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### The People vs. Tech: How the Internet is Killing Democracy

Technology has followed an exponential growth trend ever since its first establishment. Technology has become such a dominant industry that the first trillion-dollar company is expected to be a technology company. But under this amazing feat of development, these industries have stirred much controversy. Is their use of our data warranted? Is using our data for profit honorable? Which one of these two (democracy or technology) will control the other? These questions are explored in Jamie Bartlett's book "The People vs. Tech: How the Internet is Killing Democracy".

Jamie Bartlett outlines the numerous challenges that American democracy will encounter with these gargantuan technology companies. Bartlett has six pillars of democracy and shows how technology firms might weaken each of them. These pillars are; being active citizens, sharing culture in different areas, free elections, stakeholder equality, competitive economy and civic freedom, and lastly, trust in authority. In his exploration, Jamie Bartlett interviews several high-collar individuals from the tech firms, which helps support his background knowledge with first-hand accounts of how these companies are affecting our democracy. The fortunate aspect of this work is that Bartlett presents the information in a way where anyone without an extensive knowledge of technology or politics can still understand it. By grouping his points into the six pillars, the reader can easily stitch together his points into a working understanding of how democracy is being affected by the actions of these tech firms. The six-pillar outline allows the

political aspects of his argument drive the structure and transition from point to point. This allows for anyone, with any background of politics or technology, to follow along without missing a beat.

Essentially, the key argument to this piece is that there is a major conflict of interests going on in the world, more specifically, in the north west. Bartlett claims that within some timeframe, where the range is truly unknown, technology and democracy will collide in such a way where one will destroy the other, or ultimately control the other. Politics is already working to control technology, when considering the net neutrality issue, or the regulation of data collection (Bartlett 1). Technology, however, is giving more and more individuals a platform to share their ideas, new and old. The impact of these movements has been seen more frequently over the past ten years. The problem with this is that it creates a glass ceiling of individual thought and opinion (Bartlett 38). Humans tend to gravitate towards a majority, and by seeing these majorities form on social media, or ideas being endorsed by celebrities, citizens will gravitate to supporting these ideals, instead of forming their own opinions. Bartlett goes on to describe the online community as tribal. People who relate to similar opinions or share the same situations as the people that support a political stance, will form groups to support certain agendas (Bartlett 49). This condones a decision-making process that was once thought of as irrational. Fact-based opinions have been swayed by irrational emotional opinions based on information that is easily tampered with, so that it is not always completely true.

To relate this to a modern issue, Bartlett summarizes how these effects played a role in the recent election of Donald Trump. Data collection, which was sometimes illegal and sometimes not, played a key role in how the election turned out. The Cambridge Analytica, which is a British data collection and politics firm, is responsible for the data mining of citizens

to provide them with advertisements for political campaigns. These advertisements would take the information gathered for the individual and mold a positive advertisement for their client based on the likes and dislikes of the target individual. As anyone could infer, the clients of this firm, one being Donald Trump, was able to gain an unfair advantage over his opponent because of the content being shown to citizens by this firm (Bartlett 85-92). As this information was presented to the voters, it destroys the origin of political controversy. In a way, it is almost forcing people with similar likes and dislikes of a political party to only see biased information about the nominee of that party. Instead, democracy should be about seeing the information presented by both sides and making an informed decision based on the (hopefully) unbiased information.

Another pressing issue that Bartlett explores, is technologies effect on the middle class and inequality between the financial poles. Artificially intelligent robots and machines are beginning to take the place of middle-class workers. The unfortunate reality is, that as this class begins to diminish, the gap between upper and lower class grows. As robots do not require any payment, besides infrequent regular maintenance, profit goes almost directly to the head honchos of the technology firms (Bartlett 181-121). This inequality will lead to a huge segregation of society where the top percent can withhold its wealth from the poor masses. And most of the time, money equals power, so the top percent will make all decisions and control all government, ultimately eliminating democracy, replacing it with a financially-driven oligarchy.

Bartlett does a great job structuring this piece to effectively show how technology is impacting politics and democracy. He outlines the monopolistic behavior of these big tech firms. It is clear that he is quite unhappy to see these firms grasping so much control, but he fails to dive deeply into why capitalism allows this. He also informs the reader about our private data

being used by these firms. Unfortunately, although he does provide great background information, he does not make a claim or opinion on a solution where firms use this data without breaching human privacy rights. The regulation of private data use is one of the key factors that would cause democracy to fall, and yet, a feasible potential solution is not explored.

Citizens must be weary in this society, where exponentially growing technology companies gather information about their clients to deliver ads based on your information. Is it right for them to use this information to sell you things? Is it right to use this information to sway your vote in an election? Is it right that machines will end up depleting the middle-class work force so that CEO's and CFO's can further line their pockets? This book "The People vs Tech: How the Internet is Killing Democracy", will give the perfect background to form an informed opinion.

Works Cited

Jamie Bartlett, *The People vs. Tech: How the Internet is Killing Democracy (and How We Save IT)*, Dutton, 2018.