April 6, 2023

TO: Interested Parties
FR: Citizen Data
RE: Strong bipartisan support for Congress to reduce harms caused by social media platforms

A recent national poll found that an overwhelming majority of Republicans[1] and Democrats (an average of 77% and 81% respectively) agree that social media is responsible for threats to democracy and our children's well-being. More than eight out of ten Republicans (84%) and Democrats (83%) believe that more needs to be done to increase transparency, ensure privacy and protect children; Americans across the aisle want Congress to act to reduce the harms caused by social media platforms. Strong majorities of Republicans, Democrats and Nonpartisan Independents said that they would be more likely to support their elected officials in a re-election if they supported laws restricting how social media companies use our data, as well as how they allow children to use their platforms.

Key Takeaways

- **Eight out of ten (78%) Americans hold social media platforms responsible** for a range of childhood issues (including bullying and mental health concerns such as body image problems, eating disorders, depression and anxiety), as well as threats to our democracy.
- **Seven in ten (71%) Americans see social media's impact on children as more negative than positive**, expressing concerns around issues such as its overwhelming influence, as well as its impact on mental health.
- **Eight out of ten Americans (82%) feel that more needs to be done to increase transparency, ensure privacy, and protect children** from the negative impact of social media.
- **A strong majority of Americans are in favor of legislation to enhance transparency;** seven in ten (68%) Americans would support legislation which required social media platforms to make their products and algorithms available for independent review.
- **A cross-partisan majority of Americans want elected officials to take action.** Six in ten (58%) Americans would be more likely to support their elected officials in a re-election if they supported laws to increase requirements on the way that social media platforms collect and use data. Two thirds (66%) Americans would be more likely to support their elected officials in a re-election if they supported a law placing greater requirements on how technology companies allow children to use their online platforms.

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[1] Note that "Republicans" refers to both Republicans and Republican-leaners, while "Democrats" refers to both Democrats and Democrat-leaners.

Americans hold social media deeply responsible for a range of childhood issues, as well as multiple threats to our democracy.

Approximately eight out of ten Americans hold social media responsible for bullying, childhood mental health, and the spreading of false information and conspiracy theories:

Childhood Issue or Democracy Threat	Responsible[2]	Deeply Responsible	Male (deeply)	Female (deeply)
Spreading of false information and conspiracy theories	81%	62%	61%	62%
Bullying	80%	54%	48%	60%
Children's mental health issues, including body image problems, eating disorders, depression and anxiety	79%	54%	49%	59%
Political extremism	76%	54%	56%	52%
Political polarization	73%	50%	54%	46%

It is also worth noting that **one in four (25%) Americans hold social media *fully* responsible (10 out of 10) for the spreading of false information and conspiracy theories**.

For the 7% who chose "none of the above" when it comes to social media usage (from a list of 15 platforms, "other messaging app" and "other social media platform"), 69% held social media deeply responsible for the spreading of false information and 33% held it fully responsible.

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[2] The scale was 0-10, where zero means that social media is not responsible at all, ten means that social media is fully responsible, and five is neutral; neither responsible or not responsible. "Responsible" indicates that a respondent scored the issue a 6 or higher; "deeply responsible" an 8 or higher; and "fully responsible" a 10.

Those who do not list Facebook among their top three most used social media sites (39% of respondents) were also much more likely than the average to hold social media responsible for the spreading of false information. 70% held it deeply responsible and almost one in three (31%) held it fully responsible. By contrast, just 57% of frequent Facebook users (62% of Americans) held it deeply responsible and 22% held it fully responsible.

Typically, **men hold social media more responsible for democracy threats, while women hold social media more responsible for childhood issues**. For instance, 48% of men hold social media deeply responsible for bullying, compared to 60% of women. On the other hand, 54% of men hold social media deeply responsible for political polarization, compared to just 46% of women.

Seven in ten Americans see social media's impact on children as more negative than positive.

Just seven in one hundred see social media's impact on children as more positive than negative.

Of those Americans who felt that social media's impact on children is more negative than positive, trending concerns included:
- The level of **influence**;
- **Bullying** and social pressure;
- The spreading of **false information**;
- Image and **mental health** concerns;
- Alienation and **loss of genuine relationships**;
- Inappropriate or **harmful content**;
- Spreading of **ideology**; and
- Less time spent outside; more **time wasted** on "junk" content.

Among the most prevalent concerns were the sheer level of influence that social media has in children's lives, as well as the bullying and social pressure that occurs on social media platforms.

