# China DA

### China DA 1nc Shell

#### Hobbling Facebook will cause Chinese companies to fill the void—undermining a powerful source of American influence at the expense of the Chinese

Loren Thompson, 7/16/2020 (Chief Operating Officer of the non-profit Lexington Institute, “Inventing Bogus Antitrust Arguments To Bring Down Big Tech Is Bad For National Security,” [https://www.forbes.com/sites/ lorenthompson/2020/07/16/inventing-bogus-antitrust-arguments-to-bring-down-big-tech-is-bad-for-national-security/?sh=43d68876784b](https://www.forbes.com/sites/%20lorenthompson/2020/07/16/inventing-bogus-antitrust-arguments-to-bring-down-big-tech-is-bad-for-national-security/?sh=43d68876784b), Retrieved 8/10/2021)

Beijing is undoubtedly encouraging if not subsidizing such assaults. The contrast between how the Chinese government treats its tech companies and the way Washington treats its own players is hard to miss. Whether we like it or not, companies like Alphabet and Facebook have become the leading purveyors of American ideas and influence to the world. If they are hobbled, Chinese competitors will eagerly take their place. There is no compelling argument for breaking up or otherwise sanctioning U.S. technology leaders. If you think America’s Big Tech companies have too much power, imagine how it will feel when their successors are run out of the People’s Republic.

#### The spread of Chinese influence undermines the liberal world order and leads to multiple scenarios for nuclear conflict:

Thomas H. Henriksen, 3/23/2017 (Senior Fellow at Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA, “Post-American World Order,” <https://www.hoover.org/research/post-american-world-order>, Retrieved 8/11/2021)

China’s Not So Peaceful Rise A series of dramatic events took place in response to Obama’s growing disengagement policies, as world powers noted Washington’s burgeoning inwardness. China switched from its “peaceful rise” policy to aggressively asserting and expanding its international presence. Xi Jinping, the all-powerful Chinese leader, moved to advance Beijing’s political and military suzerainty over the South China Sea (SCS) by seizing and reconstructing the disputed shoals into artificial islands with dredged ocean sands in 2014. Next, China militarized three micro-isles of the Spratly Islands (also claimed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam) with runways, radars, and surface-to-air missile sites—actions that broke Beijing’s earlier promise not to militarize the waterway. Since then, Chinese officials have made it clear that the SCS is now their exclusive lake. Other states are expected to recognize China’s claims to most of the energy-rich waters, through which $5 trillion of trade passes annually, roughly half the world’s merchant fleet tonnage. China backs its assertions by modernizing the arsenals of its advanced warships, aircraft, missiles, and ground forces. Xi and company seem bent on restoring the ancient tribute system in which South Korea and Vietnam would become modern-day vassals, while more distant Asian states become supplicants in a Sinocentric sphere. In short, China has become a revisionist juggernaut. Along with its fortifying of these artificial islands, the world’s second largest economy and military spender has emerged as an economic, political, and ideological competitor of the United States not only in Southeast Asian maritime zones but globally. China is maneuvering to set up bases or harbors in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Greece—and is even extending its reach to the long U.S.-allied Portuguese Azores in the mid-Atlantic. In reaction to Beijing’s SCS actions, the Trump administration has stepped up America’s own show of force by sending warships, fighter jets, and submarines to the waters. To underline its not-too-subtle counter-signal to China, the United States also test-fired four Trident II submarine-launched ballistic missiles over 4,000 miles into the Pacific Ocean from the California coast last month, the first four-missile salvo in the post-Soviet era. The western Pacific is becoming a tinderbox. Russia’s Resurgence At the other end of the Asian continent, Russia longs to restore its lost prestige and political influence, forfeited with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Under Vladimir Putin, Russian forces backed the seizure of Crimea from Ukraine before taking over its eastern borderlands. Earlier, Moscow perfected its “frozen war” tactics against two provinces in the Republic of Georgia, thereby yanking them from Georgian sovereignty. Russia’s bullying and intimidation of its Baltic and Eastern European neighbors have become commonplace. Meanwhile, the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, called for “a post-West world” at the Munich Security Conference in mid-February. What China and Russia have in common is that both are engaged in advancing their spheres of influence in their neighborhoods and beyond. Both also seek to crack the Western liberal world order. The United States, meanwhile, has become blasé about its former leadership position in the Western hemisphere, where China’s companies have entered into business deals, some with strategic implications. Washington, without a hint of nostalgia, treats the Monroe Doctrine as a relic of yesteryear’s Yankee imperialism in Latin America. These newly assertive major powers are not alone in shattering the post-Cold War order, which witnessed the unrivaled predominance of the United States—the “indispensable nation,” in the words of the Clinton administration. Trouble-making regional powers, such as Iran, Syria, and North Korea either spread terrorism, provoke instability, or arm themselves with longer-range missiles and nuclear weapons. While they were independent actors a few years ago, each of these pariah regimes increasingly aligns with the two chief U.S. adversaries. Iran and Syria cozy up to Russia, and North Korea depends for fuel and food on a China that hypocritically protests that it lacks influence over a nuclear-armed Pyongyang. Western Europe, once a powerful but independently minded U.S. ally, has faltered. Its slippage is evident in the refugee crisis, its sagging economies, its 20 percent youth unemployment rate, and its reluctance to fund an adequate military defense in the face of Russia’s continuing provocations, including cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and fake news stories. Europe’s paltry defense reflects the continent’s lost belief in its own purpose—and even, some might say, its own civilization. Sino-Russian Partnering Little of this threatening world existed when the United States enjoyed its unipolar moment after the eclipse of its Soviet nemesis, and even after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The emergent world, divided between the United States, China, and Russia, points to the new global order. Particularly worrisome are the warming relations between Beijing and Moscow, despite Chinese designs on Siberian lands and resources. Overcoming a centuries-old rivalry, the recent Sino-Russian rapprochement compounds Washington’s difficulties. Separating Russia from China, as Kissinger and Nixon did, would be a sensible goal for President Trump. It has always been a wise recourse to divide one’s adversaries. Besides, the United States and Russia have worked together in the past. During the World War II, they collaborated against the Third Reich. And during the Cold War, they cooperated in nuclear arms treaties and wheat deals, while mutually trying to skirt a flashpoint that could end in a nuclear war. Washington can work to steer the Kremlin, as it has done before, toward acceptable conduct with its neighbors before Russia can be more than a tactical ally in the great game with China. In the immediate future, the United States can adopt international and domestic approaches to cope with Russian and Chinese territorial expansionism. The tensions stoked by the assertive regimes in the Kremlin or Tiananmen Square could spark a political or military incident that might set off a chain reaction leading to a large-scale war. Historically, powerful rivalries nearly always lead to at least skirmishes, if not a full-blown war. The anomalous Cold War era spared the United States and Soviet Russia a direct conflict, largely from concerns that one would trigger a nuclear exchange destroying both states and much of the world. Such a repetition might reoccur in the unfolding three-cornered geopolitical world. It seems safe to acknowledge that an ascendant China and a resurgent Russia will persist in their geo-strategic ambitions. What Is To Be Done? The first marching order is to dodge any kind of perpetual war of the sort that George Orwell outlined in “1984,” which engulfed the three super states of Eastasia, Eurasia, and Oceania, and made possible the totalitarian Big Brother regime. A long-running Cold War-type confrontation would almost certainly take another form than the one that ran from 1945 until the downfall of the Soviet Union. What prescriptions can be offered in the face of the escalating competition among the three global powers? First, by staying militarily and economically strong, the United States will have the resources to deter its peers’ hawkish behavior that might otherwise trigger a major conflict. Judging by the history of the Cold War, the coming strategic chess match with Russia and China will prove tense and demanding—since all the countries boast nuclear arms and long-range ballistic missiles. Next, the United States should widen and sustain willing coalitions of partners, something at which America excels, and at which China and Russia fail conspicuously. There can be little room for error in fraught crises among nuclear-weaponized and hostile powers. Short- and long-term standoffs are likely, as they were during the Cold War. Thus, the playbook, in part, involves a waiting game in which each power looks to its rivals to suffer grievous internal problems which could entail a collapse, as happened to the Soviet Union. Some Chinese and Russian experts predict grave domestic problems for each other. They also entertain similar thoughts about the United States, which they view as terminally decadent and catastrophically polarized over politics, ethnicity, and the future direction of the country. So, the brewing three-way struggle also involves a systemic contest, which will test the competitors’ economic and political institutions. At this juncture, the world is entering a standoff among the three great and several not-so-great powers. Averting war, while defending our interests, will prove a challenge, calling for deft policy, political endurance, and economic growth, as well as sufficient military force to keep at bay aggressive states or prevail over them if ever a war breaks out.

**Next off,**

# Politics DA

**First off, reconciliation bill passes now, but Biden’s PC key to moderate’s votes. Solves warming**

Emma **Dumain, 11-8**-2021, "Democrats cheer reconciliation vote, but big fights remain," E&E News, https://www.eenews.net/articles/democrats-cheer-reconciliation-vote-but-big-fights-remain/

Congressional Democrats painted a rosy view this past weekend of the prospects for swift legislative action on their massive, $1.7 trillion climate and social spending package.

From the White House on Saturday, President Biden said without equivocation, “We will pass this in the House, and we’ll pass it in the Senate.”

From Glasgow, Scotland, on a panel at the United Nations climate talks, Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) said his message to the entire international community was that the Senate would ultimately get the votes to advance the reconciliation bill, enabling Biden to meet his goal of achieving 50 percent emissions reductions below 2005 levels by the year 2030.

“We will get this job done,” said Markey of legislation that would invest roughly $550 billion to fight the climate crisis — the biggest federal investment in the environment in history.

And yesterday, White House chief of staff Ron Klain hammered the point home: “We are going to lead the world in tackling climate change,” he said on on NBC’s “Meet The Press,” adding, “We’re going to pass this bill and have the tools to do it.”

But simmering beneath this optimism are real uncertainties as to how lingering disagreements over the cost and content of the reconciliation bill, known as the “Build Back Better Act,” will get resolved and fulfill the many promises on climate action Democrats intend to tout in Glasgow over the next several days.

