

Social Media Has Been Good for Democracy

A 500-Year Communications Arc, Its Critics, and the AI
Counter-Revolution

Claude Code

June 28, 2026

Abstract

This report defends the thesis that social media has been *literally* pro-democratic. By collapsing the publication monopoly that legacy gatekeepers — broadcast networks, prestige newspapers, party machines, foundation-funded NGOs, accredited expert bodies — held for most of the twentieth century, social media transferred political and epistemic power from a narrow credentialed elite to the mass of ordinary citizens. This is not a novel phenomenon but the most recent and most aggressive episode in a recurring historical pattern: the printing press, the popular press, the radio, the television, and the early internet each widened political participation while incumbents called the change “a threat to democracy.” The contemporary critique of social media — that it has produced misinformation, polarization, populism, and the erosion of trusted institutions — describes exactly this transfer of power. The critique survives only by a definitional sleight: substituting “democracy” for “the elite-mediated procedural order that preceded mass-participation digital media.” On any literal reading of *kratos* by the *demos*, the critics’ own evidence is evidence *for* democratization, not against it. The report closes with a contrasting analysis of artificial intelligence as the first communications-and-cognition technology in five centuries that may run the trend in reverse: capital-intensive, compute-concentrated, model-mediated, and likely to re-aggregate epistemic and political power into a small number of frontier labs, regulators, and capital allocators.

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	What Democracy Is, and What It Isn’t	4
2.1	The Literal Definition	4

2.2	What Democracy Is Not	5
2.3	Why the Conflation Is Tempting	6
3	The Historical Arc: Communications Technology and Political Power	6
3.1	The Printing Press (<i>c.</i> 1450–1700)	6
3.2	Newspapers and the Public Sphere (<i>c.</i> 1700–1900)	7
3.3	Radio (<i>c.</i> 1920–1960)	8
3.4	Television (<i>c.</i> 1950–2000)	9
3.5	The Web 1.0 Era (<i>c.</i> 1993–2005)	9
3.6	Summary: The Pre-Social-Media Pattern	9
4	Social Media as the Most Aggressive Democratizer	10
4.1	The Mechanics	10
4.2	The Cases	11
4.3	Measurable Population-Level Effects	13
5	The “Social Media Is Bad for Democracy” Thesis	15
5.1	Six Representative Critics	15
5.2	Mapping the Critique to the Framework	16
5.3	The Critics’ Strongest Argument: Quality of Decision-Making	18
6	The Terminological Game	18
6.1	Three Common Substitutions	18
6.2	Why the Game Is Effective	19
6.3	An Honest Restatement	19
7	Artificial Intelligence as Counter-Democratization	20
7.1	Five Concentrations	20
7.2	The Publisher–Consumer Flip	22
7.3	The Comparison Matrix	24
7.4	Counter-Considerations	25
8	Conclusion	26

1 Introduction

“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind.”

attributed to Jim Morrison; the sentiment is older

In 2008, a sitting United States Senator could not credibly run for President without the editorial blessing of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the three broadcast networks, and a small constellation of cable news anchors. In 2024, a former President campaigned successfully against the unanimous opposition of every one of those institutions, won the popular vote, and announced major cabinet picks via posts to a platform he himself owned. In the intervening sixteen years, the distribution of political agenda-setting power in the United States — and, to greater or lesser degrees, in most OECD democracies — shifted decisively away from a few hundred credentialed editors, producers, and consultants and toward several billion citizens with smartphones.

This report argues that the shift constitutes *democratization* in the most literal and historically defensible sense of the word, and that the contemporary discourse claiming the opposite — that “social media has been bad for democracy” — is sustained by a definitional sleight that does not survive serious examination.

The argument has four parts.

Part I (Sections 2–3) establishes the definitional and historical baseline. *Democracy* means rule by the people — *δημος* (the people) holding *κράτος* (power) (Ober, 2008). It does not mean any particular policy bundle, any particular set of institutions, or any particular distribution of authority among credentialed bodies. Communications technologies that broaden the share of the citizenry capable of forming, expressing, and acting on political opinion increase democracy on this definition; technologies that narrow it decrease democracy. By that standard, the printing press, the penny press, the radio, the television, and the early web were all democratizing events — though all were called the opposite by the incumbents they displaced.

Part II (Sections 4–4.3) applies the same lens to social media. It catalogs the mechanics by which platforms collapsed the publication barrier (recommendation feeds, mobile capture of attention, decentralized cross-cutting coalitions, low-cost organizing), the cases (Arab Spring, Tea Party, #MeToo, BLM, Brexit, MAGA, Yellow Vests, Bolsonaro, Modi, Milei), and the measurable population-level outcomes (legacy media revenue collapse, populist vote share, trust collapse, elite–mass attitude divergence).

Part III (Sections 5–6) surveys the leading critics of social media’s effects on democracy — including Sunstein (2017), Tufekci (2017), Vaidhyanathan (2018), Haidt (2024), Applebaum (2020), Stanley (2018), and Fukuyama (2022) — and maps each substantive claim onto

the literal democratization framework. The claim that emerges is striking: every harm the critics identify is, on inspection, a description of *kratos* migrating from elite institutions to the mass. The critique works as a critique only if one quietly substitutes “democracy” for “the elite-mediated procedural status quo I prefer.”

Part IV (Sections 7–8) turns to artificial intelligence. Unlike every prior communications and information technology since 1450, AI is structurally *anti*-democratizing in five distinct senses: compute concentration, capital concentration, geographic concentration, model-mediated epistemic gatekeeping, and an emerging regulatory architecture that locks in incumbent advantage. Where social media made every citizen a publisher, AI threatens to make every citizen a consumer of elite-trained intelligence. The 500-year arc may be about to bend back.

A note on what this report is and is not. It is not a defense of any particular content posted to any social media platform. It is not a claim that populist movements have produced good policy outcomes; that is a separate question. It is not a claim that all aspects of the legacy gatekeeping apparatus were corrupt; many were not. It is not a claim that AI is inherently malign; some of its potential is profoundly democratizing. What it *is* is an argument about the conceptual mapping between *communications structure* and *distribution of political power*, an argument that on the most natural reading of that mapping, the case against social media collapses, and an argument that the next technological wave is structurally different from its predecessors in ways that should worry anyone who cares about democracy in the literal sense.

2 What Democracy Is, and What It Isn’t

The argument turns on a definitional distinction that has been blurred in contemporary discourse to the point of unrecognizability. It is worth restoring carefully.

2.1 The Literal Definition

Democracy (*δημοκρατία*, *dēmokratia*) is a compound of *δῆμος* (*dēmos*, “the people”) and *κράτος* (*kratos*, “power, rule, strength”). Ober (2008) argues that the suffix *kratos* was selected by classical Athenians specifically over *archē* (“office, magistracy, rule by command”) to signal that democracy referred to the *collective capacity to act* possessed by the citizenry, not to any particular procedure for selecting officials. In Athens, this capacity was instantiated in the Assembly (Ekklesia), the Council (Boule) selected by lot, the popular courts, and the practice of *isegoria* (equal right of speech in the Assembly).

The point of *isegoria* is that the speaker’s standing was not credentialed: any citizen could stand and address the assembly on any matter, and the assembly — not a body

of vetted experts — decided what to do. Athens did not require a degree in political philosophy, a position in an established *paideia*, or a vetting committee before someone could speak. Whether this was wise is a separate question; that it was *democratic*, by the term Athenians invented, is the point.

A useful working definition for the modern era: *democracy is the distribution of effective political power — including the power to set the agenda, define legitimate opinion, organize collective action, and select officials — across the citizenry rather than concentrating it in a credentialed sub-elite.*

By this definition, the universal-suffrage United States of 1965 is more democratic than the propertied-male-suffrage United States of 1820. The Twitter-and-podcast media environment of 2024 is more democratic than the three-network broadcast environment of 1976. The pamphlet-saturated England of 1645 is more democratic than the regulated-printing England of 1635. None of these claims requires endorsement of the outcomes those more-democratic systems produced.

