

How Social Media Influences Democracy: New State-of-the-Field Report from a Recent Conference | Items

By Kris-Stella Trump

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Academic research on the relationship between social media and democracy is fast-moving and spans multiple disciplines; this makes it difficult for any one researcher to stay on top of developments in this emerging field of study. While scholarly convenings on questions related to social media and democracy have been frequent in the last couple of years, it has been harder to find gatherings that encourage a holistic, bird's-eye look at the field across disciplines.

It was in this context that the Social Science Research Council's [Media & Democracy](#) program convened a conference on April 19-20, 2018, on "[Social Media and Democracy: Assessing the State of the Field and Identifying Unexplored Questions](#)." Today, we are proud to release [a report](#) based on discussions that took place at the conference, with a special emphasis on outstanding research questions.

Scholars at the conference discussed what researchers know, don't know, and should know about the complicated relationship between social media use and how democracy functions. Their topics included the causes of incivility online, the differences between online and offline political conversations, echo chambers, the spread of fake news, the correction of false beliefs, and the uses of social media by hostile foreign actors.

Across these topics, the discussion repeatedly returned to three key issues: the need for more research on all forms of political communication (not only that which takes place online); the need to improve our understanding of the role that identity and community play in determining political behaviors and beliefs; and the need for research that uses data from a variety of platforms, taking into account people's whole media diet. Below, we summarize some highlights from the discussion; for more detail, you can access the full report [here](#).

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