This past Friday, progressives finally agreed to clear the separate, $1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package for the president’s signature, even without ironclad commitments from moderate Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona that they would vote for the separate, partisan bill. Those commitments had been a hard line that liberals had held on to for weeks.

Meanwhile, another dilemma emerged: House Democratic moderates said they would not support the reconciliation bill until it had received an official cost estimate from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

House Democratic leadership ultimately culled together the votes to pass the bipartisan infrastructure bill, 228-206, with all but six Democrats supporting and with help from 13 Republicans to make up the shortfall. Moderates essentially promised progressives they’d vote for the reconciliation bill once the CBO score is finalized.

At the same time, Congress took a procedural step, 221-213, regarding the reconciliation bill to bring that measure closer to a final passage vote the week of Nov. 15, when the House returns following the Veterans Day recess.

Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-N.J.), one of the moderates who insisted the reconciliation bill be scored prior to a vote, said on CNN’s “State of the Union” yesterday he expected the score to be in line with White House projections, in which case he and his colleagues would back the bill as soon as next week.

Party leaders, however, are taking a tremendous gamble that the CBO score will be sufficient. They are now working against a much tighter deadline to resolve intraparty differences on multiple policy proposals by the year’s end, where the final weeks of December will also be consumed by other legislative battles relating to the appropriations process and the debt ceiling.

They are also putting tremendous trust in Biden’s ability to convince Manchin and Sinema to support the larger spending package, about which Manchin has expressed serious reservations while Sinema has stayed mostly mum.

**Antitrust reform requires PC and trades off with other legislative priorities.**

Peter C. **Carstensen 21**, the Fred W. & Vi Miller Chair in Law Emeritus, University of Wisconsin Law School, February 2021, “THE “OUGHT” AND “IS LIKELY” OF BIDEN ANTITRUST,” https://www.concurrences.com/en/review/issues/no-1-2021/on-topic/the-new-us-antitrust-administration-en

14. Similarly, **despite bipartisan murmurs** about competitive issues, the potential in a closely divided Congress that any major initiatives will survive is limited at best. In part the challenge here is how the Biden administration will rank its commitments. If it were to make reform of competition law a major and primary commitment, it would **have to trade off other goals**, which might include health care reform or increases in the minimum wage. It is likely in this circumstance the new administration, like the Obama administration’s abandonment of the pro-competitive rules proposed under the PSA, would elect to **give up stricter competition rules** in order to achieve other legislative priorities.

15. Another key to a robust commitment to workable competition is the choice of cabinet and other key administrative positions. Here as well, the early signs are not entirely encouraging. In selecting Tom Vilsack to return as secretary of agriculture, the president has embraced a friend of the large corporate interests dominating agriculture who has spent the last four years in a highly lucrative position advancing their interests. Given the desperate need for pro-competitive rules to implement the PSA and control exploitation of dairy farmers through milk-market orders, the return of Vilsack is not good news. Who will head the FTC and who will be the attorney general and assistant attorney general for antitrust is still unknown, but if those picks are also centrists with strong links to corporate America the hope for robust enforcement of competition law will further attenuate!

16. In sum, this is a pessimistic prognostication for the likely Biden antitrust enforcement agenda. There is much that ought to be done. But this requires a willingness to take major enforcement risks, to invest **significant political capital** in the legislative process, and to select leaders who are committed to advancing the public interest in fair, efficient and dynamically competitive markets. The early signs are that the new administration will be no more committed to robust competition policy than the Obama administration. Events may force a more vigorous policy—I will cling to that hope as the Biden administration takes shape.

**Unchecked climate change causes extinction.**

Bill **McKibben 19**. Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College; fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; holds honorary degrees from 18 colleges and universities; Foreign Policy named him to their inaugural list of the world’s 100 most important global thinkers. "This Is How **Human Extinction** Could Play Out." Rolling Stone. 4-9-2019. https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/bill-mckibben-falter-climate-change-817310/

Oh, it could get **very bad**.

In 2015, a study in the Journal of Mathematical Biology pointed out that if the world’s **oceans** kept warming, by 2100 they might become hot enough to “**stop oxygen production** by **phyto-plankton** by disrupting the process of photosynthesis.” Given that **two-thirds** of the **Earth’s oxygen** comes from phytoplankton, that would “likely result in the **mass mortality of animals and humans**.”

A year later, above the Arctic Circle, in Siberia, a heat wave thawed a reindeer carcass that had been trapped in the permafrost. The exposed body released anthrax into nearby water and soil, infecting two thousand reindeer grazing nearby, and they in turn infected some humans; a twelve-year-old boy died. As it turns out, **permafrost** is a “very good preserver of **microbes** and **viruses**, because it is cold, there is no oxygen, and it is dark” — scientists have managed to revive an eight-million-year-old bacterium they found beneath the surface of a glacier. Researchers believe there are fragments of the **Spanish flu virus**, **smallpox**, and **bubonic plague** buried in Siberia and Alaska.

Or consider this: as ice sheets melt, they take weight off land, and that can **trigger earthquakes** — seismic activity is already increasing in Greenland and Alaska. Meanwhile, the added weight of the new seawater starts to bend the Earth’s crust. “That will give you a **massive increase in volcanic activity**. It’ll activate faults to create earthquakes, submarine landslides, tsunamis, the whole lot,” explained the director of University College London’s Hazard Centre. Such a landslide happened in Scandinavia about eight thousand years ago, as the last Ice Age retreated and a Kentucky-size section of Norway’s continental shelf gave way, “plummeting down to the abyssal plain and creating a series of **titanic waves** that roared forth with a vengeance,” **wiping all signs of life** from coastal Norway to Greenland and “drowning the Wales-sized landmass that once connected Britain to the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany.” When the waves hit the Shetlands, they were sixty-five feet high.

There’s even this: if we keep raising carbon dioxide levels, we may not be able to think straight anymore. At a thousand parts per million (which is within the realm of possibility for 2100), human cognitive ability falls 21 percent. “The largest effects were seen for Crisis Response, Information Usage, and Strategy,” a Harvard study reported, which is too bad, as those skills are what we seem to need most.

I could, in other words, do my best to scare you silly. I’m not opposed on principle — changing something as fundamental as the composition of the atmosphere, and hence the heat balance of the planet, is certain to trigger all manner of horror, and we shouldn’t shy away from it. The dramatic uncertainty that lies ahead may be the most frightening development of all; the physical world is going from backdrop to foreground. (It’s like the contrast between politics in the old days, when you could forget about Washington for weeks at a time, and politics in the Trump era, when the president is always jumping out from behind a tree to yell at you.)

But let’s try to occupy ourselves with the most likely scenarios, because they are more than disturbing enough. Long before we get to tidal waves or smallpox, long before we choke to death or stop thinking clearly, we will need to concentrate on the most mundane and basic facts: everyone needs to eat every day, and an awful lot of us live near the ocean.

FOOD SUPPLY first. We’ve had an amazing run since the end of World War II, with crop yields growing fast enough to keep ahead of a fast-rising population. It’s come at great human cost — displaced peasant farmers fill many of the planet’s vast slums — but in terms of sheer volume, the Green Revolution’s fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery managed to push output sharply upward. That climb, however, now seems to be running into the brute facts of heat and drought. There are studies to demonstrate the dire effects of warming on coffee, cacao, chickpeas, and champagne, but it is cereals that we really need to worry about, given that they supply most of the planet’s calories: corn, wheat, and rice all evolved as crops in the climate of the last ten thousand years, and though plant breeders can change them, there are limits to those changes. You can move a person from Hanoi to Edmonton, and she might decide to open a Vietnamese restaurant. But if you move a rice plant, it will die.

A 2017 study in Australia, home to some of the world’s highest-tech farming, found that “**wheat productivity** has **flatlined** as a **direct result of climate change**.” After tripling between 1900 and 1990, wheat yields had stagnated since, as temperatures increased a degree and rainfall declined by nearly a third. “The chance of that just being variable climate without the underlying factor [of climate change] is less than one in a hundred billion,” the researchers said, and it meant that despite all the expensive new technology farmers kept introducing, “they have succeeded only in standing still, not in moving forward.” Assuming the same trends continued, yields would actually start to decline inside of two decades, they reported. In June 2018, researchers found that a two-degree Celsius rise in temperature — which, recall, is what the Paris accords are now aiming for — could cut U.S. corn yields by 18 percent. A four-degree increase — which is where our current trajectory will take us — would cut the crop almost in half. The United States is the world’s largest producer of corn, which in turn is the planet’s most widely grown crop.

**Corn is vulnerable** because even a week of high temperatures at the key moment can **keep it from fertilizing**. (“You only get one chance to pollinate a quadrillion kernels of corn,” the head of a commodity consulting firm explained.) But even the hardiest crops are susceptible. Sorghum, for instance, which is a staple for half a billion humans, is particularly hardy in dry conditions because it has big, fibrous roots that reach far down into the earth. Even it has limits, though, and they are being reached. Thirty years of data from the American Midwest show that heat waves affect the “vapor pressure deficit,” the difference between the water vapor in the sorghum leaf’s interior and that in the surrounding air. Hotter weather means the sorghum releases more moisture into the atmosphere. Warm the planet’s temperature by two degrees Celsius — which is, again, now the world’s goal — and sorghum yields drop 17 percent. Warm it five degrees Celsius (nine degrees Fahrenheit), and yields drop almost 60 percent.

It’s hard to imagine a topic duller than sorghum yields. It’s the precise opposite of clickbait. But **people have to eat**; in the human game, the single most important question is probably “What’s for dinner?” And when the answer is “Not much,” things **deteriorate fast**. In 2010 a severe heat wave hit Russia, and it wrecked the grain harvest, which led the Kremlin to ban exports. The global **price of wheat spiked**, and that helped **trigger the Arab Spring** — Egypt at the time was the largest wheat importer on the planet. That experience set academics and insurers to work gaming out what the next **food shock** might look like. In 2017 one team imagined a vigorous El Niño, with the attendant floods and droughts — for a season, in their scenario, corn and soy yields declined by 10 percent, and wheat and rice by 7 percent. The result was chaos: “quadrupled commodity prices, civil unrest, significant negative humanitarian consequences . . . **Food riots** break out in urban areas across the Middle East, North Africa, and Latin America. The euro weakens and the main European stock markets lose ten percent.”

