

Techlash? America's Growing Concern With Major Technology Companies



The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Trust, Media and Democracy initiative aims to address the decline in trust for journalism and other democratic institutions by examining the causes and supporting solutions.

As part of the multidisciplinary initiative launched in 2017, Knight Foundation partnered with Gallup on a research series to better understand Americans' evolving relationship with the media and to inform solutions to the information challenges of our day.

Knight Foundation is also investing in technologists, journalists, academic institutions and others with strong, innovative approaches to improve the flow of accurate information, prevent the spread of misinformation and better inform communities.

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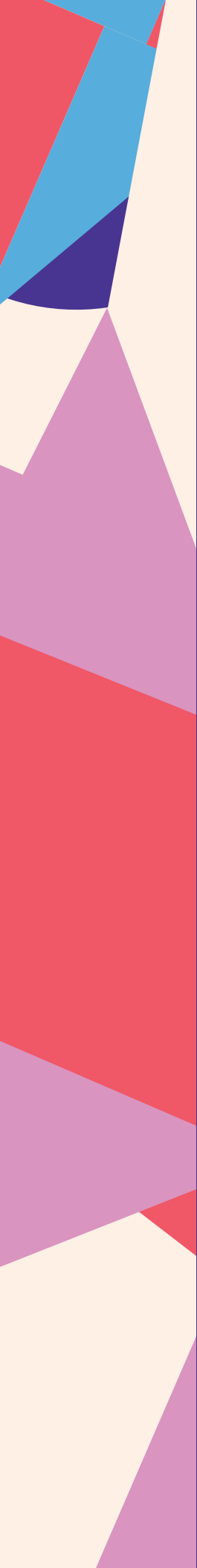


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Introduction

The internet has transformed the way Americans access information, connect with loved ones and understand the world around them. But even as technology has brought considerable benefits to people's lives, there has been increasing dialogue about the possible downsides of online technology, particularly relating to the practices of the largest internet and technology companies, such as Google, Twitter, Facebook and Amazon.

Americans' concerns about these companies appear to be deepening. Gallup's tracking of public sentiment toward the internet industry shows a decline from a high of 60% of Americans with positive views of such companies in 2015 to 43% of Americans viewing them positively and 30% viewing them negatively in 2019 — up 14 percentage points from 2015.¹ When asked specifically about such technology giants as Google, Facebook and Amazon, 46% of Americans view these companies positively, and one-third (33%) view them negatively.²

Knight Foundation and Gallup endeavored to better understand how Americans view the roles these companies play in their lives and society as a whole. With the exception of their influence on democratic participation, this report finds widespread concern about the effects of internet and technology companies on society and democracy and their ability to self-regulate. Still, Americans continue to use these platforms despite their unease about misinformation and privacy, perhaps because there are few other options for similar services given the dominance of the major companies in the field.

Alongside the decline in how Americans regard major internet and technology companies, a variety of measures have been introduced and debated, including data privacy legislation and antitrust measures to break up some of these companies and curb some of their legal protections. However, Americans are ambivalent about major governmental involvement in regulating the practices of these companies, either because they are philosophically opposed to government intervention or, as this study suggests, because they do not believe government officials have the necessary knowledge to craft effective legislation.

This report provides valuable insights that may inform more focused and responsive practices of the internet and technology companies themselves or legislative and regulatory proposals from policymakers who aim to assuage Americans' concerns.

1 Gallup, Inc. *Computers and the internet*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1591/Computers-Internet.aspx>

2 Saad, L. (2019, August 21). *Americans split on more regulation of big tech*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/265799/americans-split-regulation-big-tech.aspx>

Executive Summary

1

Americans have largely negative views of major internet and technology companies' impact on society.

Their top concern relates to the amplification of misinformation on the internet.

- 74% of Americans are very concerned about the spread of misinformation on the internet. Despite a partisan gap, majorities of both Democrats (84%) and Republicans (65%) are very concerned about this issue.
- 68% are very concerned about the privacy of personal data stored by internet and technology companies, and 56% are very concerned about hate speech and other abusive or threatening language online.

Americans believe that major internet companies:

- do more to divide society (60%) than to unite it (11%)
- allow powerful interests to control society (48%) rather than give people the power to change society (19%)
- magnify unpopular views (52%) rather than make them less visible (17%)
- create more problems than they solve (47%) rather than solve more problems than they create (15%)
- contribute to making people misinformed about the news (47%) rather than making them informed (19%)

2

The public believes internet and technology companies have too much power — a sentiment held across all demographic and political groups.

- 77% of Americans say major internet and technology companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have too much power.
- Americans are equally divided among those who favor (50%) and oppose (49%) government intervention that would require internet and technology companies to break into smaller companies.

3

Americans distrust social media companies to make the right decisions about their content, but are divided on the role of government to regulate them.

- Americans do not trust social media companies much (44%) or at all (40%) to make the right decisions about what content should or should not be allowed on online platforms.
- However, they would still prefer the companies (55%) to make those decisions rather than the government (44%).

4

Americans across the political and demographic spectrum say political leaders are not paying enough attention to technology issues.

- 59% of Americans believe elected officials and political candidates are paying “too little” attention to issues dealing with technology and technology companies.

SECTION 1

Americans Are Concerned About the Role Internet and Technology Companies Play in Society

Impact of internet and technology companies on society and democracy

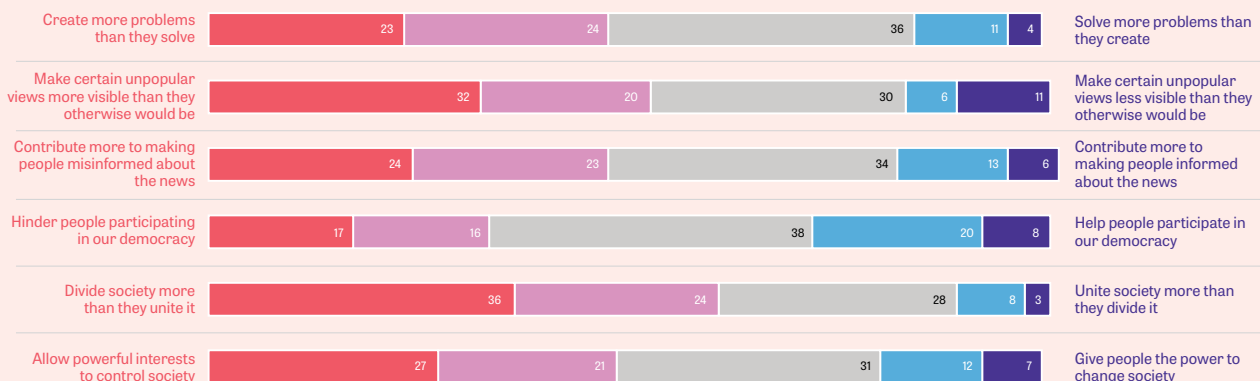
By connecting people with information and each other, internet and technology companies play an active role in the lives of everyday Americans. However, views of the internet industry have diminished sharply in the past five years.³ When asked in the current survey to identify the role and impact of major internet companies, Americans are decidedly negative.

FIGURE 1

Opinions of Effects of Internet and Technology Companies on Society

Where would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means you think major internet companies [positive affect] and 1 means major internet companies [negative affect]. You may use any number from 1-5.

