

Assignment 3
Essay on polarization and propaganda

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1 Essay on "Polarization or Propaganda?"

[Link of the article](#)

Political disagreement has been always around since I can remember. Nevertheless, what we are seeing lately in the United States and other democratic countries is not just groups of people disagreeing, is groups of people that see each other's as a threat, as crazy people with his heads completely full of lies.

Why is that? The article states two possible explanations: propaganda and polarization. The first one tries to justify this radicalized political landscape around the press and social networks, meanwhile the last one focuses more on a natural-grouping behavior explanation.

Even though we live in the era of the "information", the fast growth of social media platforms and digital content enabled the spread of large amounts of misleading and fake news. New unsourced and fraudulent articles target daily groups of "susceptible" individuals towards a concrete goal, in this case, political opinions in order to get more cloud.

Nowadays, propaganda is everywhere: in our phone, our personal computer, in the TV, around each corner of our city... And as someone may think, propaganda does not just affect grown-up individuals: propaganda targets everyone, child's, teenagers, elderly people... Therefore, it is impossible to not acknowledge the strength of this propaganda theory.

Nevertheless, a well-known behavior much older than this era of "information" is the fact that like-minded people tend to group together. What this article explains us is that what we are lately seeing is a radicalization of this grouping, meaning that we are now clustering with very opposite political opinions, completely removing what we call "center parties".

As we can see, the major difference between these two phenomena is the channel. Propaganda needs social platforms, like Facebook (USA elections 2016), YouTube and Twitter in order to spread its false information. Meanwhile, polarization seems like it has an anthropological root. Nevertheless, both explanations are really close; the article itself mentions the use of social platforms when talking about polarization:

> [...]we constantly hear our own beliefs affirmed and rarely encounter our political opposites. Sunstein adds a technological flourish to the story. Social media, he says, enables even more frictionless self-sorting, which accelerates the process.

(Continues below)

In my opinion, propaganda is the real deal here. What happened in the USA elections of 2016 or the Indonesian ones was never seen before and it can not be attributed to only “polarization”. In fact, I think what is happening is the mix of both: we naturally tend to group ourselves between people with similar political ideas (polarization) and at the same time we also do it in our social media: we follow people that think like us, so we only hear one-sided opinions.

This creates a self-destroying behavior, like a feedback, where each time we are more biased and more radicalized towards one political view, like Republican or Democratic in the United States, pro-independence or unionist in Catalonia, etc.

It took a couple fraudulent elections and a strong social mobilization for social media platforms to start countermeasures against fake news. Still, nowadays, political parties (and we are not talking about bots or fake users here...) use social media platforms to spread and indoctrinate its followers towards radicalization. It’s our duty to change the way social platforms are used and start to build a “clean” internet.