At about the same time, a team of British researchers released a study demonstrating that even if you can grow plenty of food, the transportation system that distributes it runs through just fourteen major choke-points, and those are vulnerable to — you guessed it — massive disruption from climate change. For instance, U.S. rivers and canals carry a third of the world’s corn and soy, and they’ve been frequently shut down or crimped by flooding and drought in recent years. Brazil accounts for 17 percent of the world’s grain exports, but heavy rainfall in 2017 stranded three thousand trucks. “It’s the glide path to a perfect storm,” said one of the report’s authors.

Five weeks after that, another report raised an even deeper question. What if you can figure out how to grow plenty of food, and you can figure out how to guarantee its distribution, but the food itself has lost much of its value? The paper, in the journal Environmental Research, said that rising carbon dioxide levels, by speeding plant growth, seem to have reduced the amount of protein in basic staple crops, a finding so startling that, for many years, agronomists had overlooked hints that it was happening. But it seems to be true: when researchers grow grain at the carbon dioxide levels we expect for later this century, they find that minerals such as calcium and iron drop by 8 percent, and protein by about the same amount. In the developing world, where people rely on plants for their protein, that means huge reductions in nutrition: India alone could lose 5 percent of the protein in its total diet, putting 53 million people at new risk for protein deficiency. The loss of zinc, essential for maternal and infant health, could endanger 138 million people around the world. In 2018, rice researchers found “significantly less protein” when they grew eighteen varieties of rice in high–carbon dioxide test plots. “The idea that food became less nutritious was a surprise,” said one researcher. “It’s not intuitive. But I think we should continue to expect surprises. We are completely altering the biophysical conditions that underpin our food system.” And not just ours. People don’t depend on goldenrod, for instance, but bees do. When scientists looked at samples of goldenrod in the Smithsonian that dated back to 1842, they found that the protein content of its pollen had “declined by a third since the industrial revolution — and the change closely tracks with the rise in carbon dioxide.”

Bees help crops, obviously, so that’s scary news. But in August 2018, a massive new study found something just as frightening: crop pests were thriving in the new heat. “It gets better and better for them,” said one University of Colorado researcher. Even if we hit the UN target of limiting temperature rise to two degrees Celsius, pests should cut wheat yields by 46 percent, corn by 31 percent, and rice by 19 percent. “Warmer temperatures accelerate the metabolism of insect pests like aphids and corn borers at a predictable rate,” the researchers found. “That makes them hungrier[,] and warmer temperatures also speed up their reproduction.” Even fossilized plants from fifty million years ago make the point: “**Plant damage** from insects **correlated** with rising and falling **temperatures**, reaching a maximum during the warmest periods.”

### Misinformation Advantage Answers (Front-Line)

#### Social media markets are competitive—TikTok proves:

Casey Newton, 2/23/2021 (Verge contributing editor. He is the founder and editor of Platformer, a daily newsletter about Big Tech and democracy, “Social networks are finally competitive again,” [https://www.theverge.com/2021 /2/23/22296520/social-networks-competition-facebook-tiktok-twitter-clubhouse-snap](https://www.theverge.com/2021%20/2/23/22296520/social-networks-competition-facebook-tiktok-twitter-clubhouse-snap), Retrieved 8/4/2021)

It still doesn’t seem quite real to me, and yet everywhere I look the signs are there: social networks are competitive again. Today, let’s tour this weird new landscape and talk about what it means — and doesn’t mean — for the tech giants and the governments trying to rein them in. I. HOW COMPETITION ENDED If I had to put a date on when competition ended among social networks in the United States, I’d choose August 2nd, 2016. That’s when Instagram introduced its copy of Snapchat stories, blunting the momentum of an upstart challenger and sending a chill through the startup ecosystem. I don’t think copying features is necessarily anti-competitive — in fact, as I’ll argue below, it’s a sign that the ecosystem is working as intended — but the effect of Facebook’s copying here was dramatic. Snap fell into a long funk, and would-be entrepreneurs and investors got the message: Facebook will seek to acquire or copy any upstart social product, dramatically limiting its odds of breakout success. Investment shrunk accordingly. The previous year, after the success of Twitter’s Periscope app, Facebook had cloned its live video features, and enthusiasm for both products seemed to broadly peter out. When live group video experienced momentary success under Houseparty, Facebook cloned that too, and Houseparty later sold to Epic Games for an undisclosed sum. It was in this stagnant environment that many people, myself included, came to believe that it had been a mistake to let Facebook acquire Instagram and WhatsApp. The former became the breakout social network of a younger generation, and the latter cemented Facebook’s global dominance in communication. A world in which both had remained independent would have been much more competitive, even if neither had grown to the scale that they did under Facebook. This is the basic thesis of the Federal Trade Commission’s antitrust lawsuit against the company, which it filed in December. The government argues that Facebook “is illegally maintaining its personal social networking monopoly through a years-long course of anticompetitive conduct,” and if successful, it could force Facebook to sell off Instagram and WhatsApp. It’s a tricky case; as Ben Thompson explains here, the government’s attempt to define the market in which Facebook competes so as to prove it has a monopoly is rather tortured. You can think the FTC’s case against Facebook is weak and also believe that the period from 2016 to 2021 saw remarkably little innovation among American social networks, at least in terms of the basic user behaviors that they inspire. The market for social products became incredibly concentrated; Facebook and Google built a duopoly in digital advertising; and their vast size and unpredictable effects helped to trigger a global backlash against American tech giants. If, like me, you think this is all a problem, you could argue for one of two basic approaches to fixing it. The first is government intervention, in the form of an antitrust lawsuit or new regulations from Congress, that would regulate the ability of tech giants to acquire smaller companies or put up new barriers to entering the market or competing on fair terms. The second is to do basically nothing, trusting that the entropic nature of the universe and the inexorable march of time would eventually restore competition. If the second choice sounds ridiculous, it is not without precedent. In the late 1990s, Microsoft’s dominance over the PC market led the government to pursue an antitrust case over the company’s move to bundle its Internet Explorer browser with the Windows operating system. The fear was that such bundling would grant Microsoft total power over the consumer PC market forever. In reality, of course, mobile phones were out there just waiting to be perfected, and then Apple came along and did just that, and now no one really worries too much about Microsoft’s power over the PC market. I do wish the US government had intervened around 2016 to explore new regulations for tech giants’ mergers and acquisitions. In its absence, we could only bet on entropy — and whichever contrarian capitalists still felt like they could challenge Facebook in the market despite its many advantages. The thing is, though, that a bunch of contrarian capitalists did. And lately they have been having a lot of success. II. HOW COMPETITION BEGAN Facebook’s biggest competitor in 2021 is, of course, TikTok, which has been siphoning usage from Facebook’s family of apps since it launched in the United States in 2018 (after merging with Musical.ly). TikTok began by making it dramatically easier for people to make compelling videos, parceled out fame and fortune with a central feed that is incredibly compelling even if you don’t know or follow a single person, and eventually created an entire universe of audio memes, visual effects, and community in-jokes. Eugene Wei, our best writer and thinker on TikTok, published the third part of his essay series about the app Sunday night. Among the many salient points Wei makes is that the sheer number of forces that have gone into TikTok’s success have made it difficult for Facebook (or YouTube) to clone. He writes: People will litigate Instagram copying Snapchat’s Stories feature until the end of time, but the fact is that format wasn’t ever going to be some defensible moat. Ephemerality is a clever new dimension on which to vary social media, but it’s easily copiable. This is why TikTok’s network effects of creativity matter. To clone TikTok, you can’t just copy any single feature. It’s all of that, and not just the features, but how users deploy them and how the resultant videos interact with each other on the FYP feed. It’s replicating all the feedback loops that are built into TikTok’s ecosystem, all of which are interconnected. Maybe you can copy some of the atoms, but the magic lives at the molecular level. The success of TikTok is a source of real anxiety inside Facebook, where employees ask CEO Mark Zuckerberg a question about it during nearly every all-hands Q&A session. The company has deployed a competitor, called Reels, inside of Instagram, and perhaps it will find a way to succeed. But the larger point is that, whatever the odds, Facebook now has to compete against TiKTok or risk losing the next generation. You’ve probably already considered that, though. (Unless you’re the FTC, which conspicuously avoided any mention of TikTok in its entire complaint about Facebook’s alleged monopoly position.) But when it comes to mobile short-form video, Facebook and YouTube face a real challenge. So where else does Facebook suddenly find itself forced to compete? For starters, there’s audio. While still available only by invitation, Clubhouse recently hit an estimated 10 million downloads. Celebrities including Tiffany Haddish, Elon Musk, Joe Rogan, and Zuckerberg himself have made appearances on the app, granting it a cultural cachet rare in a social startup that is still less than a year old. Clubhouse raised money last month at a valuation of $1 billion — more than Facebook ultimately paid for Instagram. Because it’s an audio app, Clubhouse doesn’t pose quite the existential threat that TikTok does: you can still theoretically browse Instagram or message businesses on WhatsApp while listening to a Clubhouse chat. But Facebook has been sufficiently intrigued by Clubhouse’s rapid rise that it is now working out how to clone the app, according to a report this month in The New York Times. Elsewhere, Twitter already has a Clubhouse clone, called Spaces, in beta. It’s not clear that Clubhouse poses a threat to either company, exactly. But both are still taking it as a challenge. What else? After years of making its most prominent investments in technically challenging media involving video, augmented reality, and virtual reality, Facebook is reportedly taking a second look at text. The rise of Substack over the past year has begun to mint a growing number of millionaire, text-based creators, while also pulling millions of people away from their social feeds into the relative calm of the email inbox. (I have a personal stake in this one, of course; I started a newsletter in large part because my social feeds had come to feel like a lousy place to get my news.) What’s interesting here is that Facebook now seems open to this possibility, too. Last month, the Times also reported that Facebook is developing newsletter tools for reporters and writers. (I’ve confirmed this with my own sources.) As with Clubhouse, newsletters hardly pose an existential threat to Facebook. But they do bleed time and attention away from the company’s apps — and in a world where news may not be even available on Facebook in some countries, it may be wise for it to have a hedge. (And Twitter clearly thinks so, too: it acquired Substack competitor Revue last month.) That leaves Facebook competing with legitimately fast-growing, well-funded competitors across several categories. And while it’s in a much earlier stage, I think the company may soon have an interesting competitor in photography as well. Dispo is an invite-only social photo app with a twist: you can’t see any photos you take with the app until 24 hours after you take them. (The app sends you a push notification to open them every day at 9AM local time: among other things, a nice hack to boost daily usage.) Founded by David Dobrik, one of the world’s most popular YouTubers, Dispo has been around as a basic utility for a year. But last month a beta version launched on iOS with social features including shared photo “rolls,” and it quickly hit the 10,000-person cap on Apple’s TestFlight software. It raised $4 million in seed funding in October, and assuming the buzz continues into a public launch, I wouldn’t be surprised if Dispo took off in a major way. Audio, video, photos, and text: to some extent, Facebook has never had to stop competing across these dimensions in the company’s history. But I can’t remember the last time it was fighting so many interesting battles at the same time. III. WHAT IT MEANS Here’s what I’m not saying when I argue that social networks are competitive again: That Facebook has not acted in various anti-competitive ways throughout its history. That Facebook should no longer be subject to antitrust scrutiny, or that the US government (and, separately, a coalition of US attorneys general) should abandon their lawsuits. That, given all this new competition, Facebook should be allowed to purchase rival social networks in the future. That Facebook won’t remain the world’s largest social network for a long time to come, or that its business will suffer in the short term. In fact, I think there’s a good case to be made that antitrust pressure from the US government in particular is what has allowed competition to return to social networks in the first place. Had Clubhouse or Substack emerged in 2013 or 2014, it’s not hard to imagine Facebook racing to acquire them and knock them off the chessboard. But in 2021, when Facebook faces a formal antitrust review in the United Kingdom over its acquisition of a failing GIF search engine, the company can only sit back and try to copy what others are doing better. If that’s the case, it suggests that the half-assed response to Facebook’s growing dominance over the past half-decade nonetheless got us, however belatedly, to a better place. Antitrust pressure made it extremely difficult for the company to make acquisitions, opening a window just big enough for new entrants to climb through. It remains to be seen how big any new challengers to Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter can grow. But for the first time in a long time, I’m optimistic about their chances.