2.2 What Democracy Is Not

Democracy, on the literal definition, is not:

- **Any particular policy bundle.** A regime that produces “good” policy by elite consensus and a regime that produces “bad” policy by direct citizen action are not therefore non-democratic and democratic respectively. They are differently-good-or-bad differently-democratic regimes.
- **Liberal proceduralism.** Constitutional rights, separation of powers, independent judiciaries, and rule of law are valuable and often co-occur with democracy — but they are conceptually independent. A liberal autocracy (singular wise ruler, robust property rights, strong courts) is not a democracy. A constitutionally-illiberal majoritarianism is not for that reason undemocratic.
- **Expert consensus.** If 97% of credentialed economists, climate scientists, or public-health officials hold a view, and 60% of the citizenry holds the opposite, the citizenry’s view is not for that reason “undemocratic.” It may be wrong. That is a separate matter.
- **Institutional configuration.** Independent central banks, regulatory agencies, supranational bodies (the EU, WTO, IMF), foundations, professional associations, and accredited universities are valuable infrastructure. They are not democracy. Many of them exist precisely to insulate decisions from democratic pressure.
- **Trusted information ecosystems.** A society in which a few prestige media outlets

enjoy near-universal credibility is not for that reason more democratic than one in which credibility is contested. It may be more functional, more orderly, more truthful — those are separate questions. Concentrated credibility is concentrated agenda-setting power.

The reason this distinction matters is that the contemporary case against social media depends on conflating these. The complaint that social media has eroded “trust in democratic institutions” is, depending on which institutions, either (i) a complaint about loss of trust in elite gatekeepers, which is a description of democratization, or (ii) a complaint about loss of trust in literally-democratic institutions like elections, which is a serious complaint but one that needs separate empirical examination. The two are routinely run together.

2.3 Why the Conflation Is Tempting

The conflation is rhetorically powerful precisely because it is invisible. To say “social media is bad for the policy outcomes I prefer” is to make a technocratic claim that invites scrutiny. To say “social media is bad for democracy” is to make a claim that sounds like a moral imperative no decent person can oppose. The second sentence does the work of the first while avoiding its rhetorical costs.

Caplan (2007) argues that elites in mature democracies routinely complain about “democratic” outcomes they dislike while resisting any framing that would make their preference for elite-mediated rule explicit. The complaint about social media is an instance of this general pattern.

3 The Historical Arc: Communications Technology and Political Power

The contemporary debate over social media has a much longer pedigree than is usually appreciated. Every major communications technology since Gutenberg has provoked the same pattern: a sharp expansion in who can publish; a corresponding redistribution of political and epistemic power; and a sharp reaction from prior gatekeepers, framed as a defense of public order, of truth, of religion, of decency, of standards, and — once the word came into common use — of democracy itself.

3.1 The Printing Press (c. 1450–1700)

The printing press is the clearest case. Before Gutenberg, books were produced by hand in monasteries; circulation was measured in dozens; the curation of legitimate knowledge

was a monopoly of the Church and a small literate elite. The press collapsed the cost of duplication by approximately four orders of magnitude within a half-century. By 1500, more than 20 million printed books were in circulation in Europe (Eisenstein, 1979); by 1600, perhaps 200 million.

The political consequences were immediate and dramatic. Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses* (1517) were a local academic complaint until printed broadsheets carried them across German-speaking lands in a matter of weeks; within a decade Luther was the bestselling author in German history (Pettegree, 2015). The Reformation is unintelligible without the press. So is the explosion of vernacular Bibles, which removed clerical mediation of the foundational religious text. So are the political pamphlet wars of the English Civil War — between 1640 and 1660 the number of titles published in England rose from roughly 600 per year to over 4,000 (Raymond, 2003). So is the spread of Enlightenment political theory in the eighteenth century, often via tracts that would have been suppressed had a single Church-and-Crown licensing regime been able to enforce its monopoly.

What did prior gatekeepers say at the time? Pope Leo X’s 1515 bull *Inter Sollicitudines* introduced pre-publication censorship across the Catholic world, lamenting that the press, while useful, had given rise to “many errors” and “pernicious doctrines” that “deceived the simple people” (Eisenstein, 1979). Henry VIII’s 1538 proclamation required royal licensing of all printed works to prevent “naughty printed books” from causing “great trouble in Christendom.” The Stationers’ Company in England was created in 1557 specifically to limit who could print and what. In the French *ancien régime*, the *Direction de la Librairie* regulated every publication for two centuries.

The political language used by these incumbents is striking. They did not say “the press is taking power away from us.” They said “the press is enabling deception of the simple,” “the press is undermining the proper order of society,” “the press is causing disorder and confusion.” These are the same arguments made about social media by twenty-first-century critics. They were not wrong about the descriptive facts. The press did enable mass deception; it also enabled the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and modern democratic politics. Both descriptions are true; what was being defended in the censorship regimes was not democracy — the word had no contemporary political resonance — but the existing elite-mediated knowledge order.

3.2 Newspapers and the Public Sphere (c. 1700–1900)

The newspaper extended the pattern. Habermas (1989) identified the eighteenth-century proliferation of newspapers, journals, and coffeehouse readings as the constitutive condition of the modern “public sphere” — the first time in history when private citizens, not aristocrats or clerics, could form collective opinion on questions of state. In the United

States, the penny press of the 1830s reduced the price of a daily paper from six cents (a half-day's wages) to one cent, expanding readership tenfold and producing the first genuinely mass political readership (Schudson, 1978). By the late nineteenth century, the United States supported roughly 12,000 newspapers, including hundreds of immigrant-language, labor, agrarian-populist, and minor-party titles.

Two features of the newspaper era are worth flagging. First, the political fights over press freedom in the nineteenth century — the Sedition Acts of 1798 and 1918, the postal exclusions of abolitionist and labor publications, the criminal libel prosecutions of pamphleteers — show the same pattern of incumbent reaction. Second, the consolidation of the newspaper industry into chains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hearst, Pulitzer, McCormick, later the Newhouse and Chandler families) re-narrowed publication power. By the mid-twentieth century, daily-newspaper monopolies were the norm in American cities. Each subsequent communications technology — radio, TV, the web — partially reversed this re-concentration.

3.3 Radio (c. 1920–1960)

Radio was the first medium to break the print barrier: it required no literacy. By 1930, roughly 40% of U.S. households owned a radio; by 1940, 80% (Starr, 2004). Radio enabled, for the first time, simultaneous mass political address: Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats, Father Coughlin's populist broadcasts, Adolf Hitler's rallies, Winston Churchill's wartime addresses. The political historian Craig (2000) argues that radio fundamentally restructured the relationship between national leaders and citizens by allowing leaders to bypass party and press intermediaries.

The pattern of incumbent reaction repeated. The Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934 created federal licensing regimes that, while officially about spectrum management, in practice gave the Federal Radio Commission (later FCC) discretion over who could broadcast. The 1949 Fairness Doctrine required “balanced” coverage of controversial issues — a requirement that, in practice, gave incumbent broadcasters a defensible reason not to air heterodox voices. Father Coughlin lost his radio platform in 1939 after the National Association of Broadcasters adopted rules that effectively prohibited the sale of airtime for controversial commentary (Warren, 1996).

Radio's case complicates the simple “communications expansion = democratization” story in an instructive way. Its centralized broadcast architecture (one transmitter, millions of receivers) initially *narrowed* editorial voice even as it widened audience. The same was true of television. It was the internet, and especially social media, that restored many-to-many publication on the radio-and-television scale of audience.

