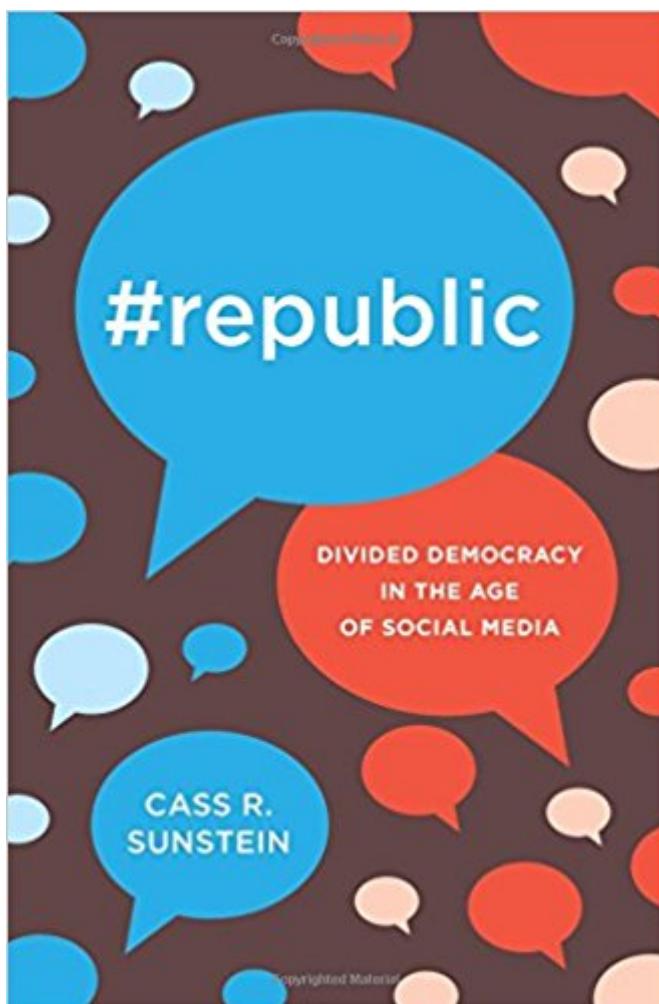


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# #Republic: Divided Democracy In The Age Of Social Media



## Synopsis

From the New York Times bestselling author of *Nudge* and *The World According to Star Wars*, a revealing account of how today's Internet threatens democracy and what can be done about it. As the Internet grows more sophisticated, it is creating new threats to democracy. Social media companies such as Facebook can sort us ever more efficiently into groups of the like-minded, creating echo chambers that amplify our views. It's no accident that on some occasions, people of different political views cannot even understand each other. It's also no surprise that terrorist groups have been able to exploit social media to deadly effect. Welcome to the age of *#Republic*. In this revealing book, Cass Sunstein, the New York Times bestselling author of *Nudge* and *The World According to Star Wars*, shows how today's Internet is driving political fragmentation, polarization, and even extremism and what can be done about it. Thoroughly rethinking the critical relationship between democracy and the Internet, Sunstein describes how the online world creates "cybercascades," exploits "confirmation bias," and assists "polarization entrepreneurs." And he explains why online fragmentation endangers the shared conversations, experiences, and understandings that are the lifeblood of democracy. In response, Sunstein proposes practical and legal changes to make the Internet friendlier to democratic deliberation. These changes would get us out of our information cocoons by increasing the frequency of unchosen, unplanned encounters and exposing us to people, places, things, and ideas that we would never have picked for our Twitter feed. *#Republic* need not be an ironic term. As Sunstein shows, it can be a rallying cry for the kind of democracy that citizens of diverse societies most need.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"I . . . found myself shocked at how relevant Sunstein's account was to my own life and the ways I seek out and encounter information, which is in a way the value of the book--it gets you to reflect on the role of your information habits on your view of the world around you. And if you want to know how important that is, well, you should read Sunstein's book."--Annie Coreno, Publishers Weekly (staff pick)"Sunstein argues convincingly that for deliberative democracy to work, citizens must be in a position to consider a range of options."--Angelia R Wilson, Times Higher Education"Required reading for anyone who is concerned with the future of democracy."--Economist"Ripped straight from the headlines, but informed by hard data, #Republic should command the attention of American citizens across the political spectrum."--Glenn C. Altschuler, Philadelphia Inquirer"With political polarisation on the rise, particular in the United States, [this book] couldn't come at a more important time."--Alex Dean, Prospect"An excellent assessment of how social psychology, technology, and politics are colliding to produce the extreme and polarized discourse that has come to dominate our contemporary political environment. Its accessible prose and clear organization make it a solid pick for political science courses as well as citizens who want to better understand how technology is changing the way we think and talk about politics in today's world."--Benjamin Knoll, New York Journal of Books"#Republic . . . describes how social media shapes politics and journalism. So far, it has not received as much attention as Nudge. This is a pity: the ideas in #Republic are arguably more important--and more pressing."--Gillian Tett, Financial Times Magazine"America's leading legal academic gives us a way to address democracy's leading challenge--preserving a public informed enough to govern itself. Drawing on an incredible range of scholarship and experience, this book could not be more timely. Or urgently needed."--Lawrence Lessig, Harvard Law School

