



SELECT COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Call for Evidence

The House of Lords Select Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies was established on 13 June 2019 and asked to report by 31 March 2020.

With the growth of digital media, methods of political communication and campaigning have evolved. The impact of digital technologies on our democratic processes has come under increasing scrutiny. Many are of the view that digital technologies offer significant potential benefits for the extension of democracy, while others fear that such technologies may actually undermine the democratic process. As well as covering the effects of digital technologies on the electoral process and political campaigns, the Committee wishes to consider the effects of technology on political debate more broadly, and the wider public's engagement with and participation in political discourse.

The Committee has decided to focus on the issue of how representative democracy can be supported, rather than undermined, in a digital world. It will primarily look across six key areas: **transparency in political campaigns; privacy and anonymity; misinformation¹; the effects of digital technologies on public discourse; how technology can facilitate democracy and the development of effective digital literacy.**

The questions set out below are intended to provide a framework for those who wish to offer their views. **You need not answer all these questions.**

Diversity comes in many forms and hearing a range of different perspectives means that Committees are better informed and can more effectively scrutinise public policy and legislation. Committees can undertake their role most effectively when they hear from a wide range of individuals, sectors or groups in society affected by a particular policy or piece of legislation. **We encourage anyone with experience or expertise of the issues under investigation to share their views with the committee, with the full knowledge that their views have value and are welcome.**

Information on how to submit evidence is set out below. If you have any questions or require adjustments to enable you to respond, please contact the Committee team, whose details are below.

It is helpful if opinions are supported by factual evidence where appropriate. Comparisons with practice in other countries are welcome.

The deadline for written evidence submissions is Friday 20 September 2019.

¹ Misinformation here refers to inaccurate information, whether intentionally inaccurate or not. Disinformation refers to intentionally wrong information.

The Committee is seeking input on the following questions:

General

1. How has digital technology changed the way that democracy works in the UK and has this been a net positive or negative effect?
2. How have the design of algorithms used by social media platforms shaped democratic debate? To what extent should there be greater accountability for the design of these algorithms?

Education

3. What role should every stage of education play in helping to create a healthy, active, digitally literate democracy?

Online campaigning

4. Would greater transparency in the online spending and campaigning of political groups improve the electoral process in the UK by ensuring accountability, and if so what should this transparency look like?
5. What effect does online targeted advertising have on the political process, and what effects could it have in the future? Should there be additional regulation of political advertising?

Privacy and anonymity

6. To what extent does increasing use of encrypted messaging and private groups present a challenge to the democratic process?
7. What are the positive or negative effects of anonymity on online democratic discourse?

Democratic debate

8. To what extent does social media negatively shape public debate, either through encouraging polarisation or through abuse deterring individuals from engaging in public life?
9. To what extent do you think that there are those who are using social media to attempt to undermine trust in the democratic process and in democratic institutions; and what might be the best ways to combat this and strengthen faith in democracy?

Misinformation

10. What might be the best ways of reducing the effects of misinformation on social media platforms?

Moderation

11. How could the moderation processes of large technology companies be improved to better tackle abuse and misinformation, as well as helping public debate flourish?

Technology and democratic engagement

12. How could the Government better support the positive work of civil society organisations using technology to facilitate engagement with democratic processes?
13. How can elected representatives use technology to engage with the public in local and national decision making? What can Parliament and Government do to better use technology to support democratic engagement and ensure the efficacy of the democratic process?
14. What positive examples are there of technology being used to enhance democracy?

Written evidence should be submitted online using the written submission form available at <https://www.parliament.uk/democ-digital-committee/written-submission-form>

If you do not have access to a computer, you may submit a paper copy to:

Clerk to the Select Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies
Committee Office,
House of Lords,
London SW1A 0PW

The deadline for written evidence is 20 September 2019.

Short, concise submissions, of no more than six pages, are preferred. A longer submission should include a one-page summary. Paragraphs should be numbered. Submissions should be dated, with a note of the author's name, and of whether the author is acting on an individual or corporate basis. All submissions made through the written submission form will be acknowledged automatically by email. NB This does not constitute formal acceptance of evidence by the Committee, which takes place when the Committee meets.

Personal contact details supplied to the Committee will be removed from submissions before publication but will be retained by the Committee staff for specific purposes relating to the Committee's work, such as seeking additional information.

Submissions become the property of the Committee which will decide whether to accept them as evidence. Evidence may be published by the Committee at any stage. It will normally appear on the Committee's website and will be deposited in the Parliamentary Archives.

Once you have received notification that your submission has been accepted as evidence and published by the Committee, you may publicise or publish it yourself, but in doing so you must indicate that it was prepared for the Committee. If you publish your evidence separately, you should be aware that you will be legally responsible for its content.

Certain individuals and organisations may be invited to appear in person before the Committee to give oral evidence. Oral evidence is usually given in public at Westminster and broadcast in audio and online. Persons invited to give oral evidence will be notified separately of the procedure to be followed and the topics likely to be discussed.

Substantive communications to the Committee about the inquiry should be addressed through the Clerk, whether or not they are intended to constitute formal evidence to the Committee. For all purposes please contact the Committee secretariat on HLDEMOCRACYDIGITAL@parliament.uk.

This is a public call for evidence. Please bring it to the attention of other groups and individuals who may not have received a copy direct.

You can follow the progress of the inquiry at <https://www.parliament.uk/democ-digital-committee/>.