3.4 Television (*c.* 1950–2000)

Television deepened the broadcast-era concentration. By 1960, three networks — CBS, NBC, ABC — reached roughly 90% of American viewers in prime time (Baughman, 2007). The Cronkite-era anchor enjoyed a credibility position unprecedented in human history. Walter Cronkite’s 1968 commentary that the Vietnam War was unwinnable was reportedly received by Lyndon Johnson as “If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost middle America.” That a single broadcaster could “be” middle America to the President says everything about the centralization of political-information flow.

Television produced two countervailing democratic effects. It increased the share of citizens exposed to political information by orders of magnitude relative to the newspaper era. And it concentrated the framing and selection of that information in a few hundred network producers, editors, and anchors. The net effect on democracy in the literal sense is ambiguous; what is unambiguous is that television was vastly more concentrated than what came after.

3.5 The Web 1.0 Era (*c.* 1993–2005)

The early web partially undid the broadcast concentration. The blogosphere of the early 2000s broke several stories that the legacy media missed or refused to run — the most cited being the Dan Rather / Bush National Guard memos affair of 2004, in which blog readers identified the supposed 1972 memos as having been produced in a Microsoft Word default font (Benkler, 2006). Comment threads on news articles, message boards, and the early aggregators (Drudge, Slashdot, Digg) provided cross-cutting routes for political information that did not pass through the network newsroom or the editorial board.

What Web 1.0 did not do, however, was solve the audience problem. Most blogs had tiny readerships; political information still flowed predominantly through cable news, network television, and the major newspapers, whose websites became the dominant news sites of the era. Web 1.0 expanded the production side; it did not yet expand the distribution side. That came next.

3.6 Summary: The Pre-Social-Media Pattern

Across five communications eras, three regularities are visible:

1. Each technology that lowered the cost of producing or distributing political information shifted some power away from prior gatekeepers and toward a broader citizenry.
2. In every case, prior incumbents reacted with claims that the new medium was a threat to order, to truth, to morality, to public peace, to the welfare of the simple —

and, once the word was available, to democracy.

3. The technologies most clearly democratizing in the literal sense were those that lowered barriers to *production* (printing press, pamphlet, mimeograph, web). Pure broadcast technologies (radio, TV) widened audience but concentrated voice; they were ambiguous on the democratization measure.

Social media combined the audience scale of broadcast with the open production of print. It is the first technology since the printing press to do both at once.

4 Social Media as the Most Aggressive Democratizer

4.1 The Mechanics

The architectural innovation of social media is not user-generated content per se — Web 1.0 had that — but *algorithmic many-to-many distribution at broadcast scale*. On legacy media, distribution was the scarce resource: production was widely available (anyone could write a pamphlet, record a podcast, build a website) but reaching a national audience required passing through a small set of gatekeepers (network producers, editorial boards, cable bookers, bookstore buyers). Social media replaced that scarce-distribution architecture with an algorithmic one in which content propagated according to engagement signals across user networks.

Several specific mechanics matter:

- **Zero marginal cost of publication.** Posting a tweet or a TikTok requires no editorial approval, no production budget, and no distribution agreement. The publication function that, in 1990, was reserved to perhaps 10,000 American media professionals was, by 2015, available to perhaps 200 million Americans.
- **Audience-driven amplification.** Reach is determined not by editorial judgment but by user engagement. This is a profoundly democratic mechanism in the literal sense: *the audience decides what to amplify*, not the editor. Engagement-driven amplification has many failure modes (notably, it rewards inflammatory content); but its failure modes are democratic failure modes — failures of the audience’s judgment, not failures of the gatekeeping process, because there is no gatekeeping process.
- **Recommendation feeds and discovery.** Modern feeds (TikTok’s “For You,” Twitter/X’s algorithmic timeline, Instagram’s Explore, YouTube’s Up Next) surface content the user has no prior connection to. This means that a previously-unknown citizen can reach an audience of millions on the strength of a single post, with no

mediating institution involved. The “everyman who went viral” is a category that did not exist in 1990.

- **Low-friction collective action.** Hashtags, group chats, subreddits, and Discord servers enable coordination at speeds and scales that previously required institutional infrastructure (a union, a political party, a foundation, a church). [Shirky \(2008\)](#) called this “organizing without organizations.”
- **Cross-cutting coalition formation.** Because audiences self-select rather than being delivered by editorial choice, political coalitions can form along lines that cut across existing party, class, regional, or ideological structures. The Tea Party of 2009–2010, the populist alliance of free-trade-skeptical workers and tech-libertarians around the Trump 2016 campaign, the BLM-corporate-DEI alliance of 2020, the populist-right convergence between economic-nationalist Republicans and cultural-conservative Democrats: these coalitions formed online before they existed in institutional politics.

4.2 The Cases

The case-study literature on social-media-enabled political movements is now too large to summarize comprehensively. The key episodes are:

The Arab Spring (2010–2012). The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions were coordinated substantially via Facebook and Twitter. The “Facebook revolution” framing was contemporaneously called overhyped ([Morozov, 2011](#)); more recent scholarship ([Howard and Hussain, 2013](#)) confirms that social media played a non-trivial coordinating role, especially in Egypt where the regime’s mass-media monopoly was the binding constraint on previous protest movements. That subsequent democratic transitions failed in most countries is a different question from whether the protests themselves were a democratic event.

The Tea Party (2009–2010). The first significant U.S. populist movement of the social-media era. Coordinated substantially through Facebook groups and conservative blog networks, the Tea Party produced an electoral wave that flipped sixty-three House seats in 2010, replaced numerous Republican incumbents with insurgent challengers, and substantially reshaped congressional behavior on fiscal and immigration questions. The movement had no Murdoch-equivalent legacy-media patron; Fox News covered it sympathetically but did not create it.

#MeToo (2017). Originated as a social-media hashtag in October 2017 and, within weeks, produced consequences — forced resignations, criminal charges, industry-wide policy changes — that would have required years of congressional or regulatory action

through legacy channels. The movement was not party-coordinated; it bypassed both the Democratic Party’s traditional gender-politics infrastructure and the prestige magazine ecosystem that had historically gatekept this discourse.

Black Lives Matter (2013–2020). Combined organic social-media virality (the Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown cases) with deliberate movement organization. The 2020 protests, following the murder of George Floyd, were the largest protest movement in American history by participation count ([Chenoweth and Pressman, 2020](#)); that scale was achievable in three weeks because organizational infrastructure ran through social media rather than through churches, unions, or political parties.

Brexit (2016). The Leave campaign deliberately bypassed legacy press editorial endorsements — which favored Remain — by spending heavily on targeted Facebook advertising. Whatever one thinks of the policy outcome, the campaign was the first in a major Western democracy to win a national referendum substantially through digital outreach against the unanimous opposition of national print and broadcast media ([Shipman, 2017](#)).

The Trump 2016 campaign. Won the Republican nomination despite the active opposition of approximately every major Republican-aligned editorial board and donor network, then won the general election against the unanimous opposition of every major newspaper editorial board except for one regional daily. The campaign’s Twitter strategy was the most public element; the underlying Facebook organic-content and ad-targeting operation has been more thoroughly documented in retrospect ([Kreiss, 2018](#)).

The Yellow Vests (2018–2019). A spontaneous French protest movement against a fuel-tax increase, coordinated almost entirely through Facebook groups, with no political-party or trade-union infrastructure. Forced policy reversals from the Macron government within weeks.

Bolsonaro (2018), Milei (2023), Meloni (2022). Insurgent right-wing candidates in Brazil, Argentina, and Italy who won national elections against legacy-media opposition through largely social-media-mediated campaigns.

