

Info Wars: The Global Fight for Truth

David K: I'm hoping this session will prime you all for listening with more acuity and possibly critical judgement to a later event this afternoon. Um, because I think it's going to be highly relevant to many things. He won't say. Um, and I guarantee that, um, as I understand it, the guy who was interviewing Cass Sunstein is kind of connected to him. I mean he's pretty good friends with Sheryl Sandberg I believe is he and his wife. So it's kind of a, a little bit of a captive thing because Zuckerberg, John Really doesn't let himself be in situations other than that, but that's not what we're here to discuss. Um, so, so the session is about this information and particularly its impact on the U.S. political landscape and the 2020 political, the presidential election, which is kind of kind of getting off the ground tonight, which is timely. Um, first let me just introduce who is sitting up here next to me is Alex Thomas, who was the chief security officer at Facebook and is the most senior person from Facebook who, who has left and is now willing to really tell it like it is, which is highly discouraged for x, Facebook people.

David K: He's now the director of something called the Stanford Internet Observatory, um, which is actually very closely related to what his co-panelists does. Nate personally, who's the director of the Stanford Cyber Policy Center, which is an overarching entity that includes the Internet observatory. So these guys are kind of also compromised and that they are very connected. So they may not be as independent thinkers as they want to pretend. Uh, Nate is a law professor at Stanford, so, but there are differences. He's a lawyer Guy, illegal guy, and he's a security guy and internet guy. Um, so, so I'm going to start by just because I've been following Facebook closely since September of 2006. I'm going to just give you some of my thinking, especially because initially I was supposed to be a panelist on this and pat the moderator dropped out. Oh, by the way, Katie Horvath who was said to be on this panel dropped off yesterday because Facebook decided that they didn't want anyone from their companies speaking here today except for Mark Zuckerberg.

David K: Um, which is too bad. But anyway, so, so the first, the first statement I was going to make is, uh, the technology is hacking our brains and that is a serious challenge for the world. And it goes way beyond the US political system. And this is primarily because of targeted personalized database advertising as the business model for the Internet at scale. And as the technology industry has shifted to a Internet, an advertising based business model and range of problems have emerged alongside that development. You know, technology really was not connected to advertising for the most part until quite recently. And of course this mostly affects Facebook and Google, but there's plenty of other companies, particularly outside the United States that it affects very much. Um, but this attention economy that comes along with the ad model, unfortunately as I mentioned at a session I did yesterday, prioritize this fear and anger, fear and anger are the emotions that get you to do things.

David K: And what the Internet model that these companies pursue asks is for you to do more things and to stay longer. For example, Youtube ads, apparently youtube current average use time is one hour because they have gotten so good at recommending things to you that you want or feel like you have to watch. Um, so what are the consequences of this one? In my opinion, the most serious consequence, which I'm not going to say has happened in the United States, is the rise of autocrats around the world. And I don't think that it is entirely because of the alienation of working people and global immigration of all those things are totally real. There's huge class division, economic inequality in many countries, but the sudden rise of Duterte bull scenario, uh, Air Dhawan, uh, Orban is probably the worst of the mall. Every one of those guys and many others like them who are very politically successful around the world today are master manipulators of the Internet ad based business model.

David K: And they, people like that who are unafraid to lie, unafraid to do anything in order to gain power are have been handed the perfect platform for manipulation and they are brilliant at it unfortunately. Um, and just to mention which something I also mentioned yesterday but I find especially appalling, uh, as an example of how bad that is in Myanmar, which for one reason or another got the most coverage, although it's by no means the only country where this kind of problem has arisen. The military hunter was in effect encouraging a genocide against the Muslim Rohingya minority. And it was widely known that this was happening. Facebook had received innumerable complaints, there was plenty of information available to them about what was happening. But it was only when a United Nations report explicitly blamed Facebook for contributing to genocide. That right after that. Like I think the day after that or within days, Facebook banned the head of the military hunter from Facebook, which should have been done long before, but that's the level intervention that they seem to require to do the right thing.

David K: That's not good at least until recently. Maybe things are changing slightly. Another big consequence of this in general is just more societal division. Um, and just a few more comments from me. Um, Facebook does make a really big deal out of having 30,000 plus content moderators and I'm sure mark will mention that today. Maybe I'll even update the figure. Maybe it's 35,000 now, but still in many languages, many countries, there is effectively no moderation, um, until at least very recently, this may still be the case. There were only four moderators for the entire country of Nigeria, which has 22 million Facebook users. Um, they only added moderators in Burmese and this in Hala language of Sri Lanka, which is another country that said terrible problems with ethnic discord, fermented by social media. They only added moderators in those languages in the last two years. And it's been happening long before that.

