for personalization, engagement and speed. And unfortunately, it turns out that inflammatory, polarizing content attracts and engages.

Other features of these platforms have compounded the problem. For example, the way content looks on your phone, as well as the veil of anonymity that platforms provide their users. A lot of times this makes it impossible to tell the difference between, say, a peer-reviewed article by Dr. Anthony Fauci and a miracle cure being pitched by a huckster.

And meanwhile, sophisticated actors from political consultants to commercial interests, to intelligence arms of foreign powers can game platform algorithms or artificially boost the reach of the deceptive or harmful messages.

Of course, this business model has proven to be wildly successful. For more and more of us, search and social media platforms aren't just our window into the internet; they serve as our primary source of news and information.

No one tells us that the window is blurred, subject to unseen distortions and subtle manipulations. All we see is a constant feed of content where useful factual information and happy diversions, and cat videos, flow alongside lies, conspiracy theories, junk science, quackery, White supremacist, racist tracts, misogynist screeds. And over time, we lose our capacity to distinguish between fact, opinion and wholesale fiction. Or maybe we just stop caring.

And all of us, including our children, learn that if you want to rise above the crowd, above the din, if you want to be liked and shared, and yes, go viral! Then peddling controversy, outrage, even hate often gives you an edge.

Now it's true, tech companies and social media platforms are not the only distributors of toxic information. I promise you; I spend a lot of time in Washington, right?

In fact, some of the most outrageous content on the Web originates from traditional media. What social media platforms have done, though, thanks to their increasing market dominance and their emphasis on speed, is accelerate the decline of newspapers and other traditional news sources.

There are still brand name newspapers and magazines, not to mention network news broadcasts, NPR other outlets that have adapted to the new digital environment while maintaining the highest standards of journalistic integrity. But as more and more ad revenue flows to the platforms that disseminate the news, rather than that money going to the newsrooms that report it, publishers, reporters, editors, they all feel the pressure to maximize engagement in order to compete.

Reporters start worrying about, "I gotta tweet something, cause if I don't, I may be out of a job." That's the information environment we now live in. It's not just that these platforms have—and there are exceptions—been largely agnostic regarding the kind of information available and connections made on their sites. It's that in the competition between truth and falsehood, cooperation and conflict, the very design of these platforms seems to be tilting us in the wrong direction.

And we're seeing the results take over. The fact that scientists developed safe, effective vaccines in record time is an unbelievable achievement. And yet despite the fact that we've now, essentially clinically tested the vaccine on billions of people worldwide, around 1 in 5 Americans is still willing to put themselves at risk and put their families at risk rather than get vaccinated. People are dying because of misinformation.

I already mentioned the 2020 presidential election. President Trump's own attorney general has said that the Justice Department uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud. A review of the ballots in Arizona's largest county, the results of which were endorsed by some pretty courageous local Re-

publicans, because many of them were harassed and received death threats, actually more votes for President Biden and fewer votes for President Trump. And yet today, as we speak, a majority of Republicans still insist that President Biden's victory was not legitimate. That's a lot of people.

In Myanmar, it's been well-documented that hate speech shared on Facebook played a role in the murderous campaign targeting the Rohingya community. Social media platforms have been similarly implicated in fanning ethnic violence in Ethiopia, far-right extremism in Europe.

Authoritarian regimes and strongmen around the world from China to Hungary, the Philippines. Brazil have learned to conscript social media platforms to turn their own populations against groups they don't like, whether it's ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, journalists, political opponents. And of course, autocrats like Putin have used these platforms as a strategic weapon against democratic countries that they consider a threat.

People like Putin and Steve Bannon, for that matter, understand it's not necessary for people to believe this information in order to weaken democratic institutions. You just have to flood a country's public square with enough raw sewage. You just have to raise enough questions, spread enough dirt, plant enough conspiracy theorizing that citizens no longer know what to believe.

Once they lose trust in their leaders, in mainstream media, in political institutions, in each other, in the possibility of truth, the game's won. And as Putin discovered leading up to the 2016 election, our own social media platforms are well designed to support such a mission, such a project.

Russians could study and manipulate patterns in the engagement ranking system on a Facebook or YouTube. And as a result, Russian's state sponsor trolls could almost guarantee that whatever disinformation they put out there would reach millions of Americans. And that the more inflammatory the story, the quicker it spread.

I've been writing my memoirs lately, including reflections on events leading up to that election. The regrets I have, the things I might have missed. No one in my administration was surprised that Russia was attempting to meddle in our election. They had been doing that for years. Or that it was using social media in these efforts.

Before the election, I directed our top intelligence officials to expose those efforts to the press and to the public. What does still nag at me, though? Was my failure to fully appreciate at the time just how susceptible we had become to lies and conspiracy theories, despite having spent years being a target of disinformation myself.

Putin didn't do that. He didn't have to. We did it to ourselves.

So where do we go from here?

If we do nothing, I am convinced the trends that we're seeing will get worse. New technologies are already challenging the way we regulate currency, how we keep consumers safe from fraud. And with the emergence of AI, disinformation will grow more sophisticated. I've already seen demonstrations of

deepfake technology that show what looks like me on a screen saying stuff I did not say. It's a strange experience, people.

Without some standards, implications of this technology, for our elections, for our legal system, for our democracy, for rules of evidence, for our entire social order are frightening and profound.

Fortunately, I am convinced that it is possible to preserve the transformative power and promise of the open internet, while at least mitigating the worst of its harms. And I believe that those of you in the tech community, soon to be in the tech community, not just its corporate leaders, but employees at every level have to be part of the solution.

The essence of this place, what put Silicon Valley on the map is a spirit of innovation. That's what led to the globally integrated internet, and all its remarkable applications. What we've now learned is the product has some design flaws. There are some bugs in the software. We don't have to just leave it like that. Through the same spirit of innovation. We can make it better.

So I want to make some general suggestions for what that work might look like. But before I do, let me offer a few stipulations so we don't get bogged down in some well-worn, not always productive arguments.