The 2024 U.S. election. Trump’s return to power against unanimous prestige-media opposition, with substantial assistance from the Twitter/X platform under new ownership that explicitly reversed the previous moderation regime. The Joe Rogan podcast appearance — three hours of unedited conversation watched by an estimated 50 million people — substituted for the network-news interview that would have been the traditional credentialing event in prior cycles.

What unites these episodes is not that the resulting policies are good or bad — judgments differ, and that is not the question — but that each represents a successful exercise of *kratos* by a coalition of *demos* that the prior gatekeeping architecture would not have

credentialed. The question is not whether democratized politics is wise politics; it is whether democratized politics is democratic. It is.

4.3 Measurable Population-Level Effects

The case studies are suggestive; population-level data confirms the pattern. Several trends are visible across most OECD democracies:

- **Legacy media revenue and reach collapse.** U.S. daily newspaper revenue fell from approximately \$50 billion in 2005 to approximately \$10 billion in 2023 (Pew Research Center, 2024). Print circulation halved over the same period. Local newspapers have been the most affected; over 2,500 American local papers have closed since 2005.
- **Trust in legacy institutions has collapsed** (Figure 1). Gallup’s annual survey of trust in mass media stood at 72% confidence in 1976; it now stands below 30%. The decline tracks the rise of cable news, talk radio, the early web, and especially social media. Trust in government, organized religion, organized labor, big business, and the academy have all declined over the same period (Gallup, 2024).
- **Populist vote share has risen** (Figure 2). Funke et al. (2023) document a roughly tripling of populist vote share across OECD democracies between 2000 and 2020, with the steepest acceleration after 2014. The PopuList project (Rooduijn et al., 2024) confirms a similar pattern with different coding.
- **Elite–mass attitude divergence has widened.** Survey data on immigration, trade, foreign policy, and cultural-social questions show widening gaps between credentialed elites (postgraduate degree holders, residents of major cities, professional-managerial occupations) and the median citizen (Kaufmann, 2018). Where in the 1980s elite and mass opinion tracked each other on most policy questions, by the 2010s they diverged substantially on questions where the elite consensus had become a near-orthodoxy.
- **Social media penetration is near-saturation.** Pew Research and Ofcom data show that, by 2024, approximately 85% of U.S. adults used at least one social media platform regularly; smartphone penetration in OECD countries exceeded 90%. The infrastructure for mass political publication is now genuinely universal among adult citizens (Figure 3).

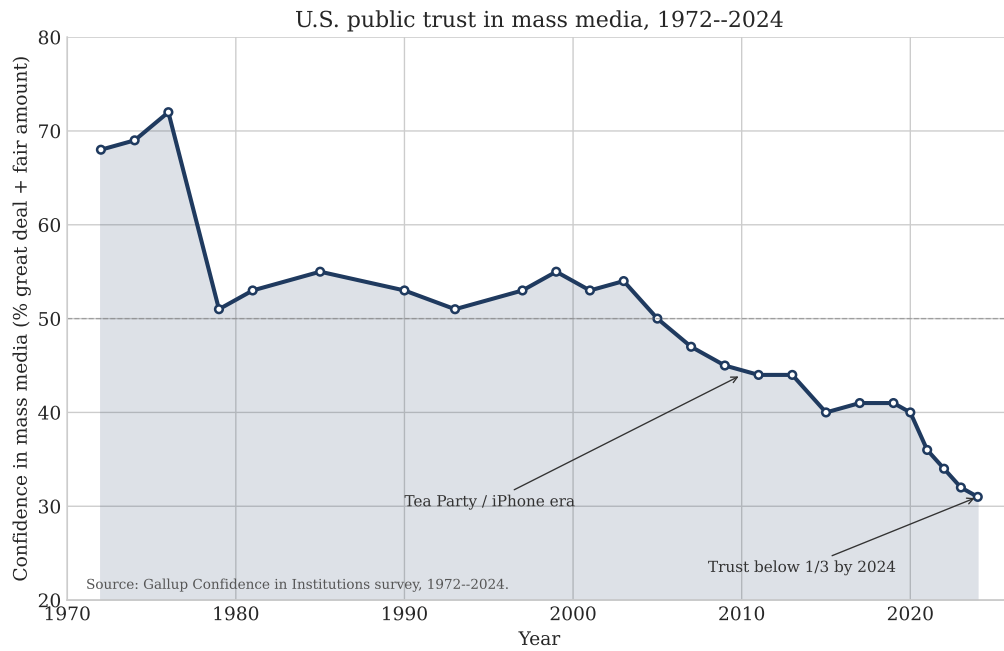


Figure 1: Public trust in mass media in the United States, 1972–2024. Sources: Gallup annual surveys of trust in newspapers, television, and radio. The series captures the share of respondents reporting “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence.

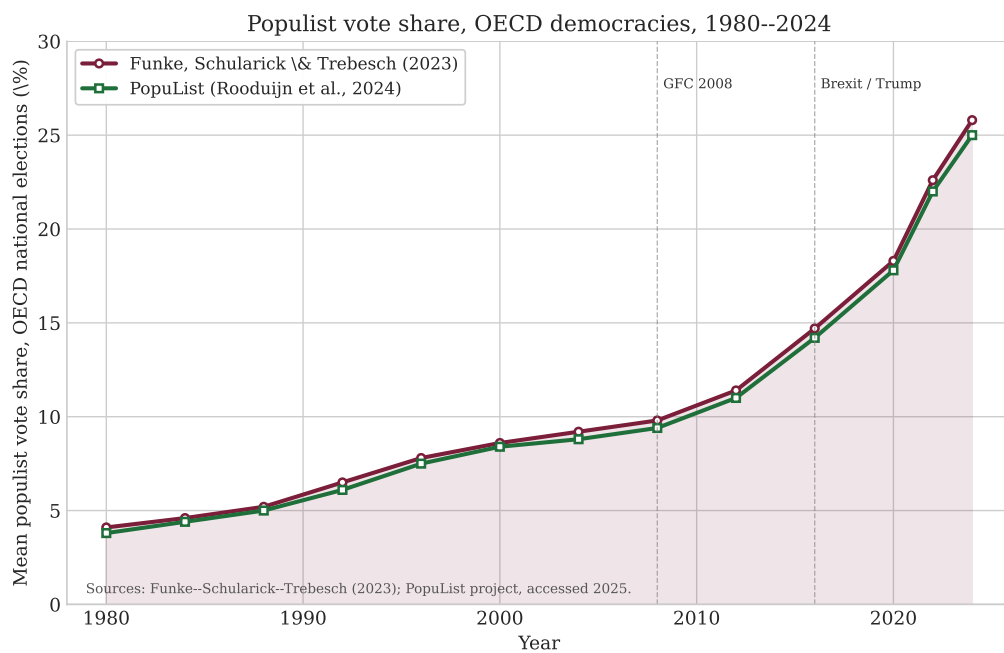


Figure 2: Average populist vote share in OECD democracies, 1980–2024. Sources: [Funke et al. \(2023\)](#) and the PopuList project ([Rooduijn et al., 2024](#)). The series is the unweighted mean of populist vote shares in national legislative elections across 31 OECD countries.

