

Yes, American Democracy Is in Peril — But Don't Blame the Bots | Salon

By Steven Rosenfeld

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Steven Rosenfeld argues that, while technologies like bots have provided an opening for electioneering, it is important to place responsibility at the feet of the actual political actors manipulating such technologies. He says that the real problem with our elections is not bots, but the erosion of accountability, checks-and-balances, and core democratic institutions.

Where these seemingly disparate trends leave 2018's midterm election voters is an open question. Bots, which aren't exactly new, also aren't the most effective way to motivate political behavior, said [Colin Delany](#), an online messaging consultant and publisher of [epolitics.com](#). Likely voters this fall can expect to be targeted by direct mail, radio and TV ads, pre-roll video, social media ads, and social media posts by friends and family — all of which make these bot examples appear as drops in a political messaging bucket.

What's clear is voters will be largely on their own to decode whatever political messages are hurled their way — in an era where those sending the most incendiary or irresponsible communiqués have constitutional cover (thank you, Supreme Court) to say whatever they want, spend unlimited sums to spread those messages, and not tell recipients (the public) who is behind the screeds or who's bankrolling them. Led by a president who revels in bullying and mockery, this landscape suggests that our politics will only get uglier.

Where are the checks and balances? Our framers created a constitutional system that is supposed to be based on restraining the inevitable excesses of human nature, right? The short answer is the effective restraints are few and far between.

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