Number one, media companies, tech companies, social media platforms did not create the divisions in our society, here or in other parts of the world. Social media did not create racism or white supremacist groups. It didn't create the kind of ethno-nationalism that Putin's enraptured with. It didn't create sexism, class conflict, religious strife, greed, envy, all the deadly sins. All these things existed long before the first tweet or Facebook poke.

Solving the disinformation problem won't cure all that ails our democracies or tears at the fabric of our world, but it can help tamp down divisions and let us rebuild the trust and solidarity needed to make our democracy stronger. And to take on anti-women mentalities, and deal with racism in our society, and build bridges between people. It can do that.

Second, we aren't going to get rid of all offensive or inflammatory content on the web. That is a strawman. We'd be wrong to try. Freedom of speech is at the heart of every democratic society in America those protections are enshrined in the First Amendment to our Constitution. There's a reason it came first in the Bill of Rights.

I'm pretty close to a First Amendment absolutist. I believe that in most instances the answer to bad speech is good speech. I believe that the free, robust, sometimes antagonistic exchange of ideas produces better outcomes and a healthier society.

No Democratic government can or should do what China, for example, is doing, simply telling people what they can and cannot say or publish while trying to control what others say about their country abroad. And I don't have a lot of confidence that any single individual or organization, private or public, should be charged or do a good job at determining who gets to hear what.

That said, the First Amendment is a check on the power of the state. It doesn't apply to private companies like Facebook or Twitter, any more than it applies to editorial decisions made by *The New York Times* or Fox News. It never has. Social media companies already make choices about what is or is not allowed on their platforms and how that content appears, both explicitly through content, moderation, and implicitly through algorithms.

The problem is, we often don't know what principles govern those decisions. And on an issue of enormous public interest, there has been little public debate and practically no democratic oversight.

Three, any rules we come up with to govern the distribution of content on the Internet will involve value judgments. None of us are perfectly objective. What we consider unshakeable truth today may prove to be totally wrong tomorrow. But that doesn't mean some things aren't truer than others or that we can't draw lines between opinions, facts, honest mistakes, intentional deceptions.

We make these distinctions all the time in our daily lives, at work, in school, at home, in sports, and we can do the same when it comes to Internet content, as long as we agree on a set of principles, some core values to guide the work. So, in the interest of full transparency, here's what I think our guiding principles should be.

The way I'm going to evaluate any proposal touching on social media and the Internet is whether it strengthens or weakens the prospects for a healthy, inclusive democracy, whether it encourages robust debate and respect for our differences, whether it reinforces rule of law and self-governance, whether it helps us make collective decisions based on the best available information, and whether it recognizes the rights and freedoms and dignity of all our citizens.

Whatever changes contribute to that vision, I'm for. Whatever erodes that vision, I'm against, just so you know. (Laughter.)

All right. With that as my starting point, I believe we have to address not just the supply of toxic information, but also the demand for it. On the supply side, tech platforms need to accept that they play a unique role in how we, as a people and people around the world, are consuming information and that their decisions have an impact on every aspect of society. With that power comes accountability, and in democracies like ours, at least, the need for some democratic oversight.

For years, social media companies have resisted that kind of accountability. They're not unique in that regard. Every private corporation wants to do anything it wants. So, the social media platforms called themselves neutral platforms with no editorial role in what their users saw. They insisted that the content people see on social media has no impact on their beliefs or behavior—(laughter)—even though their business models and their profits are based on telling advertisers the exact opposite.

Now, the good news is, is that almost all the big tech platforms now acknowledge some responsibility for content on their platforms, and they're investing in large teams of people to monitor it. Given the sheer volume of content, this



strategy can feel like a game of whack-a-mole. Still, in talking to people at these companies, I believe they are sincere in trying to limit content that engages in hate speech, encourages violence, or poses a threat to public safety. They genuinely are concerned about it and they want to do something about it.

But while content moderation can limit the distribution of clearly dangerous content, it doesn't go far enough. Users who want to spread disinformation have become experts at pushing right up to the line of what at least published company policies allow. And at those margins, social media platforms tend not to want to do anything, not just because they don't want to be accused of censorship, because they still have a financial incentive to keep as many users engaged as possible. More importantly, these companies are still way too guarded about how exactly their standards operate, or how their engagement ranking systems influence what goes viral and what doesn't.

Now, some companies have been taking the next step in managing toxic content, experimenting with new product designs that, to use just one example, add friction to slow the spread of potentially harmful content. And that kind of innovation is a step in the right direction. It should be applauded, but I also think decisions like this shouldn't be left solely to private interests. These decisions affect all of us, and just like every other industry that has a big impact in our society, that means these big platforms need to be subject to some level of public oversight and regulation.

Right now, a lot of the regulatory debate centers on Section 230 of the United States code, which, as some of you know, says the tech companies generally can't be held liable for most content that other people post on their platforms. But let's face it, these platforms are not like the old phone company.

While I'm not convinced that wholesale repeal of Section 230 is the answer, it is clear that tech companies have changed dramatically over the last 20 years. And we need to consider reforms to Section 230 to account for those changes, including whether platforms should be required to have a higher standard of care, when it comes to advertising on their site.

And by the way, I believe and I've seen that regulation and innovation are not mutually exclusive. Here in the United States, we have a long history of regulating new technologies in the name of public safety, from cars and airplanes to prescription drugs to appliances. And while companies initially always complain that the rules are going to stifle innovation and destroy the industry, the truth is, is that a good regulatory environment usually ends up spurring innovation because it raises the bar on safety and quality.

And it turns out that innovation can meet that higher bar. And if consumers trust that new technology is doing right by them and is safe, they're more likely to use it. And if properly structured, regulation can promote competition and keep incumbents from freezing out new innovators.

A regulatory structure, a smart one, needs to be in place, designed in consultation with tech companies, and experts and communities that are affected, including communities of color and others that sometimes are not well

represented here in Silicon Valley, that will allow these companies to operate effectively while also slowing the spread of harmful content. In some cases, industry standards may replace or substitute for regulation, but regulation has to be part of the answer.