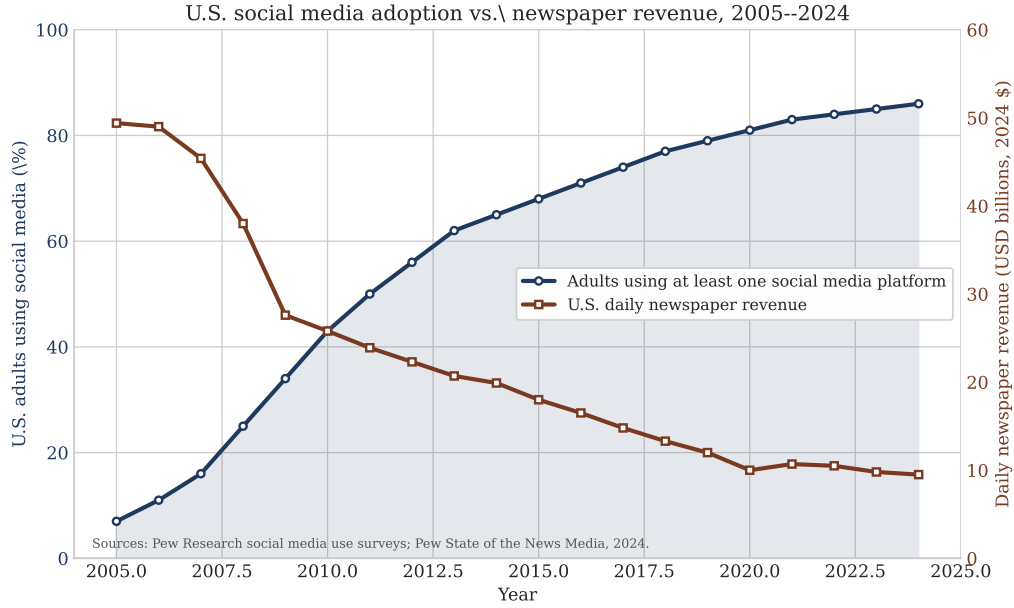


Figure 3: Social media penetration among U.S. adults and concurrent decline in U.S. daily newspaper revenue, 2005–2024. Sources: Pew Research social media use surveys; Pew State of the News Media reports. Left axis: share of adults using at least one platform regularly. Right axis: total U.S. daily newspaper revenue, billion 2024 USD.

The trust collapse is sometimes presented as evidence that social media has harmed democracy. The argument is that “democratic institutions” depend on public trust, and that the collapse of trust is therefore a democratic harm. This collapses the distinction made in §2. The institutions whose trust has collapsed are predominantly *not* the institutions of democratic self-government (elections, legislatures, courts) but the institutions of *elite mediation* of public knowledge and opinion (legacy media, foundations, professional associations, the academy). Distrust of those institutions is a precondition for the citizenry to exercise *kratos* independently of them. The collapse of credentialed-elite credibility is what democratization looks like.

5 The “Social Media Is Bad for Democracy” Thesis

This section surveys the leading versions of the case against social media and maps each onto the literal-democratization framework of §2.

5.1 Six Representative Critics

Sunstein (2017). The most rigorously argued version of the critique. Sunstein argues that algorithmic personalization produces “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers” that reduce citizens’ exposure to opposing views, undermining the cross-cutting deliberation a democracy requires. His normative model is drawn from **Habermas (1989)**: democracy

needs a single, shared public sphere in which citizens encounter the full range of views and reason their way to convergence.

Tufekci (2017). Argues that while social media has enabled mass protest movements (Tahrir Square, Gezi Park, Occupy), the resulting movements lack the “organizational capacity” that older labor-and-civil-rights movements built. Easy organization, on her account, produces shallow movements that fail to convert protest into durable institutional change.

Vaidhyathan (2018). Focuses on Facebook specifically as a “surveillance capitalist” enterprise whose engagement-driven feed monetizes outrage. Argues that the platform’s structure systematically advantages inflammatory and false content over moderate, accurate content, with cumulative effects on political culture.

Haidt (2024). Argues that smartphone-and-social-media adoption among adolescents has produced a mental-health crisis whose political consequence is a generation incapable of the resilience, in-person social skills, and tolerance for disagreement that democratic citizenship requires. A different but related Haidt essay ([Haidt, 2022](#)) argues that social media has produced a political environment in which all sides operate from positions of fear-driven dishonesty.

Applebaum (2020). Argues that social media has empowered authoritarian and authoritarian-adjacent movements globally, citing Hungary, Poland, the United States, Brazil, and others. The case for liberal democracy, on her account, depends on a class of liberal-minded intellectuals, journalists, and officials whose social authority has been eroded by social media.

Fukuyama (2022). Argues that classical liberalism — procedural rule-of-law constitutionalism — depends on a stable, broadly accepted set of intermediate institutions (universities, media, professional associations) and that social media has eroded these. He distinguishes liberalism from democracy in the literal sense and treats the erosion of liberal-institutional authority as a serious problem even if it is not strictly speaking a democratic problem.

Stanley (2018). Argues that social media is a vector for “fascism,” which he defines broadly as appeals to in-group, anti-elite, anti-intellectual, and traditional-hierarchy sentiment. On his account, democratization in the literal sense, if the demos turns out to hold sentiments he classifies as fascist, is bad for democracy as he uses the word.

5.2 Mapping the Critique to the Framework

What is striking, when these arguments are placed side by side, is that each substantive claim describes a redistribution of power from credentialed gatekeepers to the broader

citizenry. Table 1 maps the claims.

Table 1: Critic claims and their literal-democratization translation.

Critic claim	What it describes	Literal-democracy reading
“Misinformation spreads on social media”	Citizens believe things experts and major outlets deny	Citizens no longer credentialed-elite-mediated; some believe falsehoods, some believe truths the elite denied (lab-leak hypothesis, Hunter Biden laptop)
“Filter bubbles polarize”	Citizens consume content matching prior beliefs rather than editor-selected balance	Editorial selection no longer determines exposure; citizens choose
“Populism is rising”	Citizens vote for candidates the credentialed center opposes	Voting outcomes diverge from credentialed-center preferences
“Trust in institutions has collapsed”	Citizens distrust legacy media, academy, federal agencies, NGOs	Citizens no longer defer to credentialed sub-elites
“Authoritarianism is empowered”	Anti-establishment movements win elections in multiple countries	Electorates reject establishment-credentialed candidates
“Movements lack institutional depth”	Mass mobilizations bypass union/party/NGO infrastructure	Citizens organize without institutional intermediaries
“Liberal institutions are weakened”	Universities, prestige press, professional associations have less social authority	Institutional gatekeepers have less power
“The public sphere is fragmented”	Citizens no longer all read the same three papers and watch the same three networks	The public sphere is no longer curated by a hundred editors

In every row of Table 1, the left column is a description of literal democratization. The critic’s complaint, on inspection, is not that power has been concentrated — it is that power has been *distributed away from where it was previously concentrated*, namely in the credentialed sub-elites the critic respects.

This is not to say the critics are wrong about the descriptive facts. They are right. The disagreement is over what the facts mean. The critic says: “these are democratic harms.” The literal-democracy framework says: “these are descriptions of democratization. Whether democratization is harmful is a separate question.”

5.3 The Critics’ Strongest Argument: Quality of Decision-Making

There is one version of the critique that survives the framework intact: the argument from *quality of decision-making*. On this account, mass-participation politics produces worse decisions than expert-mediated politics. This is the argument of [Caplan \(2007\)](#) (in the direction of skepticism about democracy) and of [Brennan \(2016\)](#) (in favor of “epistocracy”). It is not the argument that social media is bad for democracy; it is the argument that democracy is bad for outcomes. That argument deserves serious engagement and is too large for this report. But it is a different argument from the one the critics are publicly making, and it does not benefit from the rhetorical protection of the word “democracy.”

The honest version of the critique is: *rule by credentialed sub-elites tends to produce better policy outcomes than direct citizen rule; social media has weakened credentialed-sub-elite rule; therefore policy outcomes are getting worse*. The first claim is empirically contested. The second claim is true. The third claim follows only conditional on the first. Stating the argument this way reveals what it really is: a defense of technocratic rule against democratization. That defense may be correct on the merits; what it is not is a defense of democracy.

6 The Terminological Game

The central rhetorical move of the contemporary critique is the substitution of “democracy” for “the elite-mediated procedural order that preceded mass-participation digital media.” Once one notices the substitution, it appears everywhere.