■ % 1 ■ % 2 ■ % 3 ■ % 4 ■ % 5



Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

3 Gallup, Inc. *Computers and the internet*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1591/Computers-Internet.aspx>

Specifically, they believe that major internet companies divide society (60%); allow powerful interests to control society (48%); make unpopular views more visible than they otherwise would be (52%); create more problems than they solve (47%); and contribute to making people misinformed about the news (47%). In contrast, fewer than one-fifth of Americans give ratings on the positive end of the scale by saying major internet companies give people the power to change society (19%); contribute more to making people informed (19%); make unpopular views less visible (17%); solve more problems than they create (15%); and unite society more than they divide it (11%). About a third of Americans do not lean one way or the other on these issues.

Americans are more evenly divided regarding the role internet and technology companies play in democracy. Roughly even shares of Americans say major internet companies hinder participation in our democracy (33%) as say they help people participate in our democracy (28%), with 38% neutral.

Across the political spectrum, Americans tend to hold more negative than positive views toward the internet, but Republicans tend to be more critical than Democrats and independents. For example, Republicans are more likely than Democrats and independents to see major internet companies as creating more problems than they solve, allowing powerful interests to control society, hindering political participation, making people misinformed and dividing society.

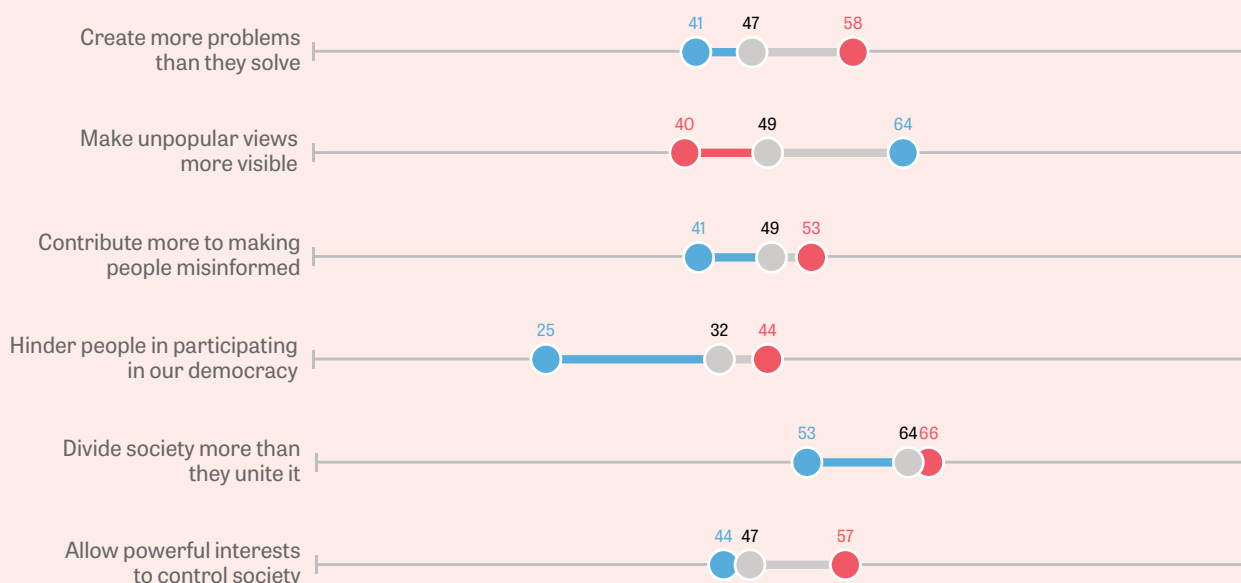
There is, however, one issue where Democrats are more likely to hold critical views than their Republican counterparts — providing visibility to unpopular viewpoints.

FIGURE 2

Opinions of Effects of Internet and Technology Companies on Society, by Political Party

% Who indicate agreement by answering "1" or "2" on the 1-5 scale

■ Democrat ■ Independent ■ Republican



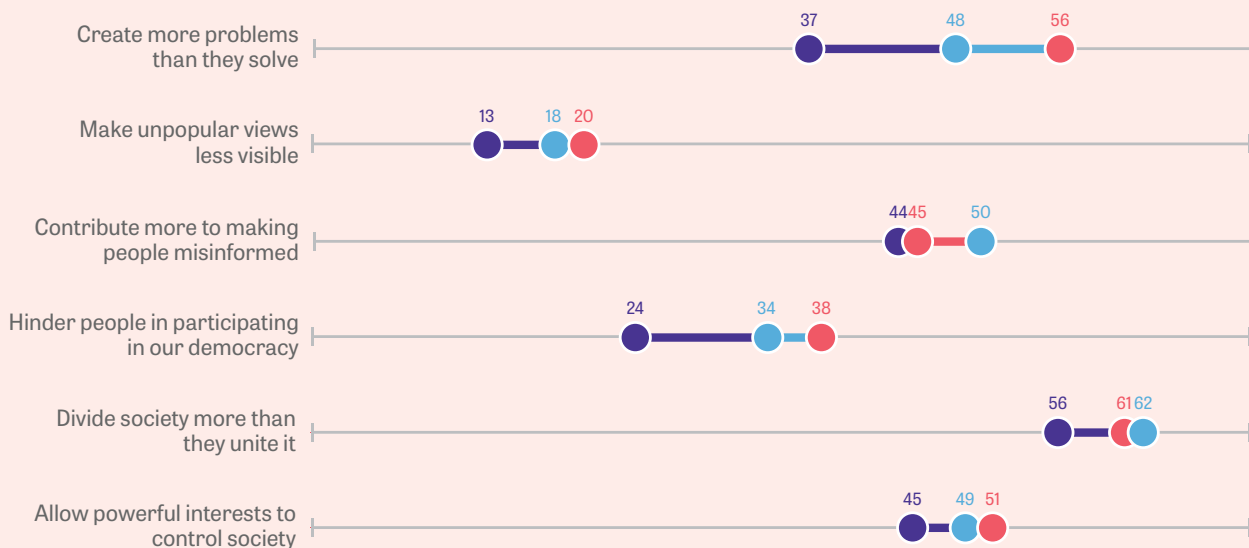
Beyond party, there are distinct differences in Americans' opinions by age. Adults aged 55 and older (56%) are more likely than their younger counterparts (48% of 35-54-year-olds and 37% of those aged 18-34) to view major internet companies as creating more problems than they solve. Younger adults aged 18-34 tend to think major internet companies help participation in democracy rather than hinder it (36% vs. 24% respectively), while older adults are more likely to say major internet companies hinder rather than help participation (34% vs. 26% among 35-54-year-olds and 38% vs. 23% among those 55 and older). However, all three age groups have similar opinions on the other ways major internet companies affect society.

FIGURE 3

Opinions of Effects of Internet and Technology Companies on Society, by Age

% Who indicate agreement by answering "1" or "2" on the 1-5 scale

■ 18-34 years ■ 35-54 years ■ 55+ years



Americans who report using Google for their local news on a daily basis are more likely to say major internet companies help democratic participation (36%) than those who use the platform for news rarely (19%) or never (20%). Similarly, there is a slight uptick in positive views among those who say they use Facebook as a daily source of news (34%), compared with those who use the site for news rarely (25%) or never (25%).