Beyond that, tech companies need to be more transparent about how they operate. So much of the conversation around disinformation is focused on what people post. The bigger issue is what content these platforms promote. Algorithms have evolved to the point where nobody on the outside of these companies can accurately predict what they'll do, unless they're really sophisticated and spend a lot of time tracking it. And sometimes, even the people who build them aren't sure. That's a problem.

In a democracy, we can rightly expect companies to subject the design of their products and services to some level of scrutiny. At minimum, they should have to share that information with researchers and regulators who are charged with keeping the rest of the safe.

This may seem like an odd example and forgive me, you vegans out there, but if a meat packing company has a proprietary technique to keep our hot dogs fresh and clean, they don't have to reveal to the world what that technique is. They do have to tell the meat inspector.

In the same way, tech companies should be able to protect their intellectual property while also following certain safety standards that we, as a country, not just them, have agreed are necessary for the greater good. And we've seen this as part of the Platform Accountability and Transparency Act that's being proposed by a bipartisan group of senators here in the United States. It doesn't happen often. And we've also seen it negotiated in Europe as part of the European Union's Digital Services Act.

Again, we don't expect tech companies to solve all these problems on their own. There are folks in these companies and in this community who have shown extraordinary good faith in some cases, but that's not enough.

We do expect these companies to affirm the importance of our democratic institutions, not dismiss them, and to work to find the right combination of regulation and industry standards that will make democracy stronger. And because companies recognize the often dangerous relationship between social media, nationalism, domestic hate groups, they do need to engage with vulnerable populations about how to put better safeguards in place to protect minority populations, ethnic populations, religious minorities, wherever they operate.

For example, in the United States, they should be working with, not always contrary to, those groups that are trying to prevent voter suppression and specifically has targeted black and brown communities. In other words, these companies need to have some other North Star other than just making money and increasing market share. Fix the problem that, in part, they helped create, but also to stand for something bigger.

And to the employees of these companies, and to the students here at Stanford who might well be future employees of these companies, you have

the power to move things in the right direction. You can advocate for change; you can be part of this redesign. And if not, you can vote with your feet and go work with companies that are trying to do the right thing.

That's on the supply side. Now, let's talk about the demand side of the equation.

It starts with breaking through our information bubbles. Look, I understand that there are a whole bunch of people in this country who have views diametrically opposed to mine. I promise, they tell me all the time. (Laughter.) I get it. I am not suggesting that all of us have to spend our days reading opinions we disagree with or looking for media stories that fundamentally don't share our values, but it is possible to broaden our perspectives.

An interesting study came out recently, and this is just one study, so take it with a grain of salt. The researchers paid a large group of regular FOX News watchers to watch CNN for almost a month. And these were not swing voters, these were hard core, Hannity, Carlson fans, right? They're right there.

And what the researchers found was that, at the end of the month, people's views on certain issues, like whether voting by mail should be allowed or whether electing Joe Biden would lead to more violence against police, on some of these issues, their views are changed by five, eight, 10 points. These people didn't suddenly turn into liberals. I am sure they still don't like me. (Laughter.) But at the margins, they had reshaped their perspectives in meaningful ways.

Studies like this show our opinions aren't fixed, and that means our divisions aren't fixed either if we can agree on some common baseline effects and agree on some common baseline of how we debate and sort out our disagreements.

The divisions that exist in this country aren't going away any time soon, but the information we get, the stories we tell ourselves can, as Lincoln said, encourage the better angels of our nature. It can also encourage the worst. And a healthy democracy depends on our better angels being encouraged.

As citizens, we have to take it upon ourselves to become better consumers of news, looking at sources, thinking before we share and teaching our kids to become critical thinkers who know how to evaluate sources and separate opinion from fact. In fact, a number of school districts around the country are working to train kids in this kind of online media literacy, not around any particular ideological perspective, but just how to check a source. Does this person who's typing in his mother's basement in his underwear seem a credible authority on climate change? (Laughter.) That's something we should all want to support.

Part of this project is also going to require us to find creative ways to reinvigorate quality journalism, including local journalism, because one of the challenges we have, part of the reason that you've seen increased polarization, is all media has become nationalized and hence, more ideological.

And one encouraging trend has been a number of nonprofit newsrooms beginning to pop up in places like Baltimore, Houston, my hometown of Chicago, all aimed at providing essential coverage of what's happening locally and in statehouses. And that's an example of how new models of journalism are possible, along with smart ways for communities to reinvigorate local news.

Companies here in Silicon Valley that have reaped some of the largest benefits from the Internet revolution, those companies need to find ways to support them. And I know Congress has been engaged with some of these companies to look at how can you get more revenue back into local news.

We should also think about how to build civic institutions for a new generation. I mentioned the decline of what are called mediating institutions—unions, Rotary clubs, bowling leagues, right? But the thing is, studies show that if you participated in an organization, like Student Council, which I did not—(laughter)—or the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, groups that allow young people to practice learning, debating, voting, making decisions together, then you're much more likely to vote and be an active citizen.

Those habits matter. We need to figure out ways to give young people and the rest of us the chance to build up civic muscles. And we have to figure out how to do that, not just in the real world, but also on virtual platforms where young people are spending time.

This is one of the things we're focused on at the Obama Foundation. And great work is also being done by organizations like the MIT Center for Constructive Communication, which is making online conversations more civil and productive, and the News Literacy Project, which is building new tools to help people separate fact from fiction.

And finally, it is important to reinforce these norms and values on an international scale. This is a globally integrated Internet. There's value in that, but it means that as we're shaping roles, we have to engage the rest of the world.

Countries like China and Russia have already tried to paint democracy as unworkable, and authoritarianism is the only path to order. China's built a great firewall around the Internet, turning it into a vehicle for domestic indoctrination and surveillance. And now, they're exporting some of those same technologies, those same with similar product designs to other countries.

In Russia, Putin has weaponized ethnonationalism through disinformation, waging hate campaigns against domestic opponents, delegitimizing democracy itself. And of course, he's escalated such efforts as part of his war in Ukraine.