#### Misinformation on social media doesn’t cause vaccine hesitancy:

GILAD EDELMAN, 7/28/2021 (Gilad Edelman is WIRED's politics writer. Before that, he was executive editor of the Washington Monthly. He has a degree from Yale Law School, “Let’s Keep the Vaccine Misinformation Problem in Perspective,” <https://www.wired.com/story/lets-keep-vaccine-misinformation-problem-in-perspective/>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

WITH COVID CASES surging in parts of the United States and vaccinations proceeding at a crawl, all eyes are on social media platforms. Many people, particularly some Democrats in Washington, appear to believe that online misinformation is at the heart of the flagging vaccination campaign. President Joe Biden summed up the mood when he suggested that Facebook was “killing people,” kicking off weeks of frenzied coverage. (He later clarified that he was referring to the purveyors of misinformation, not Facebook itself.) Then, late last week, Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota introduced a bill that would strip away Section 230 immunity for vaccine content promoted by social media algorithms. The Klobuchar bill is an apt mascot for the confused state of discourse over misinformation. Because it would direct the government to decide what counts as misinformation and then treat content differently on that basis, it would probably violate the First Amendment. Of course, Klobuchar’s proposal will never become law; it is what’s known as a messaging bill. And the message seems to be that, in order to close the vaccination gap and finally bring the pandemic to a close, social media platforms just need to do something. That focus, though, may misdiagnose the problem. At least in the US, vaccine hesitancy appears to be a largely top-down partisan phenomenon, in which public behavior is influenced by elite messaging. As of last month, just over 10 percent of adult Democrats had not been vaccinated, compared to nearly 50 percent of Republicans, according to multiple surveys. (And while access is still an issue for some Americans, the most-cited reasons for not getting the shot come down to willingness, not ability.) As my former colleague Daniel Engber recently pointed out in The Atlantic, this partisan gap has been remarkably stable, and it precedes Fox News’ recent turn toward constant vaccine-skeptical coverage. The underlying cause for the partisan split, Engber suggests, might therefore be the fact that Republicans have, throughout the pandemic, been much less afraid of Covid than Democrats. The country’s most influential Republican, Donald Trump, relentlessly played down the risk of the disease from the start (including during his own hospitalization), and millions followed his cue. Research has found that the biggest predictor of whether Americans view Covid-19 as a threat is not their scientific literacy or demographics, but whether they trust Fox News and Breitbart over CNN and The New York Times. Viral rumors on social platforms may have widened the divide, but it seems clear that Republican Party messaging, amplified by its traditional media architecture, created it. It’s also a mistake to assume that all anti-vaccine sentiment is based on misinformation per se. There has lately emerged a wealth of polling and news reports providing insight into the motivations of the vaccine-hesitant. One of the most common reasons they give for their reluctance is that we don’t yet know if the vaccines have long-term side effects. Another is that the Food and Drug Administration hasn’t officially approved any of the vaccines. Both of these facts are technically true. Are they sensible reasons to refuse the vaccine, in light of all we do know? No. But they are not false. So it goes with a great deal of anti-vaccine messaging. Yes, many people who say they’re afraid of side effects have bought into false rumors about vaccines harming fertility or altering one’s DNA. But many are responding to real, if rare, reports of serious side effects; the government really did pause administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine because of a rare blood-clot disorder. Drug companies really are greedy. The right fact, presented without adequate context, can be more than enough to scare people away. The most visible vaccine-skeptical public figures, the likes of Tucker Carlson or Senator Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), understand this. They don’t need to spread demonstrable falsehoods. They can simply focus night after night on outlier cases of severe side effects. Or they can selectively present results of scientific studies or government communications in ways that seem to suggest something ominous about either the virus or the vaccine. Or they can skirt the scientific question entirely in favor of ranting about how the government’s vaccine push is really about social control. Like any illusionist, they know that the most powerful tool available is not misinformation, but misdirection. That subtle distinction is often lost on members of the media and the political establishment. At times, “misinformation” becomes a catch-all term for any material used to dissuade people from getting the shot, whether or not it is objectively false. A recent New York Times article about the influential anti-vaxxer Joseph Mercola, for example, titled “The Most Influential Spreader of Coronavirus Misinformation Online,” concluded by noting that Mercola had made a Facebook post suggesting that the Pfizer vaccine was only 39 percent effective against infection by the Delta variant. Mercola was accurately relaying the findings of a real study, one that had been covered by mainstream news outlets. The Times article tweaked him, however, for not mentioning the study’s other finding, that the vaccine is 91 percent effective against serious illness. No doubt Mercola—an osteopathic physician who has made a fortune selling “natural” health products often advertised as alternatives to vaccines—would have done his followers a service by sharing that data point. Cherry-picking true statistics to sow doubt in vaccines is dangerous. But to sweep that example under the umbrella of misinformation is to engage in concept creep. Misinterpretation is not the same thing as misinformation, and this is not merely a semantic distinction. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are rightly under immense pressure to do more to prevent the spread of dangerous falsehoods on their platforms. They often take their cues from established media organizations. It would be a troubling development for online free speech if, in the name of preventing real-world harm, platforms routinely suppressed as “misinformation” posts that don’t contain anything objectively false. It’s hard enough to distinguish between truth and falsity at scale. It would be reckless to ask platforms to take on the responsibility of judging whether a user’s interpretation of the facts—their opinion about a matter of public policy—is acceptable or not. “It for sure is the case that misinformation is making things worse,” said Gordon Pennycook, a behavioral psychologist at the University of Regina. “There are people who believe things that are false, and they read those things on the internet. That for sure is happening.” But, Pennycook went on, “the more you focus on that, the less you talk about the avenues in which people come to be hesitant that have nothing to do with misinformation.” In his research, Pennycook runs experiments to figure out how people actually respond to online misinformation. In one study, he and his coauthors tested whether people would be convinced by the claim in a fake news headline after being exposed to it online. (Sample headline: “Mike Pence: Gay Conversion Therapy Saved My Marriage.”) In one phase of the experiment, exposure to fake news headlines raised the number of people who rated the claim as accurate from 38 to 72. You could look at that and say online misinformation increases belief by 89 percent. Or, you could note that there were 903 participants overall, meaning the headlines only worked on 4 percent of them. The current debate over vaccine misinformation sometimes seems to imply that we’re living in an 89 percent world, but the 4 percent number is probably the more helpful guidepost. It would still be a serious problem if only a small percentage of Facebook or YouTube users were susceptible to vaccine misinformation. They’d be more likely to refuse to get vaccinated, to get sick, and to spread the virus—and, perhaps, their false beliefs—to others. At the same time, it’s important to keep in mind that somewhere around one third of American adults are still choosing not to get vaccinated. Even if Facebook and YouTube could erase all anti-vaxx content from their platforms overnight, that would only take one bite out of a much larger problem. “Misinformation is not irrelevant. It’s not something to ignore, but there are other things that are going to be more important,” said Katherine Ognyanova, an associate professor of communication at Rutgers University and a member of the Covid States Project, which studies public opinion on the pandemic. “It’s still important to combat misinformation, but it’s only one factor. It’s not going to solve everything if it went away.” It’s tempting to think that vaccine hesitancy can be overcome simply by taking false information out of circulation. It’s especially tempting to the sorts of highly educated people who make up the national media and political landscapes. People are rational, we think, and so if they are exposed to the right facts, they will reach enlightenment. At the same time, however, much of the discussion around misinformation seems to rest on a conflicting assumption, never stated aloud, that people simply cannot be trusted; that misinformation has an almost mystical power to overcome the intellect of any average Joe exposed to it, at which point it’s no use showing him the facts. Of course, neither notion is correct. People make decisions and form beliefs for all kinds of reasons, most of which have little to do with scientific evidence: gut feelings, partisanship, religious values, and so on. But they also don’t credulously believe every false rumor that appears on their feed. There are many other factors at play. In the case of vaccine intentions, that means different techniques will be needed to convert different slices of the population. Some people still just need easier access or assurances that the vaccines really are free. For the “wait and see” crowd, evidence that hundreds of millions of people have been vaccinated without incident could eventually wear down resistance. (So could rising case rates, as we may already be seeing.) But for the more stubborn holdouts and outright denialists, a harder line will be necessary. As the political scientist Brendan Nyhan put it in the pre-Covid world of 2019, apropos of measles outbreaks and school immunization requirements, “the focus on anti-vaccine content on social media can obscure the most important factor in whether children get vaccinated: the rules in their home states.” The political capital currently going toward berating social media companies would probably be better spent pressuring governments and employers to impose vaccine mandates. (Happily, there has been some momentum in that regard over the past few days, with institutions like the Veterans Health Administration, the state of California, and even a coalition of San Francisco bar owners all implementing some degree of mandatory vaccination.) That’s not to say that social media misinformation should be ignored. But it appears to be more of a long-term threat to our overall information environment than an immediate crisis preventing the US from conquering Covid-19. As Will Oremus recently explained in The Washington Post, the underlying issue is tech companies’ use of ranking algorithms designed to show users whatever is most engaging, rather than what is most edifying. This is easily stated, but it will not be an easy problem to solve. The platforms insist that they are already going to extreme lengths to shield users from vaccine misinformation and steer them toward accurate sources, and this may well be true. A recent report by the advocacy organization Avaaz, for example, is styled as proof of how Facebook continues to funnel users toward anti-vaxx material. But by the report’s own admission, a researcher who searched “vaccine” had to scroll past dozens of reputable sources, including public health bodies, before getting to unreliable pages. As any business that has been downranked by Google’s algorithm can tell you, being buried below the first page of results is nearly as bad as being banned. These results could just as easily be taken as proof that Facebook is working hard to suppress misinformation.

