

Read our research on: [Vaccines](#) | [Election 2024](#) | [News Habits](#)



Search pewresearch.org...

RESEARCH TOPICS ▼

PUBLICATIONS

OUR METHODS

SHORT READS

TOOLS & RESOURCES

EXPERTS

ABOUT US

[Home](#) > [Research Topics](#) > [News Habits & Media](#) > [News Media Trends](#) > [News Platforms & Sources](#) > [Digital News Landscape](#) > [Social Media & the...](#)

REPORT | DECEMBER 6, 2022

SHARE ↗

Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier

Most think social media has made it easier to manipulate and divide people, but also say it informs and raises awareness

BY [RICHARD WIKE](#), [LAURA SILVER](#), [JANEL FETTEROLF](#), [CHRISTINE HUANG](#), [SARAH AUSTIN](#), [LAURA CLANCY](#) AND [SNEHA GUBBALA](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

+



(Getty Images)

How we did this +

As people across the globe have increasingly turned to Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and other platforms to get their news and express their opinions, the sphere of social media has become a new public space for discussing – and often arguing bitterly – about political and social issues. And in the mind of many analysts, social media is one of the major reasons for the [declining health of democracy](#) in nations around the world.

REPORT MATERIALS

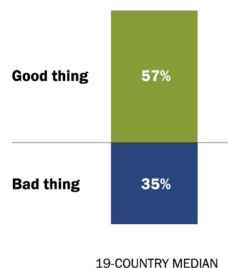
- Report PDF
- Topline
 - Detailed tables: Internet, smartphone and social media use in advanced economies (2022)
- American Trends Panel Wave 105
- Spring 2022 Survey Data

TABLE OF CONTENTS

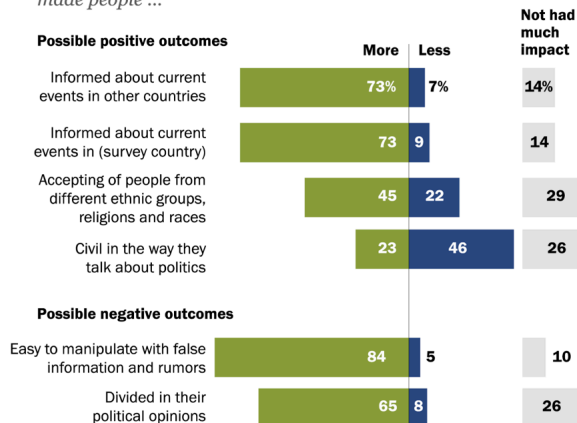
- Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier**
- 1. Satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy
- 2. Views of social media and its impacts on society
- 3. Internet, smartphone and social media use
- Acknowledgments
- Appendix A: Classifying democracies
- Appendix B: Negative Impact of the Internet and Social Media Index
- Appendix C: Political categorization
- Appendix D: Classifying European political parties
- Appendix E: Country-specific examples of smartphones
- Appendix F: Country-specific examples of social media sites
- Methodology

Most say that social media has been good for democracy but has had important negative and positive effects on politics and society

% who say social media has been more of a ___ for democracy in their country



% who say access to the internet and social media has made people ...



Note: Percentages are 19-country medians except for the question about political civility, which is an 18-country median and excludes Japan due to a translation error. Those who did not answer not shown.

Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey. Q28 & Q31a-f.

"Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier"

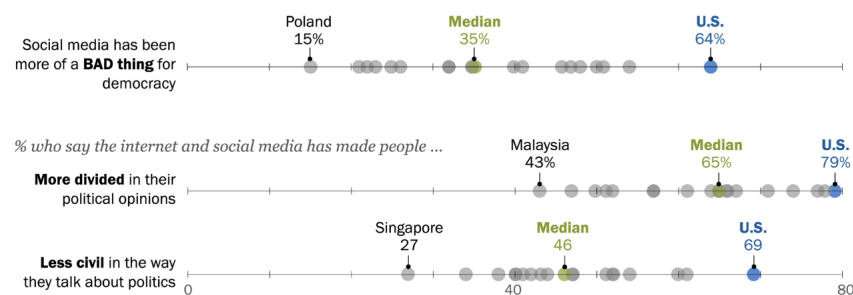
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

However, as a new Pew Research Center survey of 19 advanced economies shows, ordinary citizens see social media as both a constructive and destructive component of political life, and overall most believe it has actually had a positive impact on democracy. Across the countries polled, a median of 57% say social media has been more of a good thing for their democracy, with 35% saying it has been a bad thing.