People with less formal education tend to view major internet companies as creating more problems than they solve rather than as solving more problems than they create. Fifty-five percent of those with a high school education hold this view, compared with 46% of those with some college education and 39% of those with a college degree. Americans living in large cities (19%) or suburbs of large cities (18%) are more likely than those in rural areas (5%) to hold positive views on this issue.

College graduates (60%) are also more likely than those with some college education (51%) or no college education (46%) to believe major internet companies make unpopular views more visible. On the other items, education makes little difference.

Americans who are negative toward the news media also tend to be more critical of internet and technology companies. Notably, 70% of those who rate the news media negatively say major internet companies do more to divide society than unite it, compared with 52% of those who view the news media positively and 48% of those who are neutral. Also, many more Americans with negative opinions of the news media say major internet companies contribute more to making people misinformed (55%) than those with positive (41%) or neutral (32%) opinions of the news media.

Concerns about misinformation, privacy

Majorities of Americans are concerned about a variety of issues related to internet and technology companies. Chief among these concerns are misinformation and privacy.

Three-quarters of Americans express that they are very concerned about the spread of misinformation on the internet (74%). However, the remedy for such issues is unclear, as only about half say the government should have a major role in addressing the issue (48%).

Similarly, 68% express that they are very concerned about the privacy of personal data online — and these concerns may be increasing. A 2018 Gallup poll found 43% of Facebook users “very concerned” with “invasion of their privacy” by the social media giant, up from 30% in 2011.⁴

When it comes to other issues relating to internet and technology companies, at least half of Americans say they are very concerned about hate speech and other abusive or threatening language online (56%), online foreign interference in U.S. elections (53%), and the size and power of large technology companies (50%). On two issues — political ads and workers losing their jobs because of technology — less than half are very concerned, but majorities are at least “somewhat” concerned.

At least half of Americans (56%) say they are very concerned about hate speech and other abusive or threatening language online. Democrats (76%) are **2x as likely** as Republicans (38%) to be very concerned.

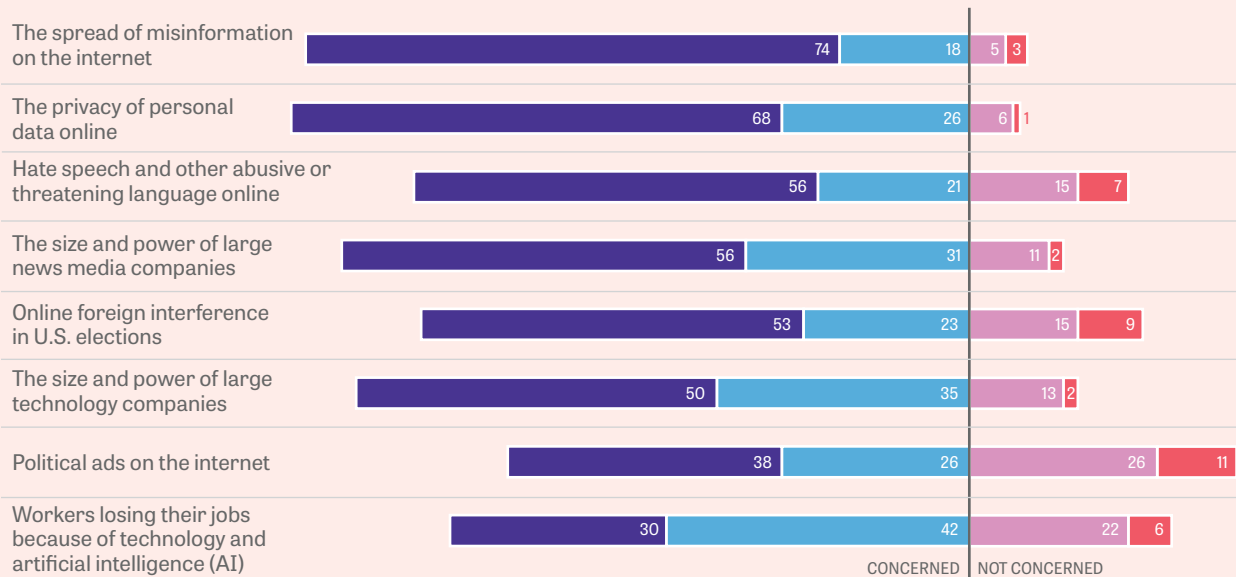
⁴ Jones, J. M. (2018, April 11). *Facebook users' privacy concerns up since 2011*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/232319/facebook-users-privacy-concerns-2011.aspx>

FIGURE 4

Level of Concern About Issues Related to Internet and Technology Companies

How concerned are you about each of the following issues?

■ % Very concerned ■ % Somewhat concerned ■ % Not very concerned ■ % Not concerned at all



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

The level of concern about online foreign interference in U.S. elections varies sharply by political party. Whereas 80% of Democrats are very concerned about this issue, just 23% of Republicans are.

Similarly, when it comes to concerns about hate speech and other abusive online behaviors, Democrats are more likely to say they are very concerned about the issue (76%), compared to Republicans (38%) and independents (50%).

A smaller, although notable gap also can be seen in views on misinformation. Americans who identify as Democrats (84%) or independents (71%) are more likely than Republicans (65%) to say the spread of misinformation is very concerning.

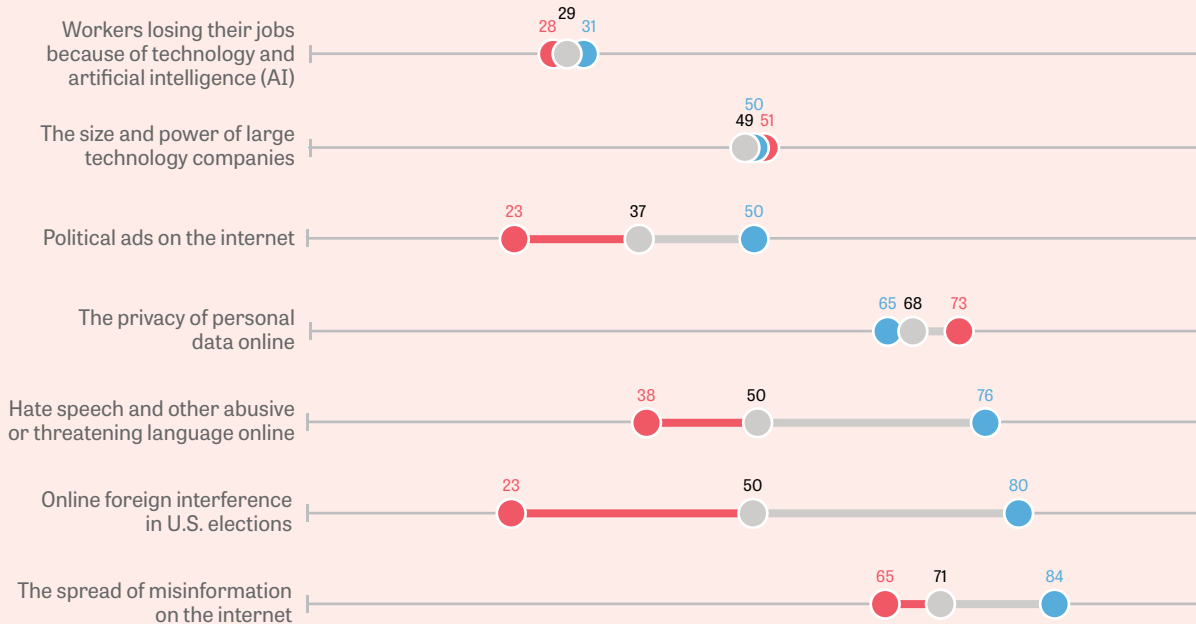
Despite these differences, there are several areas of bipartisan agreement. Majorities of Republicans (73%), independents (68%) and Democrats (65%) are very concerned about the privacy of their personal data online. And about half of Americans in all party groups say they are very concerned about the size and power of internet and technology companies.