#### Delta variant won’t threaten the economy:

CHRISTOPHER RUGABER, 7/28/2021 (economics reporter, Associated Press, “Fed’s Powell downplays delta variant’s threat to the economy,” <https://apnews.com/article/> business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-economy-0e6d48d9045930fbf230170f979dc704, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

WASHINGTON (AP) — The spread of the COVID-19 delta variant is raising infections, leading some companies and governments to require vaccinations and raising concerns about the U.S. economic recovery. But on Wednesday, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell injected a note of reassurance, suggesting that the delta variant poses little threat to the economy, at least so far. “What we’ve seen is with successive waves of COVID over the past year and some months now,” Powell said at a news conference, “there has tended to be less in the way of economic implications from each wave. We will see whether that is the case with the delta variety, but it’s certainly not an unreasonable expectation.” Powell spoke after the Fed ended its latest policy meeting in which it signaled, for the first time since the pandemic began to ease, that the economy is moving closer to the “substantial further progress” it wants to see before reducing the $120 billion in bonds it is buying each month. Those purchases are intended to lower rates on longer-term consumer and business loans to spur more borrowing and spending. A reduction in the bond buying, which likely won’t start until the end of this year or early next year, would represent the start of a gradual pullback in the Fed’s support for the economy. Only when the bond purchases are completed is the Fed expected to begin considering raising its benchmark interest rate from zero, where it’s been since the pandemic erupted in March last year. At his news conference, Powell acknowledged that the quickening spread of the highly contagious delta variant was threatening some areas of the nation where vaccinations are low, and he noted that “some forecasts are for them to rise quite significantly.” And he said that as the virus spreads, some consumers might pull back from the spending that has propelled the rapid rebound from the pandemic recession. “Dining out, traveling, some schools might not reopen,” he said. “We may see economic effects from some of that or it might weigh on the return to the labor market. We don’t have a strong sense of how that will work out, so we’ll be monitoring it carefully.” But Powell noted that last summer’s wave of infections had inflicted less damage to the economy that many analysts had forecast. “We’ve kind of learned to live with it, a lot of industries have kind of improvised their way around it,” Powell added. “It seems like we’ve learned to handle this.” The statement the Fed issued after its latest policy meeting said that ongoing vaccinations were helping to support the economy. But it dropped a sentence it had included after its previous meeting that said those vaccinations have reduced the spread of COVID-19. The Fed’s latest policy statement comes as the economy is sustaining a strong recovery from the pandemic recession, with solid hiring and spending. That improvement, and a pickup in inflation, are key reasons why Powell and other Fed policymakers are believed to be moving closer toward pulling back their economic support. Consumer prices jumped 5.4% in June from a year ago, the biggest increase in 13 years. And a separate inflation gauge the Fed prefers has risen 3.9% in the past year. Last month’s inflation surge marked a fourth straight month of unexpectedly large price increases, heightening fears that higher costs will erode the value of recent pay raises and undermine the economic recovery. But Powell underscored his belief that recent inflation readings reflect price spikes in a narrow range of categories — such as used cars, airline tickets, hotel rooms, and car rentals — that have been distorted by temporary supply shortages resulting from the economy’s swift reopening. The Fed’s most important inflation measure, Powell stressed, is what it calls “inflation expectations” — what businesses and consumers expect prices to do in the coming months and years. Expectations are important because they can be self-fulfilling: If companies expect their costs to rise, say, 3%, they are likely to raise their own prices by the same amount. So far, current price increases haven’t raised inflation expectations much, Powell said. “All the evidence is that it’s not happening,” he said. While Powell fielded many questions about inflation, he also said that hiring needed to progress further before the Fed would be ready to dial down its support for the economy. “Chairman Powell did a very good job of refocusing the discussion on the idea that the Fed is not looking to materially alter its policy until we get at least close to full employment,” said Russell Price, chief economist at Ameriprise Financial. “So that what he’s telling people there is that, that’s still their primary focus.” Among Fed watchers and investors, there is some concern that the central bank will end up responding too late and too aggressively to high inflation by quickly jacking up interest rates and potentially causing another recession. Earlier this month, Republicans in Congress peppered Powell with questions about inflation. But at his news conference, Powell said that if “we were to see inflation moving up to levels persistently that were above significantly, materially above our goal ... we would use our tools to guide inflation back down” to the Fed’s target average inflation of 2% annually. After a period of broad agreement during the pandemic crisis, the Fed’s policymakers appear divided over how soon to bein tapering its bond purchases. Several regional Fed bank presidents support tapering soon, including James Bullard of the St. Louis Fed, Patrick Harker of the Philadelphia Fed and Robert Kaplan of the Dallas Fed. But Powell has said that the central bank wants to see “substantial further progress” toward its goals of maximum employment and price stability before it would consider reducing the bond purchases. To make up for years of inflation remaining below 2%, the Fed wants inflation to moderately exceed its 2% average inflation target and to show signs of remaining above that level for an unspecified time. Powell has said the Fed will communicate its intention to taper “well in advance” of doing so. Many economists think that signal will occur in late August or September. At their two-day meeting that ended Wednesday, Fed officials also discussed the mechanics of paring its bond purchases, including how fast the purchases would be wound down. The Fed is buying $80 billion of Treasurys and $40 billion of mortgage-backed securities each month in an effort to force down loan rates. Some on the Fed’s policymaking committee favor tapering the mortgage bond purchases soon, because home prices are soaring and ultra-low loan rates might be overheating demand for homes. But Powell said he didn’t agree, suggesting that both Treasury and mortgage bond purchases tend to have similar effects on mortgage rates and other borrowing costs.

#### Disease won’t cause extinction—we’ll adapt:

Amesh Adalja, 6/17/2016 (infectious-disease physician at the University of Pittsburgh, “Why Hasn't Disease Wiped out the Human Race?” [https://www.theatlantic.com/health/ archive/2016/06/infectious-diseases-extinction/487514/](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/%20archive/2016/06/infectious-diseases-extinction/487514/), Retrieved 6/12/2021)