There are substantial cross-national differences on this question, however, and the United States is a clear outlier: Just 34% of U.S. adults think social media has been good for democracy, while 64% say it has had a bad impact. In fact, the U.S. is an outlier on a number of measures, with larger shares of Americans seeing social media as divisive.

More Americans see negative political impact of the internet and social media, compared with other countries surveyed

% who say ...



Note: Results for Japan on Q31f are excluded due to a translation error.

Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey. Q28, Q31b & Q31f.

"Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Even in countries where assessments of social media's impact are largely positive, most believe it has had some pernicious effects – in particular, it has led to manipulation and division within societies. A median of 84% across the 19 countries surveyed believe access to the internet and social media have made people easier to manipulate with false information and rumors. A [recent analysis](#) of the same survey shows that a median of 70% across the 19 nations consider the spread of false information online to be a major threat, second only to climate change on a list of global threats.

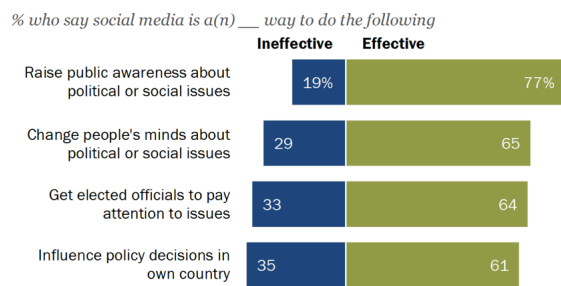
Additionally, a median of 65% think it has made people more divided in their political opinions. More than four-in-ten say it has made people less civil in how they talk about politics (only about a quarter say it has made people more civil).

So given the online world's manipulation, divisiveness and lack of civility, what's to like? How can this acrimonious sea of false information be good for democracy? Part of the answer may be that it gives people a sense of empowerment at a time when few feel empowered. Majorities in nearly every country surveyed say their political system does not allow people like them to have an influence in politics. In nine nations, including the U.S., seven-in-ten or more express that view.

Online platforms may help people feel less powerless in a few ways. First, social media informs them. As a recent [Pew Research Center report](#) highlighted, majorities in these countries believe that staying informed about domestic and international events is part of being a good citizen, and it is clear that people believe the internet and social media make it easier to stay informed. Nearly three-quarters say the internet and social media have made people more informed about current events in their own country as well as in other countries. Young adults are especially likely to hold these views.

Also, most of those surveyed see social media as an effective tool for accomplishing political goals. Majorities in most countries say it is at least somewhat effective at raising public awareness, changing people's minds about issues, getting elected officials to pay attention to issues and influencing policy decisions.

Social media generally seen as effective at influencing politics and policy



Note: Percentages are medians based on 19 countries. Those who did not answer not shown.
Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey, Q30a-d.
"Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

For some, social media is also an outlet for expression. In South Korea, for example, roughly half of social media users say they sometimes or often post or share things online about political or social issues. However, in the other countries polled, posting about these issues is less common, and in 12 nations four-in-ten or more say they never post about political or social topics. These are among the major findings of a Pew Research Center survey, conducted from Feb. 14 to June 3, 2022, among 24,525 adults in 19 nations.

Americans most likely to say social media has been bad for democracy

Majorities in most of the nations surveyed believe social media has been a good thing for democracy in their country. Assessments are especially positive in Singapore, Malaysia, Poland, Sweden, Hungary and Israel, where 65% or more hold this view (for data on how international research organizations assess the quality of democracy in the countries surveyed, see [Appendix A](#)).