As the world's leading democracy, we have to set a better example. We should be at the lead on these discussions internationally, not in the rear. Right now, Europe is forging ahead with some of the most sweeping legislation nearest regulate the abuses that are seen in big tech companies. And their approach may not be exactly right for the United States, but it points to the need for us to coordinate with other democracies.

We need to find our voice in this global conversation, and we've done it before. After World War II, after witnessing how mass media and propaganda had fanned the flames of hate, we put a framework in place that would ensure our broadcast system was compatible with democracy. We required a certain amount of children's educational programming, instituted the Fairness Doctrine. Newsrooms changed practices to maximize accuracy.

And the task before us is harder now. We can't go back to the way things were with three TV stations and newspapers in every major city, not just because of the proliferation of content, but because that content can now move around the world in an instant. And yes, our societies are far more polarized today than they were in the '50s and '60s right after the war. And yes, progress will require tradeoffs and hard choices, and we won't get it right all at once. But that's how democracy works.

I'm not going to strain this metaphor, but if you think about the U.S. Constitution as software for running a society, really innovative design. It, too, had some pretty big initial bugs. Slavery—(laughter)—you're discriminating against entire classes of people. Women couldn't vote. Even white men without property couldn't vote, couldn't participate. What part of, "We, the people?" So, we came up with a bunch of patches, the 13th Amendment, the 14th Amendment, 15th Amendment, 19th Amendment. We continued to perfect our union.

And the good news is we've got a new generation of activists that seem to be ready to keep moving. Besides Tiana, who introduced me, I've had the privilege of meeting young leaders in our Obama Foundation network, like Timothy Franklyn, who founded the National School of Journalism and Public Discourse in India, to train journalists who are committed to justice and democracy in that country; or Sandor Lederer from Hungary, who founded K-Monitor. That's a group that helps average citizens understand how public money is spent and flags potential corruption; or Juliana Tafur, who's using documentary film and curated workshops to reduce polarization and help Americans connect across differences.

Young people everywhere are recognizing that this is a problem. They're not just griping about it, they're doing their part to fix it. And the rest of us need to follow their lead.

But these idealistic, innovative young people, they're going to need those of us who are already in positions of power, those of us like me who have a platform to get our act together. If Congress is too polarized to pass anything, we probably won't make the kind of progress we need. If Republican elected officials with a few notable courageous exceptions, and I'm not going to mention them, because I don't want them to be criticized for having been praised by me—(laughter)—but if the vast majority of elected Republican officials keep insisting that there's nothing wrong with saying an election was stolen without a shred of evidence, when they know better, this isn't going to work.

Each of us, whether we work at a tech company or consume social media, whether we are a parent, a legislator, an advertiser on one of these platforms, now's the time to pick a side. We have a choice right now. Do we allow our democracy to wither or do we make it better? That's the choice we face, and it is a choice worth embracing.

In the early days of the Internet and social media, it was a certain joy in finding new ways to connect, and organize and stay informed. There was so much promise. I know, I was there. And right now, just like politics itself, just like our public lives, social media has a grimness to it. We're so fatalistic

about the steady stream of bile and vitriol that's on there, but it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, if we're going to succeed, it can't be that way.

All of us have an opportunity to do what America has always done at our best, which is to recognize that even when the source code is working, the status quo isn't, and we can build something better together. This is an opportunity. It's a chance that we should welcome for governments to take on a big, important problem and prove that democracy and innovation can coexist. It's a chance for companies to do the right thing. You'll still make money, but you'll feel better. (Laughter.)

It's a chance for employees of those companies to push them to do the right thing, because you've seen what's out there and you want to feel better. It's a chance for journalists and their supporters to figure out how do we adapt old institutions and those core values that made those institutions valuable? How do we adapt that to a new age?

It is a chance for all of us to fight for truth, not absolute truth, not a fixed truth, but to fight for what, deep down, we know is more true, is right. It's a chance for us to do that not just because we're afraid of what will happen if we don't, but because we're hopeful about what can happen if we do.

Over the last couple of months, we've seen what it looks like when a society loses the ability to distinguish truth from fiction. Mike McFaul and I were talking backstage, and my first time in Moscow as president, we gathered with all these civic activists. Putin at that time had receded from the foreground, and you had all these folks who are working to make Russia better. And we were reminiscing and thinking about that moment of possibility and what might have happened to him.

And now, in Russia, those who control the information have led public opinion further and further and further and further away from the facts, until all of a sudden, almost a quarter of the country's combat power has been damaged or destroyed in what the government is claiming is a, quote, special military operation. That's what happens when societies lose track of what is true.

On the other hand, the last couple of months have also shown what can happen when the world pushes back. We have seen it in the people, including some of our Obama leaders in Europe who are organizing on social media to help Ukrainian refugees, offering food and shelter and jobs and rides. We've seen IT in an army of volunteers who work to break through Russia propaganda and reach out to mothers of Russian soldiers, asking them to call on Putin to bring their sons home. And we've seen it in the combination of old and new media like a viral image of a Russian TV editor walking into a live shot with a handwritten sign, calling for an end to the war.

The handwritten sign was a tool. TV's a tool. The Internet is a tool. Social media is a tool. At the end of the day, tools don't control us. We control them, and we can remake them. It's up to each of us to decide what we value, and then use the tools we've been given to advance those values. And I believe we should use every tool at our disposal to secure our greatest gift, a gov-

ernment of, by, for the people for generations to come. And I hope you agree with me, and I look forward to you joining in the work.

Thank you very much, everybody.



An article by Melissa De Witte, Taylor Kubota and Ker Than titled “ ‘Regulation Has to Be Part of the Answer’ to Combating Online Disinformation, Barack Obama Said at Stanford Event” was posted at [news.stanford.edu](https://news.stanford.edu) on April 21, 2022. Following is the article.

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During a speech at Stanford University on Thursday, former U.S. President Barack Obama presented his audience with a stark choice: “Do we allow our democracy to wither, or do we make it better?”

Over the course of an hour-long address, Obama outlined the threat that disinformation online, including deepfake technology powered by AI, poses to democracy as well as ways he thought the problems might be addressed in the United States and abroad.