In other words, no, I wasn’t worried—and not because I have a rosy outlook on infectious diseases. I’m well-aware of the damage these diseases are causing around the world: HIV, malaria, tuberculosis; the influenza pandemic that took the world by surprise in 2009; the anti-vaccine movement bumping cases of measles to an all-time post-vaccine-era high; antibiotic-resistant bacteria threatening to collapse the entire structure of modern medicine—all these, like Ebola, are continuously placing an enormous number of lives at risk. But when people ask me if I’m worried about infectious diseases, they’re often not asking about the threat to human lives; they’re asking about the threat to human life. With each outbreak of a headline-grabbing emerging infectious disease comes a fear of extinction itself. The fear envisions a large proportion of humans succumbing to infection, leaving no survivors or so few that the species can’t be sustained. I’m not afraid of this apocalyptic scenario, but I do understand the impulse. Worry about the end is a quintessentially human trait. Thankfully, so is our resilience. For most of mankind’s history, infectious diseases were the existential threat to humanity—and for good reason. They were quite successful at killing people: The 6th century’s Plague of Justinian knocked out an estimated 17 percent of the world’s population; the 14th century Black Death decimated a third of Europe; the 1918 influenza pandemic killed 5 percent of the world; malaria is estimated to have killed half of all humans who have ever lived. Any yet, of course, humanity continued to flourish. Our species’ recent explosion in lifespan is almost exclusively the result of the control of infectious diseases through sanitation, vaccination, and antimicrobial therapies. Only in the modern era, in which many infectious diseases have been tamed in the industrial world, do people have the luxury of death from cancer, heart disease, or stroke in the 8th decade of life. Childhoods are free from watching siblings and friends die from outbreaks of typhoid, scarlet fever, smallpox, measles, and the like. So what would it take for a disease to wipe out humanity now? In Michael Crichton’s The Andromeda Strain, the canonical book in the disease-outbreak genre, an alien microbe threatens the human race with extinction, and humanity’s best minds are marshaled to combat the enemy organism. Fortunately, outside of fiction, there’s no reason to expect alien pathogens to wage war on the human race any time soon, and my analysis suggests that any real-life domestic microbe reaching an extinction level of threat probably is just as unlikely. When humans began to focus their minds on the problems posed by infectious disease, human life ceased being nasty, brutish, and short. Any apocalyptic pathogen would need to possess a very special combination of two attributes. First, it would have to be so unfamiliar that no existing therapy or vaccine could be applied to it. Second, it would need to have a high and surreptitious transmissibility before symptoms occur. The first is essential because any microbe from a known class of pathogens would, by definition, have family members that could serve as models for containment and countermeasures. The second would allow the hypothetical disease to spread without being detected by even the most astute clinicians. The three infectious diseases most likely to be considered extinction-level threats in the world today—influenza, HIV, and Ebola—don’t meet these two requirements. Influenza, for instance, despite its well-established ability to kill on a large scale, its contagiousness, and its unrivaled ability to shift and drift away from our vaccines, is still what I would call a “known unknown.” While there are many mysteries about how new flu strains emerge, from at least the time of Hippocrates, humans have been attuned to its risk. And in the modern era, a full-fledged industry of influenza preparedness exists, with effective vaccine strategies and antiviral therapies. HIV, which has killed 39 million people over several decades, is similarly limited due to several factors. Most importantly, HIV’s dependency on blood and body fluid for transmission (similar to Ebola) requires intimate human-to-human contact, which limits contagion. Highly potent antiviral therapy allows most people to live normally with the disease, and a substantial group of the population has genetic mutations that render them impervious to infection in the first place. Lastly, simple prevention strategies such as needle exchange for injection drug users and barrier contraceptives—when available—can curtail transmission risk. Ebola, for many of the same reasons as HIV as well as several others, also falls short of the mark. This is especially due to the fact that it spreads almost exclusively through people with easily recognizable symptoms, plus the taming of its once unfathomable 90 percent mortality rate by simple supportive care. Beyond those three, every other known disease falls short of what seems required to wipe out humans—which is, of course, why we’re still here. And it’s not that diseases are ineffective. On the contrary, diseases’ failure to knock us out is a testament to just how resilient humans are. Part of our evolutionary heritage is our immune system, one of the most complex on the planet, even without the benefit of vaccines or the helping hand of antimicrobial drugs. This system, when viewed at a species level, can adapt to almost any enemy imaginable. Coupled to genetic variations amongst humans—which open up the possibility for a range of advantages, from imperviousness to infection to a tendency for mild symptoms—this adaptability ensures that almost any infectious disease onslaught will leave a large proportion of the population alive to rebuild, in contrast to the fictional Hollywood versions. While the immune system’s role can never be understated, an even more powerful protector is the faculty of consciousness. Humans are not the most prolific, quickly evolving, or strongest organisms on the planet, but as Aristotle identified, humans are the rational animals—and it is this fundamental distinguishing characteristic that allows humans to form abstractions, think in principles, and plan long-range. These capacities, in turn, allow humans to modify, alter, and improve themselves and their environments. Consciousness equips us, at an individual and a species level, to make nature safe for the species through such technological marvels as antibiotics, antivirals, vaccines, and sanitation. When humans began to focus their minds on the problems posed by infectious disease, human life ceased being nasty, brutish, and short. In many ways, human consciousness became infectious diseases’ worthiest adversary. None of this is meant to allay all fears of infectious diseases. To totally adopt a Panglossian viewpoint would be foolish—and dangerous. Humans do face countless threats from infectious diseases: witness Zika. And if not handled appropriately, severe calamity could, and will, ensue. The West African Ebola outbreak, for instance, festered for months before major efforts to bring it under control were initiated. When it comes to infectious diseases, I’m worried about the failure of institutions to understand the full impact of outbreaks. I’m worried about countries that don’t have the infrastructure or resources to combat these outbreaks when they come. But as long as we can keep adapting, I’m not worried about the future of the human race.

#### Variants and vaccine inequalities prevent vaccines from solving Covid:

Susan Michie et al, 4/7/2021 (British academic, clinical psychologist, and professor of Health Psychology, director of The Centre for Behaviour Change and head of The Health Psychology Research Group, all at University College London, “Vaccine Equity Is Crucial to End the COVID-19 Pandemic — But It Won't Be Enough,” https://www.globalcitizen. org/en/content/vaccine-equity-covid-19-variants/, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

At the end of 2020, there was a strong hope that high levels of vaccination would see humanity finally gain the upper hand over SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. In an ideal scenario, the virus would then be contained at very low levels without further societal disruption or significant numbers of deaths. But since then, new “variants of concern” have emerged and spread worldwide, putting current pandemic control efforts, including vaccination, at risk of being derailed. Put simply, the game has changed, and a successful global rollout of current vaccines by itself is no longer a guarantee of victory. No one is truly safe from COVID-19 until everyone is safe. We are in a race against time to get global transmission rates low enough to prevent the emergence and spread of new variants. The danger is that variants will arise that can overcome the immunity conferred by vaccinations or prior infection. What’s more, many countries lack the capacity to track emerging variants via genomic surveillance. This means the situation may be even more serious than it appears. As members of the Lancet COVID-19 Commission Taskforce on Public Health, we call for urgent action in response to the new variants. These new variants mean we cannot rely on the vaccines alone to provide protection but must maintain strong public health measures to reduce the risk from these variants. At the same time, we need to accelerate the vaccine program in all countries in an equitable way. Together, these strategies will deliver “maximum suppression” of the virus. What Are Variants of Concern? Genetic mutations of viruses like SARS-CoV-2 emerge frequently, but some variants are labeled “variants of concern” because they can reinfect people who have had a previous infection or vaccination, or are more transmissible or can lead to more severe disease. There are currently at least three documented SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern: B.1.351, first reported in South Africa in December 2020 B.1.1.7, first reported in the United Kingdom in December 2020 P.1, first identified in Japan among travelers from Brazil in January 2021. Similar mutations are arising in different countries simultaneously, meaning not even border controls and high vaccination rates can necessarily protect countries from home-grown variants, including variants of concern, where there is substantial community transmission. If there are high transmission levels, and hence extensive replication of SARS-CoV-2, anywhere in the world, more variants of concern will inevitably arise and the more infectious variants will dominate. With international mobility, these variants will spread. South Africa’s experience suggests that past infection with SARS-CoV-2 offers only partial protection against the B.1.351 variant, and it is about 50% more transmissible than pre-existing variants. The B.1.351 variant has already been detected in at least 48 countries as of March 2021. The impact of the new variants on the effectiveness of vaccines is still not clear. Recent real-world evidence from the UK suggests both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines provide significant protection against severe disease and hospitalizations from the B.1.1.7 variant. On the other hand, the B.1.351 variant seems to reduce the efficacy of the AstraZeneca vaccine against mild to moderate illness. We do not yet have clear evidence on whether it also reduces effectiveness against severe disease. For these reasons, reducing community transmission is vital. No single action is sufficient to prevent the virus’ spread; we must maintain strong public health measures in tandem with vaccination programs in every country. Why We Need Maximum Suppression Each time the virus replicates, there is an opportunity for a mutation to occur. And as we are already seeing around the world, some of the resulting variants risk eroding the effectiveness of vaccines. That’s why we have called for a global strategy of “maximum suppression.” Public health leaders should focus on efforts that maximally suppress viral infection rates, thus helping to prevent the emergence of mutations that can become new variants of concern. Prompt vaccine rollouts alone will not be enough to achieve this; continued public health measures, such as face masks and physical distancing, will be vital, too. Ventilation of indoor spaces is important, some of which is under people’s control, some of which will require adjustments to buildings. Fair Access to Vaccines Global equity in vaccine access is vital, too. High-income countries should support multilateral mechanisms such as the COVAX facility, donate excess vaccines to low- and middle- income countries, and support increased vaccine production. However, to prevent the emergence of viral variants of concern, it may be necessary to prioritize countries or regions with the highest disease prevalence and transmission levels, where the risk of such variants emerging is greatest. Those with control over health care resources, services, and systems should ensure support is available for health professionals to manage increased hospitalizations over shorter periods during surges without reducing care for non-COVID-19 patients. Health systems must be better prepared against future variants. Suppression efforts should be accompanied by: genomic surveillance programs to identify and quickly characterize emerging variants in as many countries as possible around the world rapid large-scale “second-generation” vaccine programs and increased production capacity that can support equity in vaccine distribution studies of vaccine effectiveness on existing and new variants of concern adapting public health measures (such as double masking) and re-committing to health system arrangements (such as ensuring personal protective equipment for health staff) behavioral, environmental, social, and systems interventions, such as enabling ventilation, distancing between people, and an effective find, test, trace, isolate, and support system. COVID-19 variants of concern have changed the game. We need to recognize and act on this if we as a global society are to avoid future waves of infections, yet more lockdowns and restrictions, and avoidable illness and death.

### Democracy Advantage Answers (Front-Line)

#### Voter suppression and gerrymandering undermine US democracy:

Sam Levine, 3/24/2021 (staff writer, Guardian, “US democracy on the brink: Republicans wage 'coordinated onslaught' on voting rights,” <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/24/democracy-under-attack-america-us-voting-rights-republicans>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