In contrast, Americans are the most negative about the impact of social media on democracy: 64% say it has been bad. Republicans and independents who lean toward the Republican Party (74%) are much more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners (57%) to see the ill effects of social media on the political system.

Half or more also say social media has been bad for democracy in the Netherlands, France and Australia.

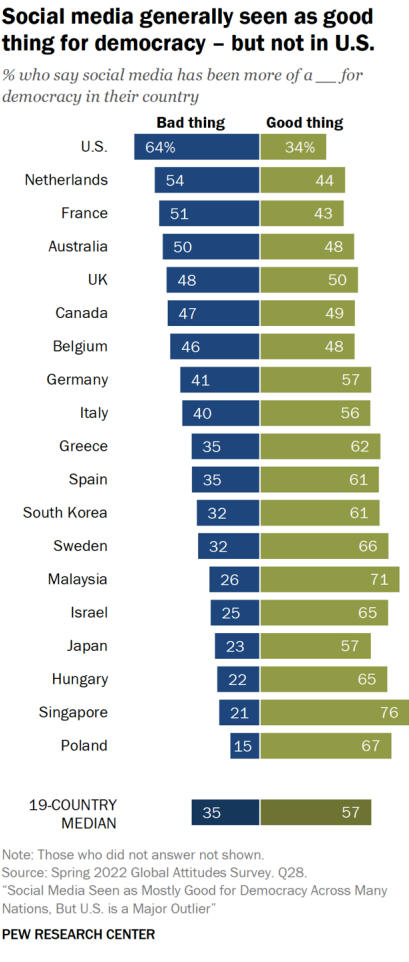
In addition to being the most negative about social media’s influence on democracy, Americans are consistently among the most negative in their assessments of specific ways social media has affected politics and society. For example, 79% in the U.S. believe access to the internet and social media has made people more divided in their political opinions, the highest percentage among the 19 countries polled.

Similarly, 69% of Americans say the internet and social media have made people less civil in how they talk about politics – again the highest share among the nations in the study.

To compare how publics evaluate the impact of the internet and social media on society, we created an index that combines responses to six questions regarding whether the internet makes people: 1) less informed about current events in their country, 2) more divided in their political opinions, 3) less accepting of people from different backgrounds, 4) easier to manipulate with false information and rumors, 5) less informed about current events in other countries, and 6) less civil in the way they talk about politics.

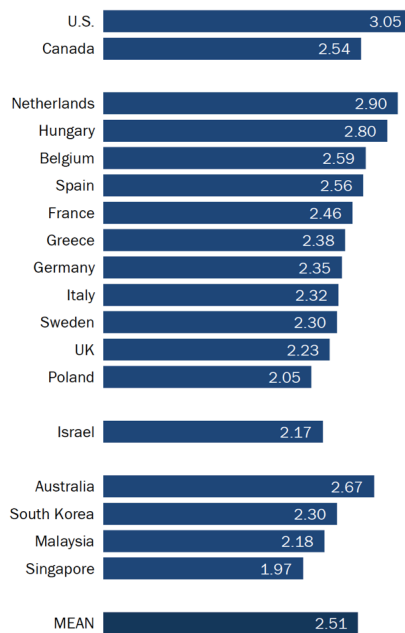
The negative positions on all of these questions were coded as 1 while positive or “no impact” responses were coded as 0. For each respondent, scores on the overall index can range from 0, indicating they see no negative effects of the internet and social media across these questions, to 6, meaning a negative answer to all six questions. See [Appendix B](#) for more information about how the index was created.

Looking at the data this way illustrates the degree to which Americans stand out for their negative take on social media’s impact. The average score among U.S. respondents is 3.05, the highest – and therefore the most negative – in the survey. Dutch, Hungarian and Australian respondents are also more negative than others. In contrast, Malaysians, Israelis, Poles and Singaporeans offer less negative assessments.