“This is an opportunity, it’s a chance that we should welcome for governments to take on a big important problem and prove that democracy and innovation can coexist,” Obama said.

Obama, who served as the 44th president of the United States from 2009 to 2017, was the keynote speaker at a one-day symposium, titled “Challenges to Democracy in the Digital Information Realm,” co-hosted by the Stanford Cyber Policy Center and the Obama Foundation on the Stanford campus on April 21.

The event brought together people working in technology, policy, and academia for panel discussions on topics ranging from the role of government in establishing online trust, the relationship between democracy and tech companies, and the threat of digital authoritarians.

Obama told a packed audience of more than 600 people in CEMEX auditorium—as well as more than 250,000 viewers tuning in online—that everyone is part of the solution to make democracy stronger in the digital age and that all of us—from technology companies and their employees to students and ordinary citizens—must work together to adapt old institutions and values to a new era of information. “If we do nothing, I’m convinced the trends that we’re seeing will get worse,” he said.

Introducing the former president was Michael McFaul, director at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and U.S. ambassador to Russia under Obama, and Stanford alum and Obama Foundation fellow, Tiana Epps-Johnson, BA ’08.

Epps-Johnson, who is the founder and executive director of the Center for Tech and Civic Life, recalled her time answering calls to an election protec-

tion hotline during the 2006 midterm election. She said the experience taught her an important lesson, which was that “the overall health of our democracy, whether we have a voting process that is fair and trustworthy, is more important than any one election outcome.”

Stanford freshman Evan Jackson said afterward that Obama’s speech resonated with him. “I use social media a lot, every day, and I’m always seeing all the fake news that can be spread easily. And I do understand that when you have controversy attached to what you’re saying, it can reach larger crowds,” Jackson said. “So if we do find a way to better contain the controversy and the fake news, it can definitely help our democracy stay powerful for our nation.”

### **The promise and perils technology poses to democracy**

In his keynote, Obama reflected on how technology has transformed the way people create and consume media. Digital and social media companies have upended traditional media—from local newspapers to broadcast television, as well as the role these outlets played in society at large.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the American public tuned in to one of three major networks, and while media from those earlier eras had their own set of problems—such as excluding women and people of color—they did provide people with a shared culture, Obama said.

Moreover, these media institutions, with established journalistic best practices for accuracy and accountability, also provided people with similar information: “When it came to the news, at least, citizens across the political spectrum tended to operate using a shared set of facts—what they saw or what they heard from Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley.”

Fast forward to today, where everyone has access to individualized news feeds that are fed by algorithms that reward the loudest and angriest voices (and which technology companies profit from). “You have the sheer proliferation of content, and the splintering of information and audiences,” Obama observed. “That’s made democracy more complicated.”

Facts are competing with opinions, conspiracy theories, and fiction. “For more and more of us, search and social media platforms aren’t just our window into the internet. They serve as our primary source of news and information,” Obama said. “No one tells us that the window is blurred, subject to unseen distortions, and subtle manipulations.”

The splintering of news sources has also made all of us more prone to what psychologists call “confirmation bias,” Obama said. “Inside our personal information bubbles, our assumptions, our blind spots, our prejudices aren’t challenged, they are reinforced and naturally, we’re more likely to react negatively to those consuming different facts and opinions—all of which deepens existing racial and religious and cultural divides.”

But the problem is not just that our brains can’t keep up with the growing amount of information online, Obama argued. “They’re also the result of very



specific choices made by the companies that have come to dominate the internet generally, and social media platforms in particular.”

The former president also made clear that he did not think technology was to blame for many of our social ills. Racism, sexism, and misogyny, all predate the internet, but technology has helped amplify them.

“Solving the disinformation problem won’t cure all that ails our democracies or tears at the fabric of our world, but it can help tamp down divisions and let us rebuild the trust and solidarity needed to make our democracy stronger,” Obama said.

He gave examples of how social media has fueled violence and extremism around the world. For example, leaders from countries such as Russia to China, Hungary, the Philippines, and Brazil have harnessed social media platforms to manipulate their populations. “Autocrats like Putin have used these platforms as a strategic weapon against democratic countries that they consider a threat,” Obama said.

He also called out emerging technologies such as AI for their potential to sow further discord online. “I’ve already seen demonstrations of deep fake technology that show what looks like me on a screen, saying stuff I did not say. It’s a strange experience people,” Obama said. “Without some standards, implications of this technology—for our elections, for our legal system, for our democracy, for rules of evidence, for our entire social order—are frightening and profound.”

### **‘Regulation has to be part of the answer’**

Obama discussed potential solutions for addressing some of the problems he viewed as contributing to a backsliding of democracy in the second half of his talk.

In an apt metaphor for a speech delivered in Silicon Valley, Obama compared the U.S. Constitution to software for running society. It had “a really innovative design,” Obama said, but also significant bugs. “Slavery. You can discriminate against entire classes of people. Women couldn’t vote. Even white men without property couldn’t vote, couldn’t participate, weren’t part of ‘We the People.’”

The amendments to the Constitution were akin to software patches, the former president said, that allowed us to “continue to perfect our union.”

Similarly, governments and technology companies should be willing to introduce changes aimed at improving civil discourse online and reducing the amount of disinformation on the internet, Obama said.

“The internet is a tool. Social media is a tool. At the end of the day, tools don’t control us. We control them. And we can remake them. It’s up to each of us to decide what we value and then use the tools we’ve been given to advance those values,” he said.

The former president put forth various solutions for combating online disinformation, including regulation, which many tech companies fiercely oppose.

“Here in the United States, we have a long history of regulating new technologies in the name of public safety, from cars and airplanes to prescription

drugs to appliances,” Obama said. “And while companies initially always complain that the rules are going to stifle innovation and destroy the industry, the truth is that a good regulatory environment usually ends up spurring innovation, because it raises the bar on safety and quality. And it turns out that innovation can meet that higher bar.”

In particular, Obama urged policymakers to rethink Section 230, enacted as part of the United States Communications Decency Act in 1996, which stipulates that generally, online platforms cannot be held liable for content that other people post on their website.