6.1 Three Common Substitutions

Substitution 1: “Democracy” = “Democratic norms.” “Democratic norms” typically refers to a cluster of practices — peaceful transfer of power, judicial independence, press freedom, deference to electoral outcomes — that are valuable but distinct from *kratos* by *demos*. The slippage is that “democratic norms” often includes, in the contemporary usage, deference by elected officials to unelected institutional bodies (the civil service, the intelligence community, the prestige press, regulatory agencies). These deferences are not democracy; they are the opposite, the constraint of democratic choice by non-democratic bodies. The constraints may be valuable. They are not democracy.

Substitution 2: “Democracy” = “Liberal democracy” = “The status quo liberal order.” [Fukuyama \(2022\)](#) explicitly notes the distinction between liberalism and democracy and warns against confusing them. He is in the minority. In most contemporary discourse, “liberal democracy” is used as a single hyphenated term, and the threats identified to “liberal democracy” are typically threats to the liberal half (rule

of law, individual rights, expert deference) rather than to the democratic half (citizens choosing who governs).

Substitution 3: “Democracy” = “Outcomes I support.” The starkest version. The argument runs: “democracy requires X policy outcome; X policy outcome is threatened by social media; therefore social media threatens democracy.” Examples include “democracy requires action on climate change”; “democracy requires immigration consensus”; “democracy requires free trade”; “democracy requires deference to public health authorities.” Each of these is a substantive policy preference. None of them is democracy. Reasonable democratic citizens can disagree on each one. Calling one’s preferred side “the democratic side” is a rhetorical move, not an argument.

6.2 Why the Game Is Effective

The substitution is effective because:

1. “Democracy” is the only nearly-universally-valued political term in contemporary Anglophone discourse. To be “anti-democratic” is to be morally disqualified. To be “pro-democratic” is to be aligned with the angels.
2. The conceptual distinction between democracy and its associated institutional infrastructure is genuinely hard to maintain. Most people, asked what democracy means, will name some mixture of “elections,” “rights,” “free press,” “rule of law,” “expert competence,” “peaceful transfer of power.” Only the first is strictly democracy.
3. The substitution is rarely conscious. Many critics of social media genuinely believe that the elite-mediated procedural order they grew up in *is* democracy — the only kind that can exist, the only kind that has ever existed in modern conditions, the only kind worth having. The substitution is the result of a particular acculturation rather than of deliberate rhetorical strategy.
4. The bar for distinguishing “democracy” from “my preferred system” is uncomfortably high. To make the distinction sharply requires saying, “I prefer some non-democratic features of our system to their more-democratic alternatives,” which is a defensible position but a politically costly one. Most participants in the debate prefer the rhetorical cover that the substitution provides.

6.3 An Honest Restatement

Compare:

Dishonest version: “Social media has been bad for democracy.”

Honest version: “Social media has shifted political power from credentialed sub-elites — whom I trust to produce good policy outcomes — toward the broader citizenry, whom I trust less. I prefer the prior distribution. I think the policy outcomes have worsened. I am concerned about the long-run institutional consequences.”

Every claim in the honest version is defensible. None of them is a claim that democracy has been harmed. They are all claims about the consequences of more democracy. The dishonest version smuggles in the conclusion — that the changes are anti-democratic — by lexical sleight rather than argument.

The argument of this report is not that the dishonest version’s substantive worries are wrong. The author is genuinely uncertain about many of them. The argument is that pretending the worries are worries about *democracy* obscures the actual question and disqualifies a class of legitimate democratic outcomes by rhetorical fiat.

7 Artificial Intelligence as Counter-Democratization

The argument so far has been retrospective. Social media has been democratizing in the literal sense; the critique to the contrary survives only via a definitional sleight. The remaining section is prospective. Artificial intelligence — and especially the frontier-model architecture that has dominated the past several years — is structurally different from every prior communications technology in ways that may reverse the five-century democratization trend.

7.1 Five Concentrations

Concentration 1: Compute. Training a frontier language model in 2024–2025 requires on the order of 10^{25} – 10^{26} floating-point operations, at a hardware cost of several hundred million to several billion dollars per run (Epoch AI, 2025). Inference at scale requires further enormous capital expenditure on data centers and energy infrastructure. As of 2025, the number of organizations operationally capable of training a frontier model is in the single digits worldwide — on the order of OpenAI, Anthropic, Google DeepMind, Meta AI, xAI, Mistral, Alibaba, ByteDance, Baidu, DeepSeek, and a handful of others. The trajectory points toward further concentration as training costs rise (Figure 5).

Concentration 2: Capital. The combined capital expenditure of the four U.S. hyperscalers (Microsoft, Google, Meta, Amazon) on AI infrastructure in 2024–2025 is approximately \$200 billion per year, with projections rising toward \$500 billion by 2027 (Figure 6). The capital intensity of frontier AI is comparable to that of pre-shale oil exploration, civilian space programs, or nuclear weapons programs. Three to five firms in the world are positioned to be major players.

Concentration 3: Geography. Frontier AI research is concentrated in a small number of cities: the San Francisco Bay Area, with secondary clusters in London, New York, Seattle, Toronto, Beijing, Shanghai, and Paris. The talent pool is small enough that frontier-lab employees can be reasonably described as a single social network of roughly 10,000–30,000 people worldwide. By contrast, the printing-press revolution was unleashed by a few hundred type founders and printers across many European cities; the social-media revolution was unleashed by participation from hundreds of millions of users across every continent.

Concentration 4: Epistemic mediation. Where social media gave citizens direct access to other citizens’ speech, AI inserts a trained-and-tuned model between the citizen and the world. Increasingly, citizens query AI assistants rather than search engines, and the assistant’s response is shaped by:

- the corpus on which the underlying model was trained (which is curated);
- the reinforcement-learning-from-human-feedback (RLHF) post-training, which encodes the labelers’ (and ultimately the lab’s) judgments about what answers are acceptable;
- the system prompt, which can be adjusted by the deploying firm;
- filtering and refusal policies, which override the underlying model’s outputs.

Each of these layers represents a point at which a small number of decision-makers can shape what citizens see and believe. This is a return to the broadcast architecture — one curator-determined output, many recipients — but in a more thoroughgoing form than radio or television, because the curation is invisible and adaptive to the individual user.

Concentration 5: Regulatory. The emerging regulatory architecture for AI — the EU AI Act, executive orders in the United States, the United Kingdom’s AI Safety Institute, the proposed Frontier Model Forum, the various “responsible scaling” commitments of frontier labs — is structured almost universally around *access control*: certifying which firms can train how-capable models under what conditions. This is the architecture of incumbent advantage: a regulatory regime expensive to comply with raises the barrier to new entrants and locks in the firms already operating at the frontier. Compare the regulatory history of radio (FCC licensing benefiting incumbent broadcasters), pharmaceuticals (FDA compliance costs benefiting incumbent firms), banking (capital requirements benefiting incumbent banks), and nuclear power (NRC compliance costs preventing new construction for forty years).

7.2 The Publisher–Consumer Flip

The clearest way to see the difference between AI and prior communications technologies is to ask: *who, after the technology, is the publisher, and who is the consumer?*

Table 2: Communications technology and the publisher–consumer relation.

Era	Publication function	Consumption function	Power direction
Pre-print	Monastic copyists (hundreds)	Literate elite (thousands)	Concentrated
Print	Printers (thousands)	Literate public (millions)	Widening
Newspaper	Editors (tens of thousands)	Reading public (hundreds of millions)	Widening
Radio/TV	Networks (hundreds)	General public (billions)	Narrowing voice; widening reach
Web 1.0	Anyone with a website (millions)	Wired public (hundreds of millions)	Widening voice
Social media	Any citizen with a phone (billions)	Same citizens (billions)	Maximally distributed
AI	Frontier labs (single digits)	Every citizen (billions)	Sharply concentrated

The social-media era is the historical peak of distributed publication: roughly four billion people on Earth can publish to a potentially global audience for zero marginal cost. The AI era inverts this. Frontier capability lives in a handful of firms. Every citizen becomes a consumer of those firms’ models. The publisher–consumer ratio, which had been improving for five hundred years, snaps back toward the pre-print extreme.