FIGURE 5

Level of Concern About Issues Related to Internet and Technology Companies, by Political Party

% Who are “very concerned”

■ Democrat ■ Independent ■ Republican



There are other notable demographic differences in opinions on hate speech online. Women (67%) are more concerned about hate speech and abusive online behaviors than men (45%). Similarly, older Americans aged 55+ are more likely to express concern about hate speech than younger Americans aged 18-34 (67% vs. 47%). About half of Americans aged 35-54 say they are very concerned about hate speech and other abusive or threatening language online.

Three-quarters of Americans are concerned about the spread of misinformation online, but only half say the government should have a major role in addressing it.

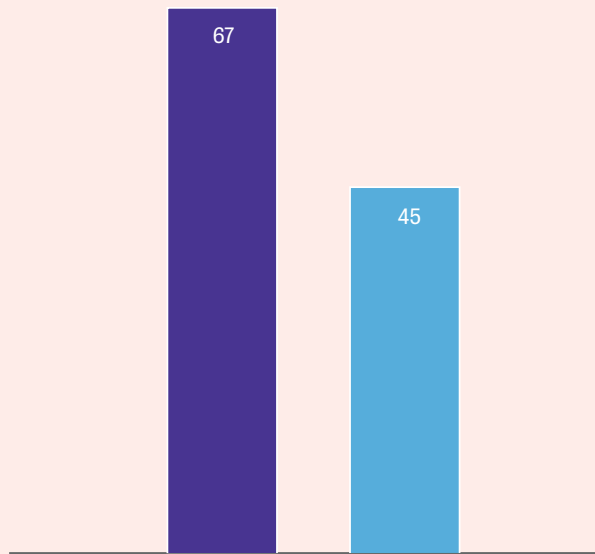
FIGURE 6

Level of Concern About Issues Related to Internet and Technology Companies, by Gender and Age

% Who are "very concerned" about hate speech and other abusive or threatening language online

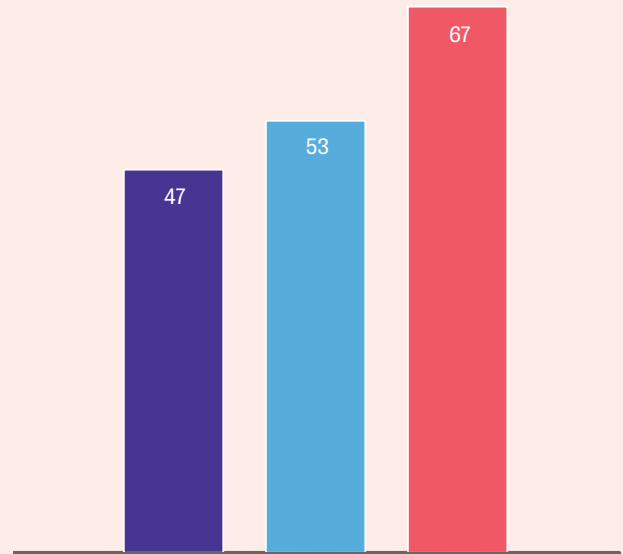
All Americans:

■ Women ■ Men



All Americans:

■ 18-34 years ■ 35-54 years ■ 55+ years



Majorities of Democrats, Republicans and independents are concerned about the privacy of their personal data online.

SECTION 2

Americans Are Divided on Role of Government in Addressing Internet and Technology Issues

Public says leaders pay “too little” attention to technology issues and are divided on government intervention

A majority (59%) of Americans say elected officials pay “too little” attention to issues dealing with technology or technology companies, while 30% say they pay the “right amount” and 11% “too much” attention. Democrats (71%) are much more inclined to say politicians pay too little attention than Republicans (43%) and independents (57%). Similarly, Americans aged 18-34 (67%) are more likely to hold this view compared to those aged 35 and older (55%). And 66% of those living in large cities, versus 50% of those residing in rural areas, see political leaders as being insufficiently attentive on matters related to technology and technology companies.

Despite Americans’ overall desire for politicians to pay more attention to technology issues, they are largely ambivalent about the government having a major role in addressing most of their concerns around internet and technology companies, perhaps rising from their belief that politicians lack the knowledge to effectively address the issues. However, there are two issues the American public favors the government playing a major role in addressing. Eighty percent say government should play a major role in addressing online interference with U.S. elections. And 7 in 10 Americans (70%) favor a major governmental role in addressing concerns related to the privacy of personal data online.

Close to half advocate a major role for government to address the spread of misinformation on the internet, the size and power of large technology companies, and hate speech or other abusive language. Smaller proportions — between 35% and 39% — say the government should play a major role in addressing the size and power of large news media companies, political ads on the internet and workers losing their jobs because of technology.

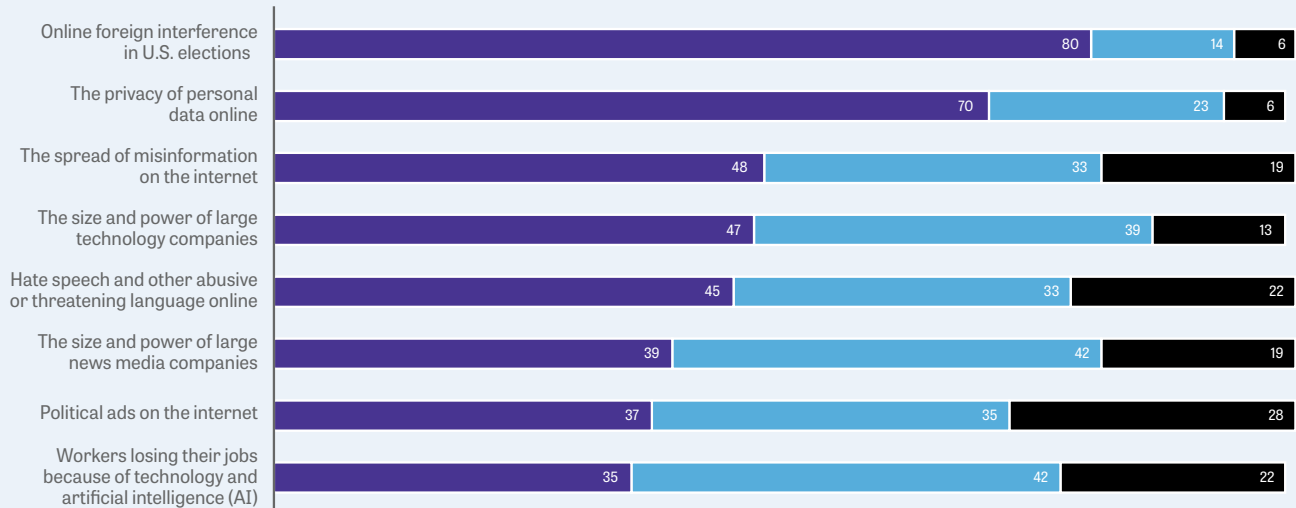
Although Americans tend not to favor a major government role in these issues, most want the government to be involved to some degree, with at most 28% rejecting any government role on these issues.