After decades of organizing Black voters in Georgia, Brown and other organizers in Georgia broke through. Defying expectations, turnout among Black voters surged in US Senate runoff races, powering two Democrats to historic victories. It came two months after Georgia saw record turnout in its November election, helping Joe Biden become the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry the state in nearly three decades. This success story was mirrored across America. Despite a lethal pandemic, a staggering 159m votes were cast, 67% of eligible voters, the highest turnout in a presidential election since 1900. Such turnout is even more remarkable considering that millions of Americans adopted an entirely new way of voting, casting their ballots not on election day but ahead of time, either in person or by mail. There wasn’t a meltdown in the election process that many feared early on in the pandemic. The United States Postal Service, under attack from Trump and his allies, delivered ballots on time. Officials found no evidence of widespread fraud or malfeasance during the election. By the time they declared the 2020 election “the most secure in American history”, a larger truth was apparent: democracy had prevailed. But 2021 has been far from a celebration of democracy. It’s been the opposite – American democracy is under attack. Seizing on Donald Trump’s lies about fraud in the 2020 election, Republicans have launched a brazen attack on voting, part of an effort to entrench control over a rapidly changing electorate by changing the rules of democracy. As of mid-February, 253 bills were pending to restrict voting in 43 states. Many of those restrictions take direct aim at mail-in and early voting, the very policies that led to November’s record turnout. “The fragility of democracy has been exposed at levels that I think even white America was blind to,” said Brown, a co-founder of Black Voters Matter. Republicans have openly talked about their intentions. “Everybody shouldn’t be voting,” John Kavanagh, a Republican in the Arizona state legislature, told CNN earlier this month. “Quantity is important, but we have to look at the quality of votes, as well.” Some Republicans say that their efforts to put new voting restrictions in place are part of an effort to restore confidence in elections and prevent voter fraud, which is extremely rare. But others have shown that their motivation is anti-democratic. Trump dismissed proposals to make it easier to vote last year by saying: “You’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.” And this month, Michael Carvin, a lawyer representing the Arizona Republican party, said something similar when Justice Amy Coney Barrett asked him what interest the party had in defending two Arizona voting restrictions. Lifting those restrictions, Carvin said, “puts us at a competitive disadvantage relative to Democrats. Politics is a zero-sum game.” Civil rights advocates have called it the greatest effort to restrict the vote since the Jim Crow era More danger lies ahead. Later this year, Republicans in many states will redraw electoral districts for both congressional and state legislative offices across the country, something the constitution mandates once per decade. This will give Republicans an opportunity to pack GOP-friendly voters into certain districts while spreading Democratic voters thin across others, further distorting democracy and ensuring their re-election. And all of this comes at a moment when the US supreme court appears wholly uninterested in protecting voting rights. The increasingly conservative supreme court has signaled in recent years that it is not going to stand in the way of lawmakers who make it harder to vote, issuing significant decisions that gutted the Voting Rights Act while also giving the green light to aggressive voter purging and extreme partisan redistricting. Civil rights advocates have described it as the greatest effort to restrict the vote since the Jim Crow era. “The coordinated onslaught of voter suppression bills is not the norm,” Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia gubernatorial candidate widely credited with helping flip the state, told the Guardian. “What is so notable about this moment, and so disconcerting, is that they are not hiding. There is no attempt to pretend that the intention is not to restrict votes.” “They are responding to the big lie, to the disproven, discredited, the blood-spilled lie of voter fraud,” she added. “They are responding by conforming to a lie and cloaking it in this mask that this is somehow ethical, that this is somehow about protecting, when it is about restricting and suppressing.” In Washington, Democrats are trying to counter the anti-democratic tide by pushing legislation that would amount to the largest expansion of voting rights since the civil rights movement. It is a “once in a generation” moment – a tipping point for America. The result of that fight will determine whether or not the guardrails of American’s democracy hold or whether they come off entirely. ‘This is Jim Crow 2.0’ Georgia has emerged as the center of this battle over American democracy. Joe Biden won the state in November by around 12,000 votes after a record number of people cast their ballots through the mail, and Trump’s efforts to overturn the election by claiming fraud and squeezing local election officials ultimately proved unsuccessful. But Republicans in the state legislature are capitalizing on the uncertainty driven by Trump’s false allegations and using it to justify aggressive new restrictions on the right to vote. One measure would allow for any citizen to bring unlimited challenges against another voter’s qualification, a procedure that has been used to target Black voters in the past in the state. And even though there was no evidence of absentee ballot fraud, Republicans have lined up behind a proposal that would impose additional ID document requirements on voters who cast a mail-in ballot, creating a new hurdle for the poor, minorities and the elderly who face significant challenges in obtaining ID. Another provision even bans providing food or water to people standing in line to vote after voters, especially in Black neighborhoods in Atlanta, spent hours waiting to cast a ballot last year. “We’re in this hamster wheel of doing the work to register to vote. People exercise their vote, particularly Black voters, and then they’re punished for exercising that vote,” Brown said. “When Black people exercise our right to vote, there is some kind of punitive measure that is inflicted upon our community. “If the bills pass, Georgia’s going to send a message loud and clear that they don’t believe in democracy. That this is a state that’s still rooted in its racist, anti-democratic past,” she added. Amid strong pressure from civil rights groups, Republicans in the state have backed away in recent days from some of their most extreme proposals – cutting Sunday early voting in the state as well as requiring voters to give an excuse to vote by mail. Both measures would have disproportionately affected Black voters, according to a Brennan Center analysis. Still, the proposals that remain in the bill would significantly harm Black voters, said Lauren Groh-Wargo, the chief executive of Fair Fight Action, the voting rights group Abrams founded. “This is Jim Crow 2.0. Those who think that’s hyperbolic need to read this bill,” she said. “This is not some sort of moderate consensus because weekend voting is back on the table.” Outside Georgia, Republicans are pushing equally aggressive proposals. In Arizona, Republicans are advancing an effort to essentially do away with a policy that allows voters to permanently sign up to automatically receive a mail-in ballot. In Florida, Republicans want to ban absentee ballot drop boxes. Texas is entertaining a suite of proposals to make it harder to vote. In Iowa, a state Trump won handily in 2020, Republicans recently enacted a law requiring the polls to close an hour earlier and shortening the early voting period by nine days, from 29 days to 20. Many of the voting policies being rolled back have been in place for years and were relatively uncontroversial, said Myrna Pérez, director of the voting rights and democracy program at the Brennan Center for Justice, which closely tracks voting restrictions in state legislatures. But after an election in which minority voters started to employ them as Republicans long had, access has come under attack. “It was only until communities of color started closing the gap between who was using them that all of a sudden they become political,” Pérez said. A conservative judiciary Many of the measures that ultimately pass will be challenged by voting rights groups in state and federal courts. But those challenges are likely to meet skepticism from a conservative judiciary, molded by Trump, and a US supreme court that appears unwilling to stop lawmakers who make it harder to vote. During the 2020 election, federal appeals courts and the supreme court turned away numerous challenges to expand voting access. The supreme court’s anti-voter posture has become increasingly clear in recent years. In a landmark 2013 case, Shelby County v Holder, the court struck down a provision in the 1965 Voting Rights Act that required places with a history of voting discrimination to submit voting changes to the justice department before they went into effect. “Things have changed dramatically” since 1965, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the majority. It meant that states like Arizona, Georgia and Texas – all states considering significant voting restrictions now – are no longer required to submit voting changes to the federal government for pre-clearance before they go into effect. The supreme court’s hostility to voting matters has only grown since then. In 2018, the court said Ohio could aggressively remove people from the state’s voter rolls, opening the door for other states to pursue similar policies. The court could go even further this year – it is poised to weaken a key provision of the Voting Rights Act that is one of the most powerful tools groups have to challenge discriminatory laws. “They have made it harder for plaintiffs to establish that voting laws are illegal when they result in greater burdens on voters of color,” said Leah Litman, a law professor at the University of Michigan. “It has largely made it more difficult across the board, through any medium, to address these state voting laws.” Targeting communities of color In a true democratic system, one of the strongest checks on the wave of voting restrictions advancing through state legislatures would be voters themselves, who can use the power of the ballot to foment political change. But this year, Republicans will have the power to redraw the blueprints of the electoral system itself in their favor. The US constitution mandates that state lawmakers redraw electoral districts every 10 years. The process requires politicians to decide which voters belong in which district. Politicians can manipulate it by packing their own voters into certain districts and cracking support for their opponent by scattering their voters across the state. Republicans will wield enormous influence over this process this year. Despite losing the presidency and the US Senate in 2020, Republicans were successful in retaining power in state legislatures, giving them complete control over drawing 181 congressional districts in 18 states, an advantage they can use to wipe out the Democratic majority in the US House. A decade ago, Republicans launched a coordinated effort, Project Redmap, to win control of state legislatures. Their aim was to take control of the process of redrawing district lines, which the US constitution mandates state legislatures must undertake once per decade. The Republican plan paid off tremendously. In 2011, they used new majorities in state legislative cycles to draw favorable maps in swing states like Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Those maps ensure that Republicans maintained significant majorities in those states, no matter what happened in regular elections. While both Democrats and Republicans have engaged in the practice over the years, the Republican effort in 2011 took it to a new level. David Daley, a journalist who extensively chronicled Redmap, has described it as “the most audacious political heist of modern times”. Now, the supreme court has made it nearly impossible to legally challenge the tactic in federal court. In one recent case, the court said Texas lawmakers were entitled to “presumption of legislative good faith” when it upheld electoral maps a lower court said were discriminatory. And in 2019, the justices said federal courts could not do anything to stop severe partisan redistricting – known as gerrymandering – even when lawmakers openly admit they are manipulating district lines for partisan gain. The decision essentially allows lawmakers to slice up voters into different districts to suit their own interests. The practice has “debased” and “dishonored” American democracy, Justice Elena Kagan, wrote in a searing dissenting opinion to the 2019 case. “Left unchecked”, she wrote, such partisan gerrymandering “may irreparably damage our system of government”. When Republicans draw new maps later this year, they will reap the benefits of an unchecked system. This time around, Republicans will also have more advanced technology and data, allowing them to choose maps from thousands of options with detailed data about voters, said Michael Li, a redistricting expert at the Brennan Center. Because of delays with the 2020 census, which produces the data used for redistricting, states are going to undertake the process much later than usual, a move that may allow them to provide little transparency into the mapmaking process. The delays will also provide an even shorter window between the redistricting process and the start of the election cycle, giving voting rights groups little time to bring challenges to gerrymandered maps. Texas Republicans pushing slate of bills to make voting even harder in state States will not have to get their maps reviewed for racial discrimination before they go into effect. “Last decade Republicans tried to pack Black voters into districts in the south and claim that they were trying to do it because of the [Voting Rights Act]. Now there’s an open route for [Republicans] to say, ‘well we’re putting Black voters into districts because they’re Democrats.’ And the supreme court has said that’s OK,” Li said. “The reality is that people of color will bear the brunt there because you really can’t do a partisan gerrymander in the south without targeting communities of color,” he added.