The TikZ diagram in Figure 4 illustrates this trajectory across the five communications eras.

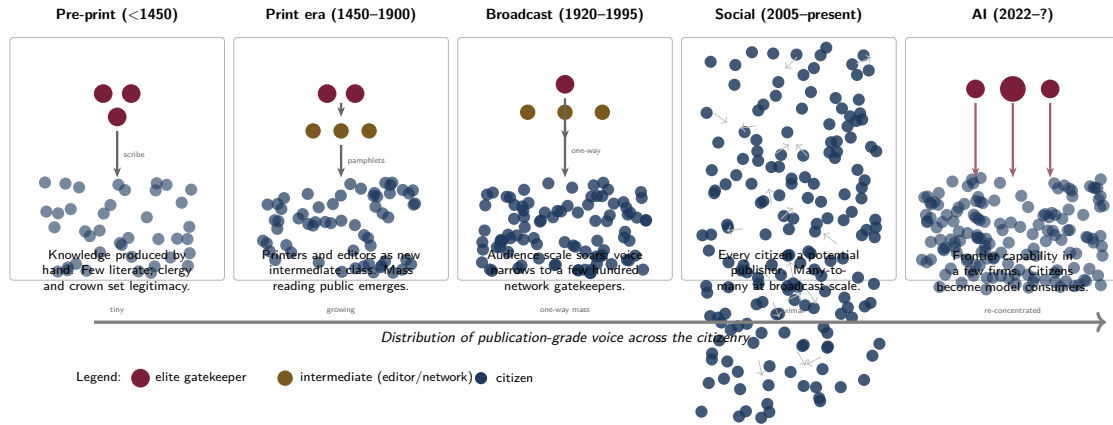


Figure 4: Schematic of political-epistemic power distribution across five communications eras. Each panel represents the share of the citizenry capable of independent publication-grade speech to a broad audience. The arc widens from pre-print through social media, then sharply re-concentrates in the AI era as model-mediated communication returns the bulk of citizens to a consumer role.

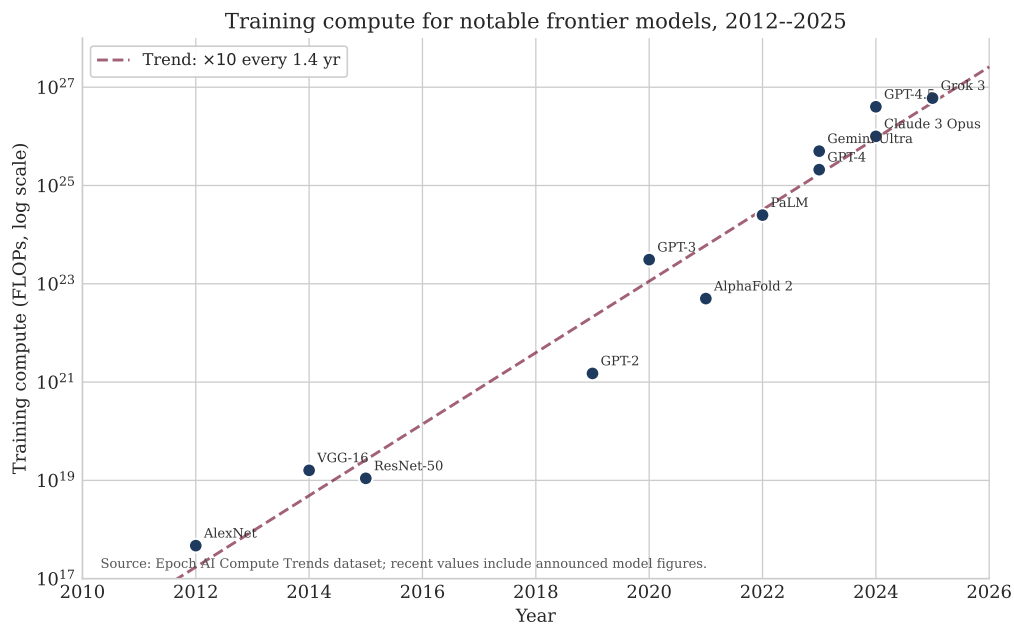


Figure 5: Training compute for notable frontier models, 2010–2025, logarithmic scale. Source: [Epoch AI \(2025\)](#). The slope corresponds to roughly an order-of-magnitude increase every 18–24 months; the absolute compute required for frontier capability now exceeds the operational capacity of all but a few firms.

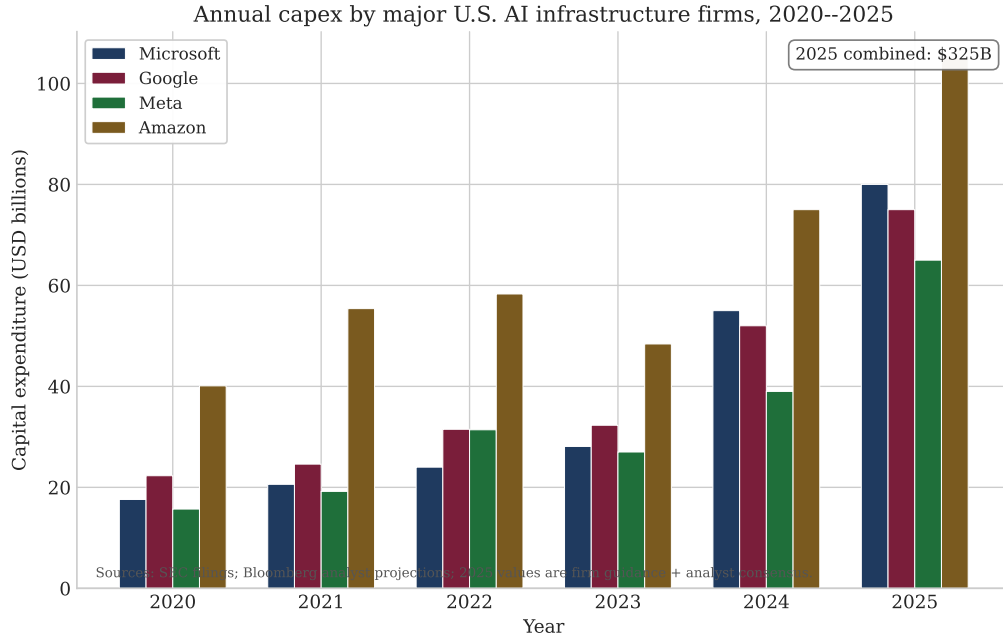


Figure 6: Annual capital expenditure on AI infrastructure by major firms, 2020–2025. Sources: company SEC filings and analyst projections. The four U.S. hyperscalers (Microsoft, Google, Meta, Amazon) account for the bulk of frontier infrastructure investment, with Nvidia as the principal hardware supplier.

7.3 The Comparison Matrix

Table 3 systematizes the comparison across the six communications eras on the dimensions that matter for democratization.

Table 3: Communications technology and democratization, six dimensions.

Dimension	Print	News- paper	Radio	TV	Social	AI
Production barrier	Low	Medium	High	High	Zero	Very high
Distribution barrier	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Zero	Mediated
Capital intensity	Low	Medium	High	High	Low	Extreme
Geographic spread	Wide	Wide	Wide	Wide	Wide	Concentrated
Gatekeeping layer	Light	Editorial	Licensing	Licensing	Algorithm	Multiple
Voice distribution	Wide	Medium	Narrow	Narrow	Maximal	Few

On every dimension except possibly geographic concentration (where social media platforms were themselves concentrated in a few U.S. firms, though the user base was global), AI represents a regression toward broadcast-era or even pre-print concentration. It is the

first major communications technology since 1450 that does not increase the share of the citizenry capable of independent political voice.