FIGURE 7

What Role Should Government Have in Addressing Issues Related to Internet and Technology Companies?

How much of a role, if any, should the government have in addressing these issues?

■ % A major role ■ % A minor role ■ % No role



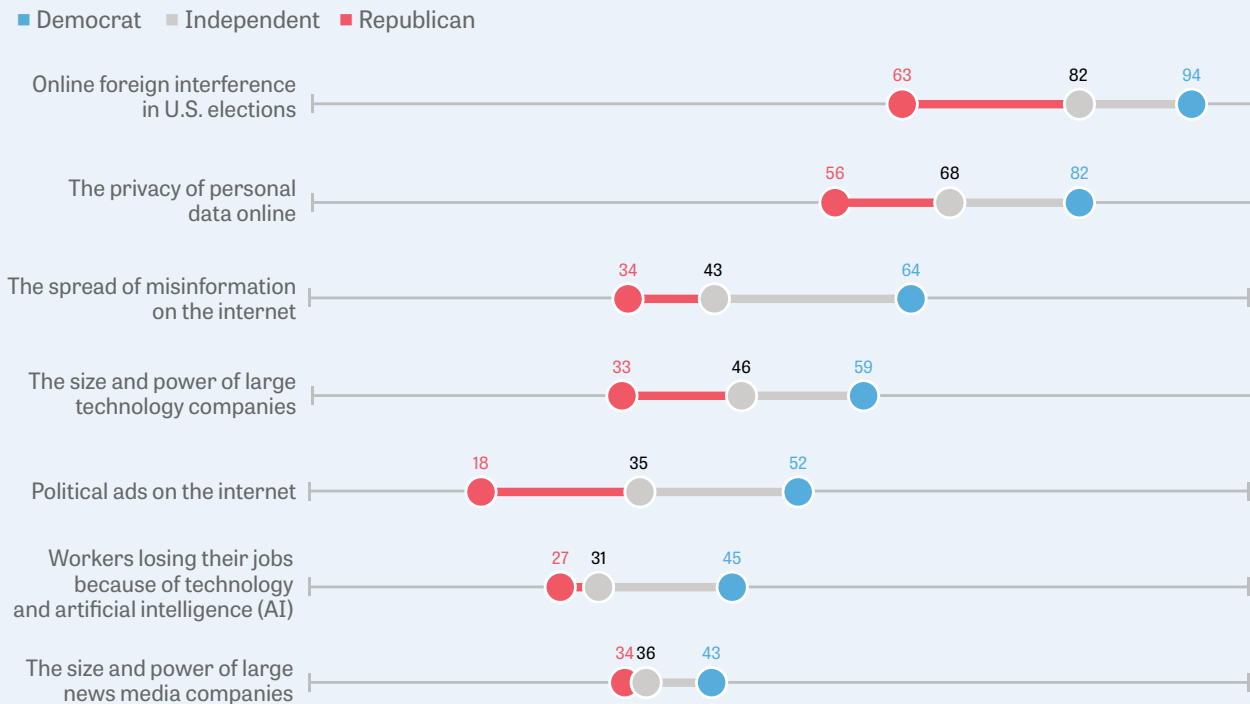
Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

Democrats are generally more likely than their Republican and independent counterparts to say the government should have a major role in addressing issues related to internet and technology companies. Democrats are substantially more likely than Republicans to say government should have a major role in addressing the spread of misinformation (64% vs. 34%) and the use of political ads on the internet (52% vs. 18%). They are also more likely to say the government has a major role to play in addressing foreign interference in U.S. elections (94% vs. 63%), although majorities of both groups call for a major government role in this area. Fewer than half of Republicans, Democrats and independents endorse a major government role in the areas of workers losing their jobs because of technology or the size and power of large news media companies.

Eighty percent of Americans say government should play a major role in addressing online interference with U.S. elections.

FIGURE 8

Percentage in Favor of a Major Government Role in Addressing Issues With Internet and Technology Companies, by Political Party



While Democrats, Republicans and independents all agree that the government should address online interference with U.S. elections, they disagree on the role government should play in addressing political ads on the internet.

SECTION 3

Americans Are Concerned About the Size and Power of Internet and Technology Companies, Divided on Solutions

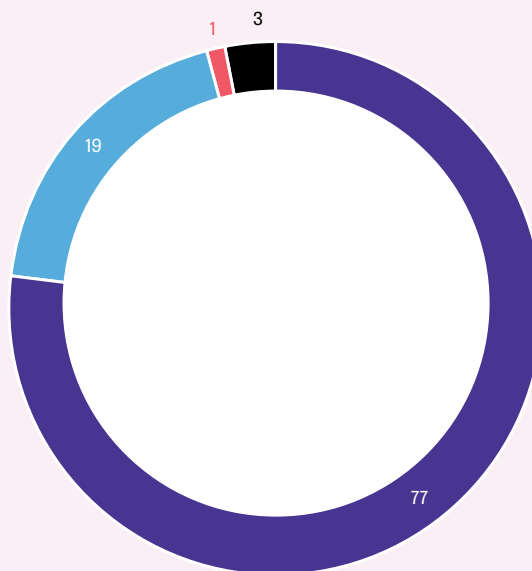
Seventy-seven percent of Americans say major internet and technology companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have too much power. Just one-fifth of Americans (19%) say internet and technology companies have the right amount of power. Only 1% say internet and technology companies have too little power. Only 1% say internet and technology companies have too little power.

FIGURE 9

Views on the Amount of Power Held by Internet and Technology Companies

Do you believe that major internet and technology companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have --?

■ % Too much power ■ % The right amount of power ■ % Too little power ■ % No answer



In an era of deep partisan divisions, it is notable these views are held consistently across all demographic and political groups.

Misuse of user data is the primary reason people think internet and technology companies are too powerful