"What went wrong with social media and also with democracy? Here's the guy who saw it coming, and yes he does have all the answers."--Tyler Cowen, author of The Great Stagnation"The Internet has surely enhanced our democracy, with greater access to information and fewer barriers to connecting with each other. However, we're seeing the opposite today with more narrow-minded online platforms and communities, as evidenced by the impact of fake news on this past election. #Republic pointedly captures the risks of the ongoing evolution of social media to our democratic ideals."--Stephanie Cutter, former Senior Aide to President Barack Obama and Partner, Precision

## Strategies

Cass Sunstein aims to demonstrate that a well-functioning system of free expression in a democracy has to satisfy two distinct conditions: 1. People should be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance. Mr. Sunstein calls it serendipity. 2. Without shared experiences, citizens in a (heterogenous) society have a much more challenging time addressing social problems. The author is concerned with rise of the "Daily Me" which allows a citizen to use social media for creating and living in an echo chamber of his/her choice. Excessive personalization makes it possible for someone to wall himself/herself off from topics and opinions that he/she would prefer to avoid. Think for instance about Facebook, Twitter, the increasing spread of fake news, or what the author calls Terrorism.com. This behavior is conducive to a rise in both fragmentation and polarization, especially within a heterogenous society. Nonetheless, Mr. Sunstein acknowledges that filtering is built into humans because they cannot see, hear, or read everything. The author rejects the idea that the political process should be treated as a kind of market in which citizens are seen as consumers. However, he recognizes that the view of "consumer sovereignty" can be found in many places in the current law, e.g. the U.S. Supreme Court's strong constitutional support given to commercial advertising and its intense constitutional hostility to campaign finance regulation. Mr. Sunstein makes different proposals to foster a more inclusive system of communications that supports a well-functioning democracy: 1. Deliberative domains. 2. Disclosure of relevant conduct by networks and other large producers of communications. 3. Voluntary self-regulation. 4. Economic subsidies, including publicly subsidized programming and websites. 5. "Must-carry" policies, designed to promote education and attention to public issues. 6. The creative use of links to draw people's attention to multiple views. 7. Opposing viewpoint and serendipity buttons, designed particularly for Facebook, and perhaps suitable elsewhere as well. Surprisingly, the author apparently does not stress the important role of both the family and school system in fostering a more inclusive system of communications. In summary, Mr. Sunstein does not feel comfortable about the rise of the "Daily Me" dear to many (niche) marketers and individuals with a more limited horizon. He perceives it as a clear danger to a well-functioning system of free expression in a democracy.

three starts because... 2/3 of the book is great, then the rest kind of blows. The book is a must for anybody interested in media and media consumption habits. It contains great literature review of tons of studies on the topic. Also, kudos for introducing the media consumer vs the citizen media

consumer idea. Alas, the book fails miserably in the recommendations section, the author seems to be at a loss what can be done to solve the current situation and resorts to wishful thinking.

This book is great. Highly recommended. Cass's insights are well reasoned and accessible. I still feel worried about the fake news problem, but I feel calmer and more optimistic about it after reading this book.

I would have given this book five stars, but there is too much repetition. A very important analysis of what is happening to communication in modern society.

Superb!

Unique

Cass Sunstein has written some good books and articles but this is not one of them. It is remarkably awful and boring. Academics are trained to write horrible stuff. Why???? I don't understand it. I defy anyone to quote anything in this book that is interesting or illuminating. Midwest Independent Research, educational websites. Democracy and politics, mwir-democracyandpolitics.blogspot. There are book lists here.

A poorly-written celebration of common sense supported by a turgid review of the social science evidence supporting that common sense. Tossed it after reading halfway through. Too many books, too little time to waste any more on this one. Those who supported the author by providing jacket blurbs have lost all credibility with me.

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