But technology has changed dramatically over the past two decades since Section 230 was enacted, Obama said. “These platforms are not like the old phone company.”

He added: “In some cases, industry standards may replace or substitute for regulation, but regulation has to be part of the answer.”

Obama also urged technology companies to be more transparent in how they operate and “at minimum” should share with researchers and regulators how some of their products and services are designed so there is some accountability.

The responsibility also lies with ordinary citizens, the former president said. “We have to take it upon ourselves to become better consumers of news—looking at sources, thinking before we share, and teaching our kids to become critical thinkers who know how to evaluate sources and separate opinion from fact.”

Obama warned that if the U.S. does not act on these issues, it risks being eclipsed in this arena by other countries. “As the world’s leading democracy, we have to set a better example. We should be able to lead on these discussions internationally, not [be] in the rear. Right now, Europe is forging ahead with some of the most sweeping legislation in years to regulate the abuses that are seen in big tech companies,” Obama said. “Their approach may not be exactly right for the United States, but it points to the need for us to coordinate with other democracies. We need to find our voice in this global conversation.”



An article by Jeanne DeAngelis titled “Obama’s Fundamental Manipulation of Free Speech” was posted at [americanthinker.com](http://americanthinker.com) on May 3, 2022. Following are excerpts of the article.

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Setting the stage for the DHS announcement of the Biden Administration’s Disinformation Governance Board recently, at a Stanford University Cyber Policy Center symposium entitled, “Challenges to Democracy in the Digital Information Realm,” Barack Obama emerged from behind his Joe Biden mask to deliver the keynote speech.

According to the anonymous author of the 2009 Department of Homeland Security treatise on “right-wing extremism,” government needs to help companies better “. . . recognize the often-dangerous relationship between social media, nationalism [and] domestic hate groups” like pro-lifers, ex-military, Second Amendment supporters, Christians, and America-First patriots.

Well aware that the voice of the people threatens the trajectory of the global elite agenda, the former president used the opportunity to double down on what he does best, which is to manipulate minds with clever word games. The stunning effort focused on convincing the naïve that government control of public discourse somehow strengthens “democracy.”

Attempting to persuade Americans that controlling free speech correlates with democratic non-complacency, Obama argued that limiting freedom “nurtures” democracy by instituting a policy that runs counter to freedom.

Credit where credit is due, the former president is masterful at presenting nonexistent consensuses as if they truly exist.

Take for instance his suggestion that questioning the 2020 election threatens “democratic ideals” and is tantamount to affiliation with Putin—while simultaneously inferring everyone agrees that the 2016 election was stolen from Hillary.

The Alinsky-mentee repeatedly portrayed American citizens as threats to the republic by juxtaposing extremes with divisive statements like: “People like Putin and Steve Bannon, for that matter, understand people don’t need to believe this information to weaken democratic institutions. You just have to flood a country’s public square with enough raw sewage. You just have to raise enough questions, spread enough dirt, and plant enough conspiracy theorizing that citizens no longer know what to believe.”

So, in other words, democratic institutions will be strengthened when Barack Obama’s “raw sewage” answers all our questions and dictates what we must think and believe?

Amongst the trustworthy mix of oppressed freedom fighters are:

- Himself
- Mainstream media shills
- The government he’s likely coordinating
- And then pointed out those *he* deems untrustworthy: anyone who causes Americans to distrust each other by disagreeing with his vision.

The former community organizer attempted to rally “the tech community, not just its corporate leaders, but employees at every level have to be part of the solution.” How? To “push” and “nudge” employers to submit to Communist Command and Control.

The former president depicted dictatorial control freaks as global unifiers. He feigned a desire for unity by stirring suspicions of voter suppression in black and brown communities, mentioning racism, white supremacism, Putin-like

ethnonationalism, "sexism, class conflict, religious strife, greed, envy, and all the deadly sins."

Obama said: Muzzling opposing opinions will "help tamp down divisions and let us rebuild the trust and solidarity needed to make our democracy stronger."

He claimed he is a supporter of free speech and in favor of a "free, robust, sometimes antagonistic exchange of ideas."

He stressed that democratic ideals will be realized when the news media, and private companies like Facebook and Twitter, submit to the proposed management of a product that—when it disagrees with him—disseminates what Obama calls "toxic information."

Seven months before a midterm election, the former president insisted that "while content moderation can limit the distribution of clearly dangerous content, it doesn't go far enough."

Therefore, "these big platforms need to be subject to some level of public oversight and regulation" that surely he will be closely involved in overseeing. The goal is to "keep the rest of us safe." Say what?

With that in mind, let's review.

- Covid vaccines (that he mistakenly admitted were clinically tested on "billions") keep us safe.
- Anthony Fauci's masked edicts keep us safe.
- Mail-in ballots keep us safe.
- Democrat poll watchers keep us safe.
- Gun-control crackdowns keep us safe.
- And now, government regulation of free speech, will also keep us safe.

Shrewdly, Obama protested too much when he asserted that he's certainly not suggesting that fairness exclude "views diametrically opposed" to his own, or that opinions and divisions be "fixed." Oh, no, no, no!

Instead, he said that there could be an effort to fundamentally transform or "redesign" and "broaden our perspectives" by mimicking "hard core Hannity, Carlson fans"—being successfully brainwashed by exclusive exposure to CNN, which, according to Obama, has the potential to change "perspectives."

Put another way, does Obama think viewing FOX 'unmeaningful,' and singular exposure to CNN helpful in safeguarding his idea of "democracy" by "reshaping" political opinion in "meaningful ways?"

- Is that why, Obama believes that the "common baseline of how we debate and sort out our disagreements," would be better managed by the governance of a First Amendment dictated to by ideologies that agree with the left's definition of what a demon like Barack Obama calls, "better angels?"
- Or that efforts to preserve democracy must include kids being taught to become "critical thinkers" by limiting exposure to differing opinions on things like climate change, sexuality, COVID vaccines, Putin, elections, and January 6?

Wanting to curtail free speech from the beginning, Obama even managed to squeeze in a backhanded criticism of the “flawed” U.S. Constitution by insinuating that undermining the First Amendment fosters a “more perfect union” and likened government regulation of free speech to amendments abolishing slavery, and granting women the right to vote.