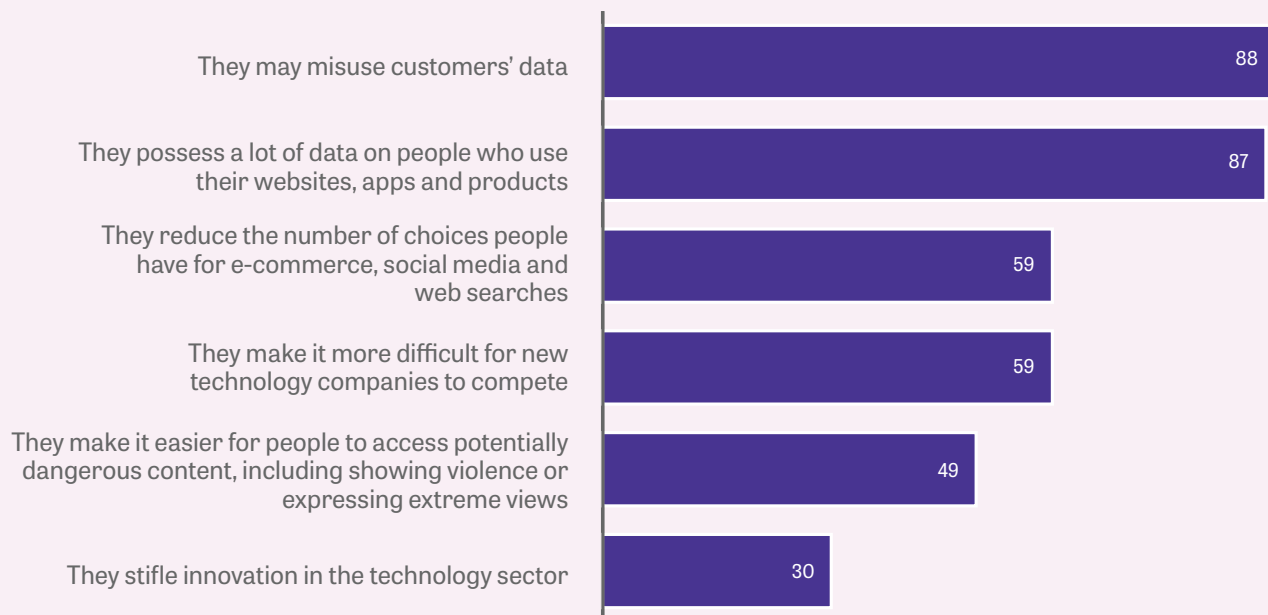
Those who believe internet and technology companies have too much power were asked to indicate whether each of six factors contributed to that view. Their responses show they are most concerned about the collection and use of customer/user data. Fully 88% of those who say these companies hold too much power say it is because they may misuse customer data. Similarly, 87% say their concerns about the power of these companies is due to the data they possess on people who use their websites, apps and products. Fewer cite concerns about anti-competitive or antitrust issues or their role in exposing people to potentially dangerous content online.

FIGURE 10

Reasons Why Americans Believe Internet and Technology Companies Have Too Much Power

Please say whether each of the following is a reason why you think major internet and technology companies have too much power. Select all that apply.

% Who select each reason



Americans' views around these concerns are consistent across most demographic and political groups. However, women (60%) and older Americans aged 55+ (64%) who say internet and technology companies have too much power are much more likely to identify "easy access to dangerous content" as a reason why they think these companies are too powerful.

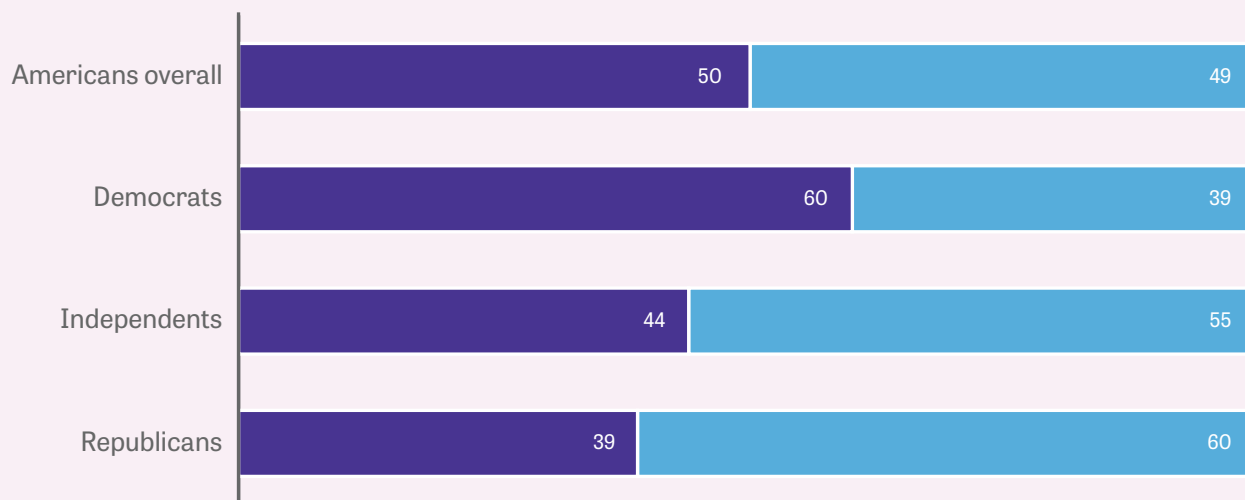
Nevertheless, as these companies come under increased antitrust scrutiny, Americans are divided evenly on whether they should be broken up — 50% are in favor, and 49% are opposed. This divide falls largely along political lines. Six in 10 (60%) Democrats favor breaking up internet and technology companies. By contrast, less than half of independents (44%) and Republicans (39%) do.

FIGURE 11

Should the Government Break Up Major Internet and Technology Companies?

Would you favor or oppose actions by the federal government that would require major internet and technology companies such as Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Google to break up into smaller companies?

■ % Favor ■ % Oppose



Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Americans who are more concerned about the size and power of internet and technology companies are more likely to want to break them up. Two-thirds (67%) of those who are very concerned about the size and power of these companies favor breaking them up, compared to 39% of those who are somewhat concerned and 21% of those who are not concerned.

Americans are divided evenly on whether major internet and technology companies should be broken up.

SECTION 4

Spotlight on Content: Americans Don't Trust Internet and Technology Companies — or Government — to Make the Right Call

Media or technology companies?

An important distinction in current policy debates is whether companies like Google and Facebook should be considered technology companies or media companies. A majority of Americans tend to view internet and technology companies as “both media and technology companies” (63%), while the remainder are evenly split between considering them as media companies (19%) or technology companies (18%).

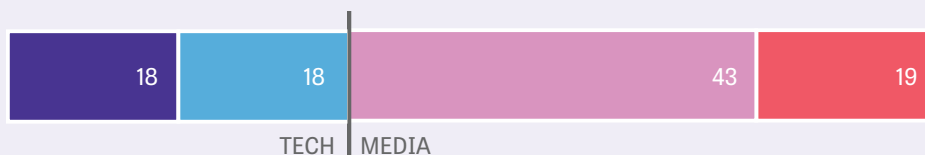
However, when those who view them as both media and technology companies are pressed to choose one or the other, Americans tend to see companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter more as media companies than as technology companies. Just 36% of Americans view internet and technology companies as solely technology companies or as “both media and technology companies but more of a technology company.” In contrast, 62% say these companies are more of or completely media companies.

FIGURE 12

Americans' Views of the Sector in Which Internet and Technology Companies Operate

If you had to choose, would you say you think of companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter as --?

■ % Technology company ■ % Both, more of a technology company
■ % Both, more of a media company ■ % Media company



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

Opinions diverge somewhat based on political affiliation. Whereas 24% of Democrats view these companies as operating solely in the technology sector, only 13% of Republicans and 16% of independents agree. In contrast, 28% of Republicans view them as solely media companies, compared to 16% of Democrats and 15% of independents.