"Where do I start? Image issues. Predatory actors. AI. Hookup culture. Indoctrination. Addiction. Phone addiction. Screen addiction. Girls are developing eating disorders by middle school. PAID INFLUENCERS to lie and manipulate. Desire for fame. Waste of time."

-45-54 year old, White, Republican, female

Eight out of ten Americans (82%) feel that more needs to be done to increase transparency, ensure privacy, and protect children.

As a result of these concerns, **eight out of ten Americans (82%) feel that more needs to be done to increase transparency, ensure privacy, and protect children**; just 10% feel that "there is no need for new rules about how social media companies operate."

More than half (51%) Americans believe that, generally speaking, social media is heading in the wrong direction; less than one third (32%) Americans view social media as headed in the right direction. **Eleven percent of Americans rate it as a 0; "heading in the completely wrong direction."** There is broad cross-partisan agreement that social media is heading in the wrong direction; more than half of Republicans and Nonpartisan Independents, and the plurality of Democrats believe that social media is headed in the wrong direction.

Americans who are most likely to see social media as headed in the wrong direction are: **older (55+), male, Republican, White, college grads and postgrads**.

As previously mentioned, there is an important gender nuance here; men are most concerned around social media in general, and typically hold it more responsible for threats to democracy, whereas women are most concerned around social media's impact on children, and typically hold it more responsible for childhood issues.

Younger Americans (18-34), on the other hand, are much less likely to see social media as headed in the wrong direction (40% compared to 59% of 55+ age group). This is likely due to the fact that younger Americans are more likely to use a range of social media platforms, compared to older Americans. Interestingly, the The 18-24 age group was the only category where Facebook did not feature in the top 3 social media platforms; TikTok, Instagram and Youtube were their preferred three.

A cross-partisan majority of Americans want elected officials to take action.

In seeking to explore solutions to the issues surrounding social media, we asked:
1. Would you support or oppose legislation which required social media platforms to make their products and algorithms available for independent review?
2. If your elected officials (members of Congress and state legislators) supported laws to increase requirements on the way that social media platforms collect and use data, would you be more or less likely to support them in a re-election, or would there be no change?
3. If your elected officials (members of Congress and state legislators) supported a law placing greater requirements on how technology companies allow children to use their online platforms, would you be more or less likely to support them in a re-election, or would there be no change?

Over two thirds (68%) of Americans would support legislation which required social media platforms to make their products and algorithms available for independent review. Four out of ten (39%) Americans would strongly support such legislation. Just 10% would oppose it.

Party	Support for legislation requiring social media platforms to make their products and algorithms available for independent review
Nationwide	**68%** support
Republican	**72%** support
Democrat	**64%** support
Nonpartisan Independent	**73%** support

Almost six out of ten (58%) Americans would be more likely to support their elected officials in a re-election if they supported laws to increase requirements on the way that social media platforms collect and use data. This is compared to 9% who would be less likely to support them.

Two thirds (66%) of Americans would be more likely to support their elected officials in a re-election if they supported a law placing greater requirements on how technology companies allow children to use their online platforms. Just 8% would be less likely to support them.

Party	Re-election support for elected officials who support laws increasing requirements on the way that social media platforms collect and use data	Re-election support for elected officials who support laws increasing requirements on how technology companies allow children to use their online platforms
Nationwide	**58%** more likely to support (50% net)[3]	**66%** more likely to support (58% net)
Republican	**62%** more likely to support (54% net)	**71%** more likely to support (65% net)
Democrat	**57%** more likely to support (48% net)	**64%** more likely to support (55% net)
Nonpartisan Independent	**61%** more likely to support (55% net)	**65%** more likely to support (58% net)

Research goal and methodology

The goal of this survey was to gain insight into the impact of social media on people's lives as well as to explore their views about ways to address what they perceive to be the negative effects.

This was a nationwide survey conducted by Online Text to Mobile and online panel from March 4 - March 7 among a random sample of 1047 U.S. citizens. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, and has been weighted by political party, 2020 General Election turnout, age, education, and race to be nationally representative.

About Citizen Data

Founded in 2019, Citizen Data is a nonpartisan democracy organization that provides data, insights, and tools to our partners as they unite to bridge divides and advance meaningful change. We bring nonpartisan, best-in-class data, analytics, research, and strategic support to people and organizations who are working to solve some of our nation's toughest modern challenges. Over the last three years, we've partnered with and provided research to over 70 pro-democracy organizations, including

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[3] Net numbers take into account those who are less likely to support.

working intimately with election organizations, officials and experts to build and rebuild trust in our elections.

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