Obama, the controlling “tool” of the global elite, ended this alarming address by saying: “[a]t the end of the day, tools don’t control us. We control them, and we can remake them. It’s up to each of us to decide what we value and then use the tools we’ve been given to advance those values. And I believe we should use every tool at our disposal to secure our greatest gift: a government of, by, for the people, for generations to come.”

By defining the voice of the people as a “steady stream of bile and vitriol,” Obama’s attempt at implied consensus, again attempted to convert Americans to “fight for [his] truth and to pick [his] side,” or chance being branded—“for generations to come”—as responsible for “allow[ing] our democracy to wither.”



A video and an excerpted transcript by Staff titled “Dan Bongino Warns the Fight for Free Speech Has Just Started, Conservative Censorship Is ‘All Around Us’ ” were posted at foxnews.com on April 30, 2022. Following is the excerpted transcript.

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*Unfiltered* host Dan Bongino revealed the “sub-players” of big tech censorship Saturday, saying it’s not just “the Twitters, the Facebooks, the YouTubes”—there’s more.

**DAN BONGINO:** “Here are a few examples. First, what about Wikipedia? You really don’t hear Wikipedia much, especially when it comes to the big tech censorship game. But don’t doubt me on this. Wikipedia is becoming a powerful source for censorship and rewriting history, and they’re just as influential in some cases as social media is . . . Then there’s the Apple App Store. You know about Apple, of course. But do you know about the App Store? Where you go to get apps? Well, one of the most powerful platforms online, the App Store, they have a monopoly over there, they can just about ban any content they want. Politics don’t even need to be involved . . . It’s happening all around us. The App Store, Google Ad Network, Wikipedia. Google Ads is one of the most powerful, devastating tools the Left has to censor conservative voices. It’s not all about Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.”



A video and an excerpted transcript by Staff titled “Biotech Entrepreneur [Vivek Ramaswamy] Warns What We’re Seeing With Twitter Is Just the ‘Tip of the Iceberg’ ” were posted at foxnews.com on April 30, 2020. Following is the excerpted transcript.

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Biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy told Dan Bongino on Saturday's *Unfiltered* that the state is coordinating behind the scenes on what these companies can and can't allow on the internet.

**VIVEK RAMASWAMY:** "One of the things that's underappreciated is how much these firms coordinate with one another behind the scenes. And this is not price-fixing. This is not the John D. Rockefeller era. This is idea-fixing, which I think is actually even more dangerous for a democracy than price-fixing. And hiding and lurking behind the veil of it all is not just the invisible hand of the free market, as they claim, but the increasingly visible fist of big government itself, where the state, as you pointed out, is coordinating from behind the scenes, the White House is coordinating from behind the scenes on what these companies can and can't allow on the internet. What does and doesn't pass the Central Bureau of Information's test for what counts as everyday people able to consume through the internet. So I think that's actually the thing that reveals that what we're seeing here with Twitter is just the beginning. This is not anywhere near the end. It might be, as a famous man once said, the end of the beginning. But at the end of the day, I think that this is still just the tip of the iceberg for what we're going to need to see in order to really restore a true free marketplace of ideas."



An article by Laura Hollis titled "The Campaign Against Misinformation Is Disinformation" was posted at townhall.com on April 28, 2022. Following is the article.

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For years we've been hearing nonstop warnings about "misinformation" and "disinformation." What's the difference?

- According to Business Insider, "misinformation" is false or (important distinction) "out-of-context" information, presented as fact but without the intention to deceive others.
- "Disinformation," on the other hand, is factually false and disseminated with the intention of misleading or deceiving others.

Our political class and their like-minded allies in the major media and Big Tech love to pretend that they're protecting us from misinformation and disinformation. What they've actually been doing is preventing the public from knowing the truth, while *they* are the ones spreading lies.

This is a deliberate and calculated strategy to entrench their own political and economic power.

Here's how it works: They disseminate lies that become the official "narrative." When others raise questions, point out facts that controvert that narrative or attempt to bring the truth to light, that truth is called "misinformation" or "disinformation." Those who challenge the narrative are smeared as liars, kooks and

conspiracy theorists. And when that fails to stop the truth-tellers, the social media companies (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others) shadow-ban them, hide their content under false “warnings” or kick them off the platforms outright.

This has happened countless times.

Former President Donald Trump claimed that he was spied on. Democrats called these accusations hysterical lies. But John Durham’s methodical investigation has produced information proving not only that Trump *was spied on* but that members of Hillary Clinton’s campaign paid Internet experts to fabricate evidence showing that Trump had a server directly connected to Russia. Clinton’s team lied to the FBI. The FBI and the CIA *knew* that the evidence—including the infamous Steele dossier—was wholly incredible.

And yet the FBI lied to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to get surveillance warrants. Further, the Clinton campaign had funneled money through law firm Perkins Coie to contractor Fusion GPS (which concocted the dossier), and then lied that the payments were for “legal services,” in violation of campaign finance laws.

These fictions and the abuse of power that animated them were drummed up to support Clinton’s and the Democrats’ lies that Trump’s victory in the 2016 presidential election was obtained by colluding with Russia, to undermine his presidency and cripple his administration with the multimillion-dollar “Russia collusion” investigation that, unsurprisingly, produced no evidence of collusion.

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced enough official disinformation to fill volumes. The lab leak origin theory of the virus was condemned as misinformation, as was data showing that drugs like ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine could be used to successfully treat the disease. It was forbidden to point out the damage done by masking children all day long, or the utter futility of economically devastating lockdowns. Anyone pointing to data showing links between the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and heart issues was shouted down.

Damning information and photos found on Hunter Biden’s laptop in late 2020 were quickly denounced as “Russian disinformation,” and all reporting on it was blocked by the social media companies for the sole reason that it cast a very unfavorable light on his father, Joe Biden, during the last days leading up to the 2020 election. Now, with the election 17 months behind us, we’re told that the laptop *is* Biden’s.