Distrust in content decisions

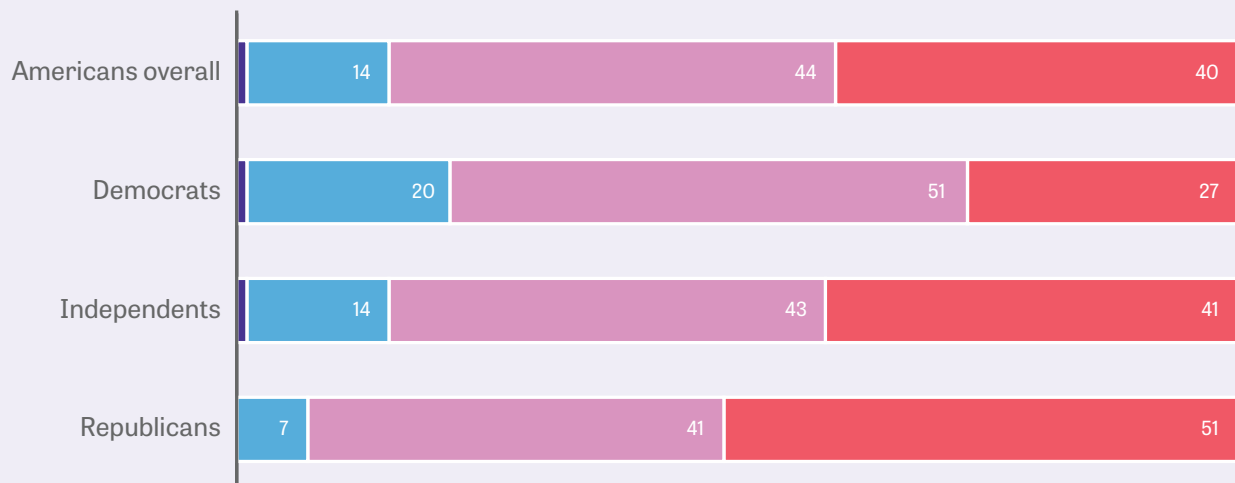
Americans are largely distrustful of social media companies to make the right decisions about what people can say or post on their websites and apps. Over 8 in 10 U.S. adults do not trust social media companies much (44%) or at all (40%) to make the right decisions about what content appears on their sites or apps. More Republicans are distrustful (41% say they trust them “not much”; 51% say “not at all”) compared to Democrats (51% and 27%, respectively) and independents (43% and 41%).

FIGURE 13

Americans' Levels of Trust in Social Media Companies

How much do you trust social media companies to make the right decisions about what people can say or post on their websites and apps?

■ % A great deal ■ % A fair amount ■ % Not much ■ % Not at all



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

Examining those who have no trust in social media companies at all, there are some interesting variances. Those who rarely (50%) or never (58%) use Google for local news are more likely to have no trust in social media than those who use the site daily for news (37%). A similar pattern is revealed among those who use Facebook for news — 52% of those who never use Facebook for news have no trust in these companies making the right content decisions, compared with those who use Facebook daily (34%).

Internet and technology companies have come under scrutiny as to whether the standards they apply to what people post on their sites and apps are fair and evenly implemented, with Americans on both sides of the political divide expressing concern. Most Americans do not think major internet companies apply the same standards in the same way to all people who use their apps and websites (78%). This includes 89% of Republicans, 73% of Democrats and 76% of independents.

Americans would rather have internet and technology companies regulate content than government

Even though Americans distrust internet and technology companies to make the right decisions around what content appears on their sites, given a choice, they would still prefer the companies (55%) rather than the government (44%) make those decisions.⁵ Republicans (64%) are more likely to opt for major internet companies to make their own policies about what people can and cannot post, compared to 59% of independents. A slim majority of Democrats (54%) prefer the government to make policies that set some limits or establish content guidelines, compared to independents (39%) and Republicans (35%).

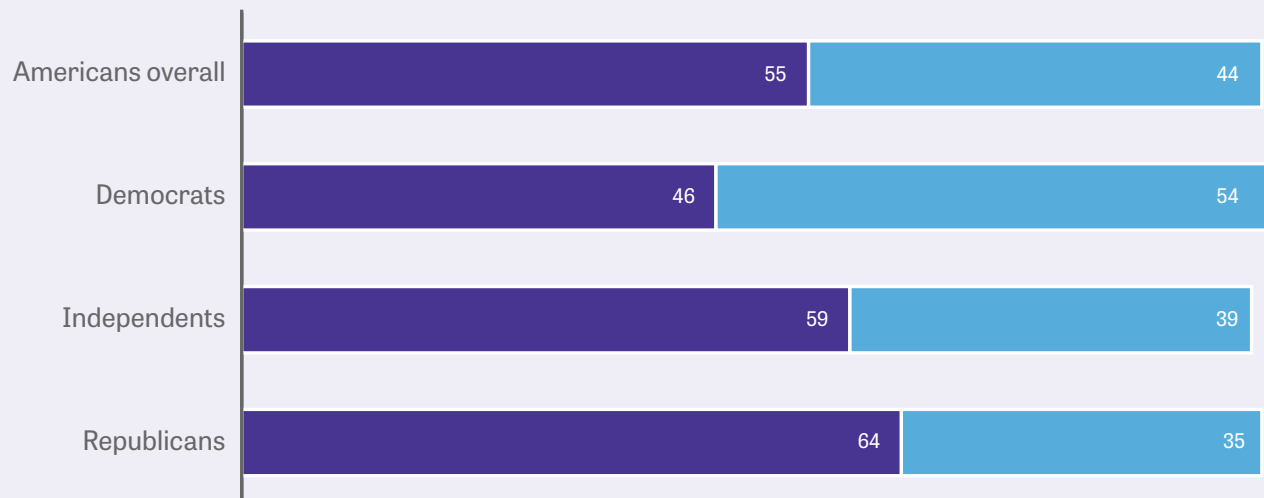
FIGURE 14

Who Should Regulate Online Content?

In your opinion, which is the better approach?

■ % For major internet companies to make their own policies about what people can and cannot post on their websites and apps, without any government involvement

■ % For the government to make policies that set some limits or establish some guidelines about what major internet companies can and cannot display on their websites and apps



Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

⁵ This suggests a small majority support, in principle, for the provision of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which shields technology companies from liability for publishing — or not — information provided by others on their platform. *47 U.S. Code § 230 — Protection for private blocking and screening of offensive material.* (n.d.). LII / Legal Information Institute. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/47/230>

SECTION 5

Spotlight on Privacy: Americans Are Concerned About Privacy, Prefer Their Data Be Used to Improve Online Experience

Because access to user data is critical to the revenue models of many internet and technology companies, data privacy is a linchpin issue for these corporations — and those who use these platforms. Privacy vies with misinformation as Americans' top overall concern about internet and technology companies, and those who believe these companies are too powerful overwhelmingly cite privacy matters.

Americans are generally uncomfortable with internet and technology companies collecting their personal information. While the vast majority of Americans believe that Facebook and Google (97%) and Amazon (96%) collect information about them, about 8 in 10 U.S. adults say they are very (42%) or somewhat (40%) uncomfortable with internet and technology companies using their personal information. This sentiment pervades most subgroups, with those aged 55 and older (48%) more likely to be very uncomfortable than those aged 35-54 (40%) or 18-34 (37%).

Americans' discomfort with companies using their personal data is consistent with recently released Gallup-Knight Foundation data showing the unwillingness of 72% of Americans to be microtargeted with political advertising and content.⁶

When asked to weigh privacy of personal data over easy access to information, three-quarters (75%) of Americans say privacy trumps information access (24%).