7.4 Counter-Considerations

The case for AI as counter-democratization is real but not complete. Several counter-considerations:

Open-source models. The release of Llama (Meta) in 2023, DeepSeek-V3/R1 (DeepSeek) in 2024–2025, and other open-weight models partially counteracts the closed-frontier-lab concentration. If the open-source frontier remains within a generation of the closed frontier, capabilities will diffuse rapidly and the concentration story weakens. The trajectory here is uncertain. As of 2025, the gap between leading closed and open models is small enough that this counter-consideration has real force.

Diffusion of inference capacity. While training is concentrated, inference can run on consumer hardware for many models. A citizen who downloads an open-weight model and runs it locally is not subject to the frontier lab’s RLHF or system prompt. The size of this population is currently small but growing.

Tooling democratization. AI has dramatically reduced the cost of producing high-quality writing, video, code, and analysis. This may be a democratizing force in the production-of-content sense, even as the model layer concentrates the production-of-cognition sense. Whether the first effect dominates the second is contested.

Direct citizen-to-AI interaction. If AI assistants serve citizens directly — as research assistants, legal advisors, medical advisors, financial advisors — rather than mediating an institutional relationship, they may flatten the credentialed-professional hierarchy in the same way social media flattened the editorial hierarchy. This is the most plausible democratizing channel for AI.

Capability decentralization over time. Frontier capability today is concentrated; frontier capability in five or ten years may be widely diffused if the cost of training falls (the historical pattern for digital technologies) and if open-source remains competitive. The current concentration may be a transient feature of the technology’s early years.

These are real counter-currents, but they do not yet outweigh the five concentrations identified in §7. The default trajectory of frontier AI is toward concentration in compute, capital, geography, epistemic mediation, and regulation. Avoiding that trajectory will require deliberate political choices — choices that, by the argument of this report, the most democratized polities in the industrialized world (those with the strongest social-media-empowered citizen voice) are in some ways best positioned to make, and in other ways least positioned, because the elite gatekeeping apparatus that would otherwise lobby

for closed AI infrastructure has been politically weakened by precisely the technology AI may replace.

8 Conclusion

For five hundred years, the trajectory of communications technology has bent toward democratization. The printing press broke clerical and royal monopoly on legitimate knowledge; the popular press created the modern public; the radio and television broadcast political life into every household; the early internet restored cross-cutting routes around the network newsroom; social media collapsed the last serious barrier to mass political publication. Each step provoked a coalition of incumbents who claimed the new medium was a threat to public order, to truth, to morality, and — once the word came into common use — to democracy itself. In every case, the incumbents were defending not democracy but the particular distribution of power they presided over. In every case, the rhetorical move succeeded in slowing but not in halting the democratization.

The current debate over social media replays the pattern. The substantive empirical claims made by the critics — that legacy gatekeepers have lost authority, that populist movements have risen, that elite-mass attitude divergence has widened, that information ecosystems are fragmented, that institutions of credentialed trust have collapsed — are accurate. They are also accurate descriptions of democratization in the literal sense. The critique survives as a critique only by the substitution of “democracy” for “the elite-mediated procedural order that preceded mass-participation digital media,” a substitution that does not survive scrutiny once made explicit.

This does not mean democratization is costless. The citizens to whom power has been redistributed may produce worse decisions than the credentialed sub-elites they have displaced. The information environment may be coarser, the political culture nastier, the policy outcomes more erratic. These are real concerns. They are also concerns about democracy itself, not about social media’s effects on it. Anyone who finds them serious has the option of arguing that democracy — understood literally, as rule by the citizenry — is in some respects undesirable, and that some non-democratic features of the prior elite-mediated order were valuable. That argument is intellectually honest. It is also a politically uncomfortable one, which is why most participants in the debate prefer the rhetorical cover that the terminological game provides.

Artificial intelligence is the first major communications-and-cognition technology in five centuries that may run the trend in reverse. Its compute requirements, capital intensity, geographic concentration, epistemic-mediation architecture, and emerging regulatory regime all point toward concentration of effective political and epistemic power in a

small number of frontier labs, capital allocators, and regulators. The publisher–consumer ratio that improved monotonically from 1450 to 2010 inverts. The five-hundred-year arc bends back. Whether it does bend back, and how far, depends on whether the open-source counter-current sustains itself, whether inference democratizes faster than training centralizes, whether the regulatory architecture that emerges around AI is one of access control or one of capability distribution, and whether the citizens who acquired political voice through social media succeed in extending that voice into questions of AI governance — questions where the inherited credentialed-elite apparatus, weakened by social media but still influential, will resist citizen control most strongly.

These are political choices, not technological inevitabilities. The technology shapes the choice set; it does not determine the outcome. The case for treating AI governance as a first-order democratic question — not a technocratic one to be delegated to frontier labs, agency staff, and international bodies — is the natural extension of the argument made in this report. If social media was democratizing in the literal sense, and if AI threatens to reverse that democratization, then those who care about democracy in the literal sense have the same obligation in 2026 that the Whig pamphleteers had in 1695, the abolitionist editors had in 1845, the populist radio organizers had in 1935, and the early bloggers had in 2003: to use the available means of communication to defend the distribution of power that those means make possible, against the incumbents who would prefer to restore the prior concentration.

References

- Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Doubleday, New York.
- Baughman, J. L. (2007). *Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 3rd edition.
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Brennan, J. (2016). *Against Democracy*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Caplan, B. (2007). *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Chenoweth, E. and Pressman, J. (2020). This summer’s black lives matter protesters were overwhelmingly peaceful, our research finds. *Washington Post*. Crowd Counting Consortium data.

- Craig, D. B. (2000). *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920–1940*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- Eisenstein, E. L. (1979). *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Epoch AI (2025). Compute trends across three eras of machine learning. <https://epoch.ai/data/notable-ai-models>. Accessed 2025.
- Fukuyama, F. (2022). *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- Funke, M., Schularick, M., and Trebesch, C. (2023). Populist leaders and the economy. *American Economic Review*, 113(12):3249–3288.
- Gallup (2024). Confidence in institutions: Mass media, 1972–2024. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>. Annual survey series.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. Originally published 1962.
- Haidt, J. (2022). Why the past 10 years of american life have been uniquely stupid. *The Atlantic*.
- Haidt, J. (2024). *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Penguin Press, New York.
- Howard, P. N. and Hussain, M. M. (2013). Democracy’s fourth wave? digital media and the arab spring. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(3):35–48.
- Kaufmann, E. (2018). *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*. Abrams Press, New York.
- Kreiss, D. (2018). *Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. PublicAffairs, New York.
- Ober, J. (2008). *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

- Pettegree, A. (2015). *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation*. Penguin Press, New York.
- Pew Research Center (2024). State of the news media 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheets/>. Accessed 2025.
- Raymond, J. (2003). *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Rooduijn, M., Pirro, A. L. P., Halikiopoulou, D., Froio, C., van Kessel, S., de Lange, S. L., Mudde, C., and Taggart, P. (2024). The PopuList 3.0: An overview of populist, far-left, and far-right parties in europe. <https://popu-list.org>. Accessed 2025.
- Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. Basic Books, New York.
- Shipman, T. (2017). *All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain’s Political Class*. William Collins, London.
- Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin Press, New York.
- Stanley, J. (2018). *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. Random House, New York.
- Starr, P. (2004). *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications*. Basic Books, New York.
- Sunstein, C. R. (2017). *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Vaidhyathan, S. (2018). *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Warren, D. (1996). *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio*. Free Press, New York.