Convenient.

Last week at Stanford University, former President Barack Obama offered one of his characteristically gaslighting speeches in which he intoned solemnly about the dangers of disinformation: “You just have to raise enough questions, spread enough dirt, plant enough conspiracy theorizing, that citizens no longer know what to believe.”

Are those warnings? Or instructions? After all, Obama is a disinformation pro.

Years ago, he bragged to author Richard Wolffe, “I actually believe my own bulls\*\*t.” He lied to the American public about his truly terrible deal that gave Iran billions and let them pursue their work toward a nuclear bomb. (Obama’s

Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes infamously laughed and preened about this particular deception.) Obama's signature legislative achievement, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, neither protects patients nor is affordable. Obama gave speech after speech in which he promised Americans that they could "keep their doctors" and "keep their plans"—lies so egregious that Politifact named them the 2013 "Lie of the Year." One of the bill's architects, Jonathan Gruber, admitted on camera that "lack of transparency" was necessary to pass the law, because of the "stupidity of the American voter."

So, the fear and loathing of disinformation only goes one way.

Nothing proves the perils of free speech more than the panic of the powerful at the news that billionaire Elon Musk has bought Twitter. That company has made its mark by constricting content that runs counter to the pet narratives of the Left, censoring conservatives and even kicking the former president of the United States off its platform (while terrorists and members of the Taliban are free to tweet).

It's abundantly clear at this point that when powerful people or the press wring their hands over "misinformation" or "disinformation," what they're really worried about is their loss of control over what Americans see, hear, read and believe.

That they deceived us for so long is shame on them. But if you still believe them after being lied to so often, shame on you.



An article by Victor Davis Hanson titled "Tearing Down the Silicon Valley Wall" was posted at townhall.com on April 28, 2022. Following is the article.

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Elon Musk has finally managed to buy Twitter. And the moment he did, the enraged Left flipped out.

Abruptly leftists began trashing their favorite electronic communications platform as the domain of the nation's elite, professional classes. Had they just discovered that they had been racists and privileged users all this time?

And what happened to the Left's former worship of Musk as the man who revolutionized the clean, green automobile industry with his Tesla electric car company?

Or Musk the space revolutionary and hip star trekker, who with his own money helped ensure the United States remains preeminent in space exploration?

Or Musk, the patriot who is providing free next-generation internet service to the underdog Ukrainians fighting Russians for their lives?

No matter. The Left reviles Musk because he has announced that Twitter will be the one social-media platform whose business is not to censor or massage free speech in an otherwise monopolist, intolerant, and hard-Left Silicon Valley.

Who knows, Musk might even allow former president Donald Trump to communicate on Twitter—in the fashion that the terrorist Taliban, Iranian theocrats, and violent Antifa protesters all take for granted in their daily access to Twitter.



But how did the once free-speech, anti-trust, let-it-all-hang-out Left become a Victorian busybody, a censorious Soviet, and an old-fashioned robber-baron monopoly?

When it discovered that few Americans wanted left-wing, socialist politics it turned elsewhere. It found power instead through control of American institutions, from academia and Wall Street to traditional and social media.

When Musk merely talked about buying Twitter, the Left shrieked that an outlier multibillionaire owning a media—and especially a social media—venue was unfair. The buyout was supposedly “dangerous” and “a threat to democracy.”

But the more the Left screamed, the less people listened.

After all, left-wing Mark Zuckerberg’s Facebook has roughly 15 times more market capitalization than Twitter. It has an audience of 2 billion users—over seven times larger than Twitter’s 271 million.

Zuckerberg’s monopoly on global social media and his enormous wealth were stealthily put in service to the Democratic Party in the 2020 election. He reportedly infused nearly \$420 million of his media money into warping the vote in key precincts, by augmenting and absorbing the work of state registrars to empower likely left-wing voters.

Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, the second wealthiest man in the world, owns the influential Washington Post. It has moved markedly to the activist Left under his patronage.

Multibillionaire Lisa Jobs, widow of the late Apple founder Steve Jobs, owns *The Atlantic*. It has become an increasingly hard-Left political magazine.

So, in Orwellian fashion, apparently most media-owning, left-wing billionaires are good? But one social media-owning, non-left-wing billionaire is bad?

How exactly might a Musk-owned Twitter alter an election?

By emulating the former directors of Twitter and the rest of Silicon Valley social media who canceled not just conservatives, but any new communication they felt harmful to the 2020 Biden campaign?

From the outset, it was clear that Hunter Biden’s lost laptop incriminated his dad, Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

Biden was referenced by his own quid pro quo, grifting son variously as “the Big Guy” and “Mr. Ten Percent”—a full partner in peddling Beltway influence to rich foreign actors.

Yet in lockstep, social media banned most coverage of the pre-election laptop story.

It instead spread its standby false narrative of “Russian disinformation.” We now know the laptop was always authentic. The crude efforts to suppress mention of it were classic politicized news suppression.

Still, the Left may well have some reason to be terrified of Elon Musk. Should he liberate Twitter from left-wing scolds and groupthinkers, would other renegade new companies and old standbys follow his lead?

Is Musk's \$46-billion acquisition the internet equivalent of Germans in November 1989 with sledgehammers smashing down the Berlin Wall?

Does Musk sense that the looming November midterm elections may result in one of the rare landslide verdicts in American history?

Does he assume the public prefers a muckraker who demands free speech rather than corporate insider cronies censoring expression they don't find useful?

Polls show that the American people have had their fill of 14 months of self-inflicted, ideology-driven disasters. And why not, given the nonexistent border, spiking crime, inflation, unaffordable gasoline, and neo-Confederate racial fixations?

Are the recent Netflix implosion, the CNN+ disaster, the Disney debacle, the Virginia statewide and San Francisco school board elections, the polls showing massive defections of Latinos from the Left, and the grass-roots pushback against government-imposed mask wearing, and explicit transgender education in the k-3 grades—also symptoms of a reckoning on the horizon?

The country is ready for a revolution. And Musk believes he can lead it with his Silicon-Valley sledgehammer.

So, as the Left says, "Bring it on."