⁶ McCarthy, J. (2020, March 2). *In U.S., most oppose micro-targeting in online political ads.* Gallup.Com. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/286490/oppose-micro-targeting-online-political-ads.aspx>

FIGURE 15

Percentage of Americans Who Value Privacy vs. Ability to Access Information

Which comes closer to your view?

% Who select each option

The privacy of my data and information is more important than being able to access information I need at a moment's notice

75

Being able to access information I need at a moment's notice is more important than the privacy of my data and information

24

Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

Young adults aged 18-34 are slightly more likely than others to say they value information access (31%). Similarly, daily users of Google (30%) and Facebook (29%) are more likely to value information access than Americans overall.

Despite privacy concerns, Americans approve of internet companies using their personal information to improve their experience on websites or apps — 66% say companies should be able to use their information for this purpose. The public also divides evenly as to whether internet companies should be able to use their personal information to show ads or services that may be of interest to them — 47% of Americans say companies should be able to do this and 52% say they should not. But Americans do not believe their personal information should be used to show them political ads that may interest them or be sold to third-party companies.

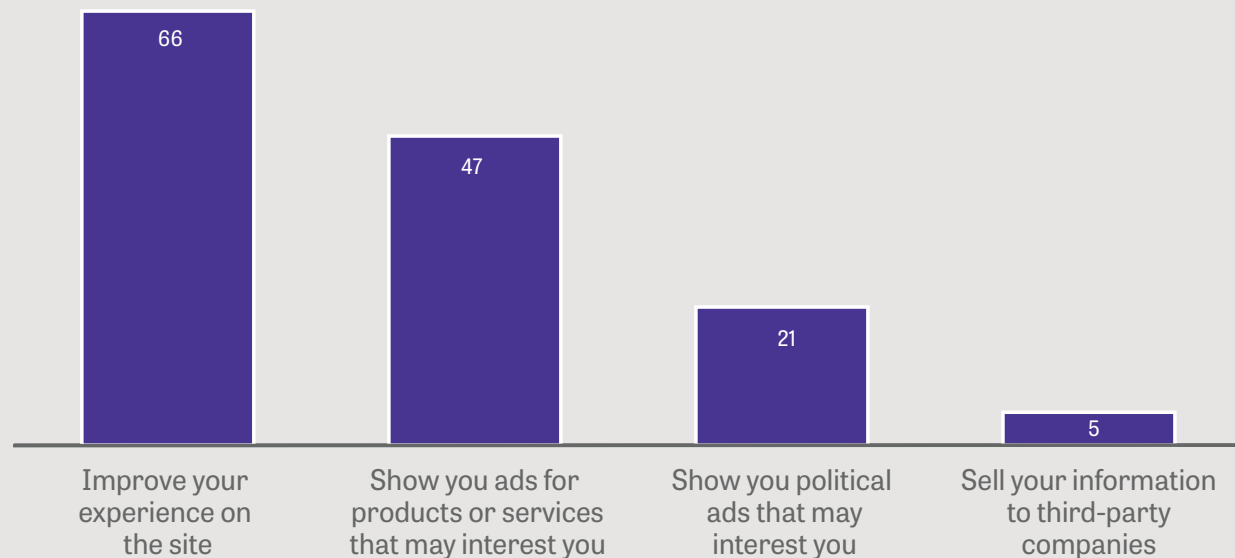
About 8 in 10 Americans are uncomfortable with internet and technology companies using their personal information.

FIGURE 16

Percentage of Americans Who Believe Internet and Technology Companies Should Be Able to Use Our Information

Do you think internet companies should or should not be allowed to use information it collects about you, such as your searching or browsing history, when you visit its website or use its apps in order to -- ?

% Who indicate companies should be able to use information it collects



Note: "No answer" percentages not shown.

Given how widespread public concerns are relating to data privacy and Americans' ambivalence about how internet and technology companies may use their data, it is not surprising that most Americans (70%) support government having a major role in addressing the privacy of personal data online. Support for governmental intervention in this area is second only to support of the government protecting the U.S. from foreign interference in U.S. elections (80%).

Seven in 10 Americans (70%) favor a major governmental role in addressing concerns related to the privacy of personal data online.

Conclusion

In less than two decades, internet and technology companies have transformed how people access information, connect with friends and family and engage networks of like-minded people. Estimates place social media use at an average of 153 minutes per day, up from 109 minutes in 2015.⁷ With this rapid acceleration of people's digital footprint have come deepening concerns about these companies' practices on such wide-ranging issues as free speech, the spread of misinformation, online interference in U.S. elections and the privacy of personal data. Americans are more negative than positive about the impact of these companies on society by margins of as much as six to one.

In this era of depressed public trust, pathways toward solutions are ambiguous. While Americans trust neither internet and technology companies nor government institutions to address their concerns, some proposals are beginning to find support.

The companies themselves have recently taken steps to address some issues — including third-party data access, political ads and content that may offend or harm users. Recently, Google announced plans to allow users to limit the use of third-party cookies in its Chrome browser,⁸ and Twitter announced it is prohibiting the promotion of political content.⁹ All the major internet and technology companies, including Facebook, Google and Twitter, hire content moderators to police hate speech and harassment on their platforms to stave off public concerns around such issues. And Facebook recently announced the formation of an independent content oversight board to support the company's aim to be “more accountable and improve our decision-making.”¹⁰

At the same time, the federal government is considering legislative proposals and regulatory actions to address concerns raised by the American public. Democratic and Republican lawmakers in both chambers of Congress have proposed legislation that largely focuses on the collection, use and sharing of personal data. Increased public scrutiny has led to multiple investigations by Congress, the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission and states' attorneys general into the business practices and potential anti-competitive behavior of these companies, which could result in legal and regulatory action.¹¹

Solutions will ultimately hinge on the extent to which Americans trust that the private companies that now administer the digital public square are also acting in the public interest — and that their largely analog democratic institutions are able to address today's largely digital concerns.

7 *Average time spent daily on social media* (Latest 2020 Data). (n.d.). BroadbandSearch.Net. Retrieved Feb. 24, 2020, from <https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/average-daily-time-on-social-media>

8 Bohn, D. (2020, January 14). *Google to 'phase out' third-party cookies in Chrome, but not for two years*. The Verge. <https://www.theverge.com/2020/1/14/21064698/google-third-party-cookies-chrome-two-years-privacy-safari-firefox>

9 *Political content*. (n.d.). Twitter. Retrieved Feb. 24, 2020, from <https://business.twitter.com/en/help/ads-policies/prohibited-content-policies/political-content.html>

10 *Establishing structure and governance for an independent oversight board*. (2019, September 17). About Facebook. <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/09/oversight-board-structure/>

11 Stacey, K., Shubert, K., & Murphy, H. (2019, October 28). *Which antitrust investigations should Big Tech worry about?* Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/abcc5070-f68f-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654>

Methodology

Results for the survey items are based on self-administered web surveys with a random sample of U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, who are members of the Gallup Panel™. Gallup uses probability-based, random sampling methods to recruit its Panel members.

Interviewing took place between Dec. 3 and 15, 2019, and included 1,628 Gallup Panel members.

Gallup weighted the obtained samples to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the 2015 Current Population Survey figures for the aged-18-and-older U.S. population. For results based on any individual sample, the margin of sampling error is ± 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

The full questionnaire, topline results, detailed cross tabulations and raw data may be obtained upon request. For questions about how the survey was conducted, please contact galluphelp@gallup.com.



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