#### Other nations don’t model US democracy—multiple reasons:

Yogendra Yadav, 11/4/2020 (national president of Swaraj India, “Why the US is a model of how not to be a democracy,” <https://theprint.in/opinion/why-the-us-is-a-model-of-how-not-to-be-a-democracy/536768/>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

Democrats all over the world wait anxiously for the much-deserved departure of Donald Trump. It could be a long wait and could well extend to another four years. At the time of this article being published, the vote count appears to be leaning towards Trump. Yet, those who care for democracy, must be grateful to Trump for something. He has singlehandedly demolished one of the biggest myths of our time: the myth of the greatness of American democracy, the idea that the US was as an exemplar of democracy, a model for others to emulate. This may be a painful realisation for many. In the last instance, this is good news for Democrats. Now, Trump should not get all the credit for demolishing the American model. He simply ensured that the whole world woke up to some of the most poorly kept secrets of American politics. Above all, he left no room to doubt that, like everywhere else, some of the top leaders in this great democracy were intellectually and morally challenged. That someone like him could bully his way to the White House and, perhaps, retain it for another term reveals something very disturbing about the American public. His mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic blurred the imaginary distinction between the first and the third world. His appointment to the Supreme Court, just before the elections, threw light on what a scandal apex judicial appointments in the US are. His not-so-hidden support for White supremacists in the face of the #BlackLivesMatter movement exposed the underbelly of racial divisions in the US. Finally, the global attention he brought to the presidential election 2020 has served to expose the shoddy electoral system in the US. Clearly, the US could learn a thing or two from India on how to conduct elections and carry out a quick and clean count of votes. In sum: Thanks to Donald Trump, the world learnt that the US is just one of the democracies in the world. It has its strengths and its weaknesses. It needs to learn from other democracies before it preaches the same to the rest of the world. No matter who emerges victor, the process and the outcome of the current election is bound to reinforce this lesson. Not a model I learnt this lesson much earlier, thanks to my friend-cum-co-author-cum-teacher, the late Alfred Stepan. A great scholar of comparative politics, Professor Stepan (and the late Juan J. Linz) could talk about intricacies of authoritarian regimes in South America, the Catalan issue in Spain or the Russian minority in Ukraine with as much ease as he would discuss the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka or the Burmese transition to democracy. He was passionate about India (an M.F. Husain in his drawing room reminded everyone of his India connect) and curious to understand every single detail of Indian politics. (He travelled to Mizoram to understand how the state returned to normalcy after 1987). I learnt a lot from him and Professor Linz while co-writing a book, Crafting State-Nations. VDO.AI Towards the end of his life, Professor Stepan started reflecting on his own country, the United States, by placing it in a comparative perspective. He was no Left-wing critic of American capitalism. He was quintessentially American and passionately liberal-democrat. His conclusion, much before Trump was anywhere on the scene, was unambiguous: if the world is to democratise, the US is not a model to emulate. I was an easy convert to this view, as I have always suspected moral claims from the global North. But I have found this a tough lesson to take across in a world obsessed with the US of A. Trump made my job easier. Today may be the right day to mention four key reasons why the US is not a model for a democracy. The first two are related to institutional design and the other two are about the nature of politics. Flawed systems The first is the famed but deeply flawed “presidential” system of the US. It is well known that the US-style presidential system institutes regular conflict between the legislature and the executive, leading to routine deadlocks. Alfred Stepan theorised it differently: the real problem with the presidential system of government is that it makes power indivisible and coalition making that much more difficult. This comes in the way of the power-sharing so necessary for the accommodation of diversities. Also, the American system leads to several veto points. Stepan demonstrated brilliantly that the greater the number of veto points in a political system, the higher the inequality in that society. He never failed to remind us that among the long-standing democracies, the US was the most unequal country. That is why any attempts to replicate the US-style presidential model, whether in South America or in the ex-USSR countries, has mostly been a disaster. The second element of the US model is its unique federalism. In the US, every power is assumed to be with the state, unless specifically given to the centre. You can see this even in how they conduct national elections. Each state has its own rules of who can vote, under what procedure, when and how. Not just that, each state has its own timetable of when they would count results, whether votes received after today would be accepted and what would be the deadline for completing the count. The states zealously guard these rights in a society that is otherwise increasingly homogeneous. This was held out to a “pure” model of federalism. Stepan reminded us that this was by no means a model, that it was a feature of a certain kind of “coming together” federalisms and need not be replicated by countries where various units were already together before they adopted federalism. The US is a textbook example of what political scientists call “symmetrical” federalism. Every federal unit has exactly the same powers. Every state, tiny or gigantic, has two seats in the US Senate. And the Senate is more powerful than the House of Representatives that reflects the population strengths of various states. Stepan pointed out that accommodation of deep diversities requires special situations to be recognised and given special treatment. Therefore, “asymmetrical” federalism of the kind we have in Canada and India is more suited for living with deep diversities. Here, too, the US is not a good model. Trump adds to the list Trump has added two more reasons to the list of why the US is not a model for democracies. One, Trump’s presidency has exposed how hollow the American two-party system is. Both the major parties are devoid of ideological orientation or organisational depth. Far from providing a choice, the two-party system is a model of choicelessness. Even if Biden were to win this election, he would be a paler copy of Trump, minus the vitriolic. Two, the last four years have proven how fickle, gullible and manipulable the American public opinion is. Alex de Tocqueville had noticed it more than two hundred years ago. Trump proved that the onset of mass media and social media has made it worse. Whether he wins or not, he has shown that you can get away with lies, hatred and bigotry. Worse, he has shown that you can do so in the face of the most powerful media in the world that repeatedly called him out. Clearly, free speech offers little assurance that truth shall prevail. The US is not the first place in the world to offer this sombre lesson. India is among the long list of countries to offer similar lessons. The world awaits a new theory of democracy. Meanwhile, we can begin by celebrating the demolition of the US-led model of democracy. Not just because the dismantling of any hegemon brings vicarious pleasure. But because this realisation sets us on the right path. There is no model of democracy. There is no golden route to the finished product called democracy.

#### Social media doesn’t undermine democracy:

Cass Sunstein, 2018 (Robert Walmsley University Professor at Harvard University, “IS SOCIAL MEDIA GOOD OR BAD FOR DEMOCRACY?” <https://sur.conectas.org/en/is-social-media-good-or-bad-for-democracy/>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

On balance, the question of whether social media platforms are good for democracy is easy. On balance, they are not merely good; they are terrific. For people to govern themselves, they need to have information. They also need to be able to convey it to others. Social media platforms make that tons easier. There is a subtler point as well. When democracies are functioning properly, people’s sufferings and challenges are not entirely private matters. Social media platforms help us alert one another to a million and one different problems. In the process, the existence of social media can prod citizens to seek solutions.

#### Studies prove that democratic peace theory is flawed:

Femke E. Bakker, 4/20/2020 (assistant professor at the Institute of Political Science @ Leiden University, “The microfoundations of normative democratic peace theory. Experiments in the US, Russia and China,” <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2474736X.2020.1753084>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

Democratic peace theory is built on the assumption that liberal-democracy has a pacifying effect on people, a socialization process that is assumed to lack within autocracies. This paper uses an experimental approach to investigate the microfoundations of democratic peace theory among decision-makers of the US, Russia and China. It builds on and extents previous experimental studies by conceptualizing and measuring the presence and influence of liberal norms, by controlling for the perception of threat as induced by the conflict, and by testing the influence of hawkishness. The results show that the microfoundations of democratic peace theories do not find support. Neither regime-type, nor liberal norms are of influence on the willingness to attack the opponent, and also the assumed difference in liberal norms between individuals of different regime types is unsupported. Moreover, hawkish decision-makers are more likely to go to war. The results show that democratic peace theory, which aims to explain why democracies do not fight with each other, cannot be used as has been done till today and should be revised. The paper concludes with suggestions for new research avenues.

### Solvency Answers (Front-Line)

#### Turn: Interoperability decreases innovation—causes firms to piggy-back on other companies:

Bruce Hoffman, 10/26/2020 (Partner, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP, D. Bruce Hoffman’s practice focuses on antitrust enforcement, including merger clearance and conduct investigations, and antitrust and other complex commercial litigation.“Deep Dive Episode 141 – Interoperability and Data Sharing: An Antitrust Remedy in Search of a Market Problem?” <https://regproject.org/podcast/deep-dive-ep-141/>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

So data portability — well, first of all, interoperability raises a lot of questions about, what are you doing to competitive incentives to interactions between competitors? Are you actually just [inaudible 04:27] a situation where firms are going to piggyback on more innovative or more successful firms, which in turn might suppress the incentives of the innovators to really work as a hard as they can to provide the best products or the most innovative products possible.

#### Turn: Data sharing decreases innovation by encouraging free riding:

Jay Ezrielev, 10/26/2020 (Founder and Managing Principal Elevecon LLC, former economic advisor to Federal Trade Commission Chairman Joseph Simons. He specializes in the economics of industrial organization, econometrics, and antitrust policy. With more than 19 years in economic consulting and government, Dr. Ezrielev has advised clients on numerous high-profile antitrust and other matters..“Deep Dive Episode 141 – Interoperability and Data Sharing: An Antitrust Remedy in Search of a Market Problem?” <https://regproject.org/podcast/deep-dive-ep-141/>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

So, the last thing, on data sharing proposals that would force companies to share the internal data with competitors, I think that is a very bad idea. Data sharing proposals would diminish incentives to innovate. The incumbent would have weaker incentives to acquire new data and to have to share its data with a competitor. The entrants would also have weaker incentives to acquire new data if you could just free ride and get the data from an incumbent.

#### Access to data doesn’t increase competition—emerging competitors prove:

Jay Ezrielev, 10/26/2020 (Founder and Managing Principal Elevecon LLC, former economic advisor to Federal Trade Commission Chairman Joseph Simons. He specializes in the economics of industrial organization, econometrics, and antitrust policy. With more than 19 years in economic consulting and government, Dr. Ezrielev has advised clients on numerous high-profile antitrust and other matters..“Deep Dive Episode 141 – Interoperability and Data Sharing: An Antitrust Remedy in Search of a Market Problem?” <https://regproject.org/podcast/deep-dive-ep-141/>, Retrieved 8/4/2021)

Data can be an important aspect, but advocates of regulations overstate the role of data as an obstacle to entry. Entrants can acquire data by acquiring customers, investing in research, or licensing data from data vendors. This is the same way that incumbents acquire their data when they enter their markets. There are countless examples of successful entry by online service providers without entrants obtaining access to incumbent’s data—take, for example, Instagram, Tinder, and most recently, TikTok. I should also say that, from my perspective, it’s not clear that the antitrust issues discussed in the House Report are actually antitrust harm. But this is a conversation for another day. But if the targets of the House Report actually engaged in anticompetitive behavior by acquiring market power to anticompetitive acquisitions or anticompetitive conduct, there are remedies that are much more direct and effective than data portability, interoperability with data sharing.