Societies on the Brink: Understanding the Dynamics of Partisanship and Polarisation

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Societies on the Brink: Understanding the Dynamics of Partisanship and Polarisation

Prof. Axel Bruns
ARC Laureate Fellow
QUT Digital Media Research Centre
a.bruns@qut.edu.au | @snurb_dot_info
Acknowledgement of Country

QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.

Artwork credit: Keisha Leon
https://www.qut.edu.au/about/indigenous
On the Brink
CRICOS No.00213J

[Image -14x0 to 974x626]


[Image -14x0 to 974x626]
United States

53% of Republicans view Trump as true U.S. president -Reuters/Ipsos

2 minute read

Reuters
Polarisation and Hyperpartisanship
For too many of us it’s become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighborhoods, or on college campuses, or places of worship, or especially our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions.

— farewell speech, 11 Jan. 2017
Filter bubbles? Echo chambers?

Can we simply blame our platforms and their algorithms?
When you use a search engine, do you see the same results as your colleagues, friends, or family do? If not, why is that? Are search results personalised especially for you? If so, what are the criteria? Which topics do search engines suggest to you and other users?

We want to find out. With your help.

Thank you to our citizen scientist community

971 participants have donated
37,475 searches

INSTALLING THE BROWSER PLUGIN

The plugin is available for Chrome and Firefox, for both desktop and laptop devices. Unfortunately, Safari, browsers and mobile devices (including iPads and mobile phones) are not supported at this time. To install the plugin, select the extension store for your browser:

NEED EXTRA HELP?

If you need extra help - try our step by step interactive installation guide.
The Australian Twittersphere, 2016

4m known Australian accounts
Network of follower connections
Filtered for degree ≥1000
→255k nodes (6.4%), 61m edges
Edges not shown in graph
(From Bruns, Moon, Münch, and Sadkowsky, 2017.)
Deshalb ist "Filterblase" die blödeste Metapher des Internets


Von Sebastian Meineck

9.3.18
Connectivity, Not Disconnection
Hyperpartisans, Hyperconnected

Ready access to information enables spread of ‘fake news’, hyperpartisanship, and polarisation.

(But also social connection and community support.)
The problem with an extraterrestrial-conspiracy mailing list isn’t that it’s an echo chamber; it’s that it thinks there’s a conspiracy by extraterrestrials.

@RELIABLESOURCES

HOW 'DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH' LEADS TO MISINFORMATION

Yael Eisenstat | Future of Democracy Fellow at The Berggruen Institute
Weaponising Media Literacy

This, but with a different system of coordinates, also drives conspiracy theories.

**FIGHT THE FAKE**

Fact-checking Tips from BRITANNICA

1. **Choose your sources wisely.**
   Some types of sources are better than others. Search out those that thoroughly review information before publishing it. Try to track down primary or authoritative voices, like scholarly journals or government databases, rather than second-hand reports.

2. **Proceed with caution.**
   Be skeptical of superlatives, generalizations, and anything that seems too good to be true. Consider the author’s motivation. Does the source have a neutral point of view, or is there an agenda behind the information?

3. **Trust expertise.**
   When in doubt about a source, check the author’s qualifications. Determine how well he or she knows the subject.

4. **Expand your search.**
   Don’t settle for a single source if you can find two or more. Look for consensus, but be wary of echo chambers. Cast a wide net. In addition to simple web searches, try databases like Google Books.

5. **Understand the context.**
   Few facts exist outside of a broader narrative. Read around the fact to see how it fits into the big picture.
We live in an age of ‘fake news’. But Australian children are not learning enough about media literacy

July 6, 2020 5:30am AEST

Today we release the findings from our new research into how young Australians consume and think about news media.

Following a summer of bushfires and during the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have told us they consume news regularly. But they also say they can find it frightening and many don’t ask questions about the true source of the information they are getting.

To our surprise, despite widespread concern about “fake news” and a growing body of evidence about the reach and impact of misinformation, many young people are also not getting formal education about news media at school.
‘Fake News’ Networks on Facebook

Posts containing FakeNIX links shared from other Facebook spaces, 2016-21 (from Angus, Bruns, Hurcombe, and Harrington, 2021).
Engagement with *Sky News Australia* Videos on Facebook

- **Small number of Australian spaces**, some official Sky News-affiliated pages, sharing many videos, predominantly from Facebook, with mostly Australian themes.

- **Large number of spaces**, mostly public groups related to US politics, sharing a smaller number of videos, predominantly from YouTube, with mostly American themes.

- **Diverse range of spaces**, including public groups and public pages promoting conspiracy theories and COVID-19 misinformation, sharing videos from both YouTube and Facebook, with international and other themes.

Nodes: public pages, groups, verified profiles / videos in posts
Size: weighted degree
Colour: Australian / United States / international / other video theme
(From Copland, Graham, and Bruns, 2021.)
Social, fringe, and mainstream media are intensely interconnected. (See Bruns, Hurcombe, Harrington, and Jude, 2021.)
Sharpen your skills

Explore a free library of training content provided by First Draft’s highly experienced team. These online courses, toolkits and resources are designed to help both journalists and the public build expertise and stay one step ahead of misinformation.

Recursos en Español →  Ressources en Français →
https://firstdraftnews.org/ressourcen-auf-deutsch/
Is It Getting Worse?
Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values

1994
- MEDIAN Democrat
- MEDIAN Republican

Consistently liberal
Consistently conservative

2004
- MEDIAN Democrat
- MEDIAN Republican

Consistently liberal
Consistently conservative

2017
- MEDIAN Democrat
- MEDIAN Republican

Consistently liberal
Consistently conservative

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/10/05/1-partisan-divides-over-political-values-widen/]
Dimensions of Polarisation
News Coverage Polarisation

Diagram showing the polarization of news coverage with a question mark in the center.
Midpoint within country (382). Polarisation score for each brand is the difference between the mean score out of 7 of the news consumers and the mean score of the population as a whole, expressed in multiples of the standard deviation of the mean score of the population as a whole.
FIGURE 8.10: POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF AUDIENCES OF ONLINE NEWS BRANDS
News Engagement Polarisation

Figure 33: Proportion of stories retweeted by Clinton and Trump followers by quintile
Public (Social Media) Discourse Polarisation

Retweet network of the 18C debate

Retweet network of #RoboDebt

Researching Polarisation and Hyperpartisanship
Multidisciplinary Approaches

• Research needs:
  - Developing robust measures of polarisation for these different dimensions
  - Assessing polarisation trends over time
  - Comparing different political and media systems
  - Distinguishing polarisation on different issues, not just left vs. right

• Research frameworks:
  - Media and communication studies – theories of the public sphere and platform publics
  - Computational communication studies – observation and analysis of news engagement
  - Psychological research – motivated reasoning and the mindset of hyperpartisanship
  - Political science – threats and benefits of polarisation in political debates
Get in Touch!

• Coming soon:
  • 4 Postdoctoral Research Fellow positions (5 years), starting early 2022
  • 4 PhD scholarships (3 years), starting early-mid 2022
  • 4 PhD scholarships (3 years), starting 2024
Thank you

Questions?
Acknowledgments

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Facebook data are provided courtesy of CrowdTangle.