

It's the (Democracy-Poisoning) Golden Age of Free Speech | WIRED

By Zeynep Tufekci

January 23, 2018

This idea that more speech—more participation, more connection—constitutes the highest, most unalloyed good is a common refrain in the tech industry. But a historian would recognize this belief as a fallacy on its face. Connectivity is not a pony. Facebook doesn't just connect democracy-loving Egyptian dissidents and fans of the videogame *Civilization*; it brings together white supremacists, who can now assemble far more effectively. It helps connect the efforts of radical Buddhist monks in Myanmar, who now have much more potent tools for spreading incitement to ethnic cleansing—fueling the fastest-growing refugee crisis in the world.

The freedom of speech is an important democratic value, but it's not the only one. In the liberal tradition, free speech is usually understood as a vehicle—a necessary condition for achieving certain other societal ideals: for creating a knowledgeable public; for engendering healthy, rational, and informed debate; for holding powerful people and institutions accountable; for keeping communities lively and vibrant. What we are seeing now is that when free speech is treated as an end and not a means, it is all too possible to thwart and distort everything it is supposed to deliver.

Source: [It's the \(Democracy-Poisoning\) Golden Age of Free Speech | WIRED](#)