Americans see more negative effects of internet and social media on society

Negative impact of the internet and social media index



Note: Results for Japan are excluded due to a translation error.
 Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey. Q31a-f.
 "Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew Research Center's research on the internet, social media and technology in the U.S. and around the world

Many of the topics explored in this report have been studied in depth in the U.S. by Pew Research Center's [internet and technology team](#), which for more than two decades has conducted survey research on the social impact of digital technologies, such as [internet and broadband](#), [mobile connectivity](#) and [social media](#). The team's work has included topics such as [privacy and surveillance](#), [activism and civic engagement](#), [digital divides](#), [the role of technology in people's lives and broader society](#), [teens' and younger children's use of technology](#) and [online dating](#). In addition, this research has examined the emergence of facial recognition, smart speakers, the gig/sharing economy, people's attitudes about automation and algorithms and the use of wearable technology. The research has also regularly explored the future of digital life on such issues as the future of work and the rise of artificial intelligence.

The Center has also continually studied technology usage and views about the impact of digital technologies [around the world](#) as part of its [Global Attitudes](#) research, including reports on topics such as [social media usage](#), [smartphone ownership](#) and public opinion in Africa regarding the [impact of the internet](#) on society.

In 2018, the Center conducted an in-depth survey in 11 emerging economies, examining views about [mobile technology](#) and [social media](#), as well as [attitudes toward diversity](#) in these nations. The Center also conducted focus groups in five countries as part of this study. In many ways, the results of the 2018 study were similar to those in the current survey, in that people in emerging and advanced economies alike believe social media presents both opportunities and dangers. For a comparison of results from the two studies, see "[In advanced and emerging economies, similar views on how social media affects democracy and society](#)."

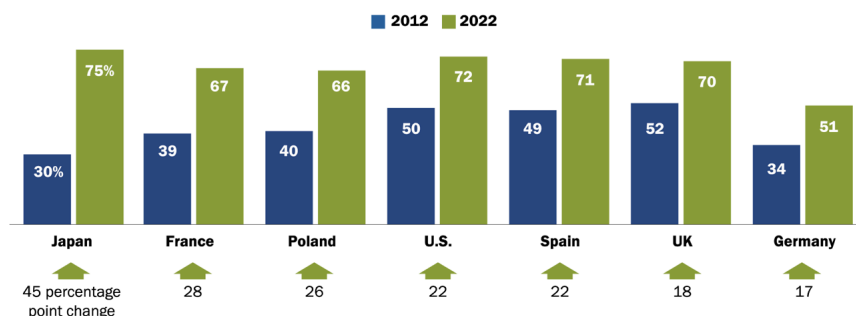
For the past few years, the COVID-19 [pandemic has created challenges for conducting surveys](#) in nations where the Center typically interviews respondents in person, rather than via phone or online approaches. Moving forward, we will return to in-person interviewing in countries around the world,

which will allow us to explore the impact of technology and other issues in regions that are underrepresented or not represented in this report.

The rapid growth of social media

Large increase in social media use compared with a decade ago

% who use social media sites



Note: In 2012, question was only asked of people who use the internet, but data is reported out of total respondents. In 2022, the question was asked of everyone.

Source: Spring Global Attitudes Survey, Q27. U.S. data is from a Pew Research Center survey conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

"Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew Research Center has been asking about social media usage for the past decade, and trend data from several nations polled over that time period highlights the extent to which these platforms have become pervasive in recent years. Growth has been especially dramatic in Japan, where just 30% used social media in 2012, compared with 75% today. Social media has also increased markedly in France, Poland, Spain, the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Even in Germany, which lags significantly behind these other nations in social media usage, there has been a notable increase since 2012.

In every nation surveyed, young people are more likely than others to use social media. However, the age gap has closed over the past decade. When looking again at data from seven nations polled in both 2012 and 2022, growth in usage has been especially steep among 30- to 49-year-olds and those ages 50 and older. For example, nearly all British 18- to 29-

Social media use has grown sharply among older adults in the last decade

% who use social media sites, among those ages ...



Note: In 2012, question was only asked of people who use the internet, but data is reported out of total respondents. In 2022, the question was asked of everyone.

Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey, Q27. U.S. data is from a Pew Research Center survey conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

"Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

year-olds were already social media users in 2012, but there has been significant growth among the two older age groups during the past 10 years.

Young people more likely to see benefits of social media

Overall, young adults are more likely than older adults to use the internet, own a smartphone and use social media. For more information on age differences in technology use, as well as differences by education and income, see the [detailed tables](#) accompanying this report.

In addition to using social media more than their older counterparts, young adults often stand out in their views about the impact of social media.

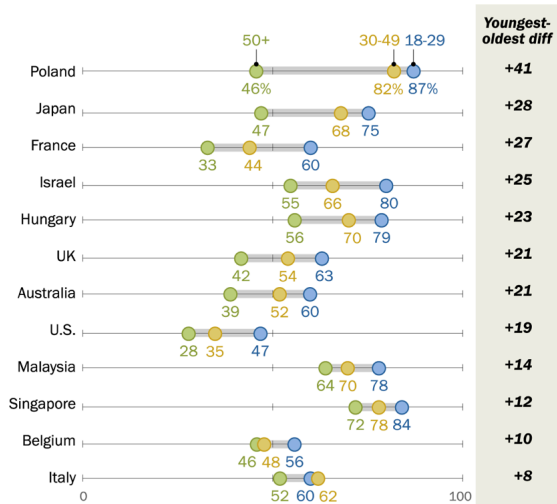
Adults ages 18 to 29 are more likely than those 50 and older to say social media has been good for democracy in 12 out of 19 nations surveyed. For instance, while 87% of 18- to 29-year-old Poles believe social media has had a positive effect on politics, just 46% of those 50 and older agree.

Young adults are also often more likely to say the internet and social media has made people more informed about domestic and international events, and they are especially likely to say these technologies have made people more accepting of others from different backgrounds.

In many cases, young people are also especially likely to consider social media an effective tool in the political realm, particularly regarding its capacity to change people’s minds on social issues and to raise awareness of those issues.

Young adults see social media’s impact on democracy more positively than older adults in most countries

% who say social media has been more of a *good thing* for democracy in their country, among those ages ...



Note: Only statistically significant differences shown.
Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey, Q28.
“Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Next: 1. Satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy

Sign up for our weekly newsletter

Fresh data delivery Saturday mornings



Enter email address...

Sign Up

Sign up for The Briefing

Weekly updates on the world of news & information



Enter email address

SIGN UP

Topics

[Democracy](#), [Global Tech & Cybersecurity](#), [International Political Values](#), [Internet Connectivity](#), [Misinformation](#),
[Political Discourse](#), [Politics & Media](#), [Politics Online](#), [Smartphones](#), [Social Media](#), [Social Media & the News](#),
[Trust, Facts & Democracy](#), [U.S. Democracy](#)

SHARE THIS LINK:

SHARE

Related

Pew Research Center

901 E St. NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20004
USA
[\(+1\) 202-419-4300 | Main](#)
[\(+1\) 202-857-8562 | Fax](#)
[\(+1\) 202-419-4372 | Media Inquiries](#)

RESEARCH TOPICS

- Politics & Policy

International Affairs

Immigration & Migration

Race & Ethnicity

Religion

Age & Generations

Gender & LGBTQ
- Family & Relationships

Economy & Work

Science

Internet & Technology

News Habits & Media

Methodological Research

FOLLOW US

- Email Newsletters
- Instagram
- Facebook
- x
- Tumblr
- YouTube
- RSS Feed

ABOUT PEW RESEARCH CENTER Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan, nonadvocacy fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. It does not take policy positions. The Center conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, computational social science research and other data-driven research. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#), its primary funder.

- 1 What Trump supporters believe and expect
- 2 Migrant encounters at U.S.-Mexico border have fallen sharply in 2024
- 3 Public Trust in Scientists and Views on Their Role in Policymaking
- 4 Majority of Americans continue to favor moving away from Electoral College
- 5 Many Americans perceive a rise in dangerous driving; 78% see cellphone distraction as major problem