David K: And they knew it was happening long before that. They have had very clear reports given to them as long as five years ago about ethnic violence in gender by Facebook on in Sri Lanka. And they did nothing. This appalls me as you can tell. Um, and essentially the reason for all this in the case of Facebook is that

they prioritized growth over governance and that has now gotten us into a global scale system with two and a half billion users. That is almost ungovernable in my opinion. Maybe my co panelists here that I'm supposedly moderating. Um, no moderators can make introductions. I know that, I know that, but um, maybe they'll disagree with that and I'm very eager to hear if they do. But, um, and there's plenty to say about youtube, but I'll hold off on that cause all lot of these same complaints and problems are equally, uh, example exemplified in behavior on youtube. But I'll leave that for possibly later. And let me start by maybe since, um, Nate is more of the pure academic, I'll let you start and then let the practitioner turned. Critic go second. So Nate, why don't you sir. Sure. Is that all right? What did you guys do? Work something else out among yourself. We thought that, I didn't know so far off the script at this point. There's no script. That's why.

Alex Stamos:

And would you like me to, uh, yeah, I mean I'm just going to respond a little bit. It is true that over optimization for growth is a significant component of problems at Facebook. You have put forward a string of thought that has become very kind of intellectually trendy, of which the analytic power of that sort of thought is actually quite poor. And that is because this whole kind of surveillance capitalism, it's all the ads is not true. The basic truth is the Internet, the companies, the Facebooks, youtube, whatever are the reflection of the are the current people at the top of the mountain who will eventually be supplanted by somebody else as part of the kind of information revolution of the Internet, which is kind of rearchitected the relationships between people and information in a way that is not been seen in the world since the invention of the printing press.

Alex Stamos:

Right. So the invention of the printing press was a massively democratizing step of taking who controls history, who controls, um, the written word out of the monks, out of the control of the Catholic church in the West and gave it to lots and lots of people. What was the effect of the printing press? Well, Europe had hundreds of years of war, for example, coming out of the Protestant reformation, which was, was built upon this, right. And, um, and we are going through the same kind of impact of we've gone from anybody who has a printing press can reach perhaps hundreds or thousands of people with a pamphlet to radio and television, which was massively de Democratizing, right? So radio and television meant you had to be a huge corporation with lots of capital and the ability to petition the government to give you spectrum to speak to people. And so we had a step backwards in the democratization of information in the 20th century and now we've had a spectacular explosion of democratization information where people have the ability to talk to one another, talk to small groups in some cases, talk to large groups who were never able to do that until you can't look at any of this without thinking about what happens when you let billions of people have a voice before.

Alex Stamos:

Now. The thing is is this is the kind of thing that like kind of Yo, all the coastal liberals in the room like me are like, oh yeah, people should have a voice, right?

Like everybody should be able to be equal and to send anything. That kind of sounds good. Well, we're living through the truth of that, right? Is that all of a sudden all of these groups that have felt oppressed people who have been white supremacists for a long time, but they never been able to meet each other, they have a voice also who has voiced people behind black lives matter, people behind the me too movement, right? And so part of this whole set of complaints really comes out of kind of the old school media elite who you always feel a little bit of, which complaints of the, like the complaints that come down to tech needs to control the speech of other people.

Alex Stamos: We're not going back to a world where 35 middle aged white men decide what is the Overton window of political speech, right? And so to a certain extent we're going to have deliver the good and the bad. Now you had some specific examples though, the reasonable advertising thing that the best counter example of that is actually whatsapp, right? So whatsapp belongs to Facebook. It makes no money. There are no advertisements on web tab. It provides a huge amount of privacy to people. In fact, the day that we turned on encryption on whatsapp was probably the, the largest uplifting communication privacy in the history of mankind. Right. Over a billion people had the ability to talk to one another without Facebook and having access to their data or governments having access to their data. It has no algorithmic ranking, it has no ads, it makes no money and yet face whatsapp was the core of the issue in India.

Alex Stamos: It's actually a significant part of the issue and Sri Lankan BMR the main issue in Brazil and the main issue, yeah Polson neuro was not using ads but also Naro was doing was motivating people to then push disinformation and on a one to one basis with a very small amount of amplification taking advantage of the privacy it gave him. And so clearly advertising can have zero to do with that because whatsapp has no effect on like the growth metrics and all the other kinds of stuff that people talk about. So I'm just gonna push back against that whole train of thought cause it kind of drives me nuts because the companies have made a lot of mistakes. But the truth is is a lot of the critics on the outside are criticizing the wrong things and they have the wrong,

David K: you can push back all you want on the ad point, which I don't care about as much as the point that they knew that genocide and ethnic discord was being fomented by their systems for many years in many countries and did nothing and they did cut all ties growth into many geographies where they had no local language expertise, no national expertise. They just basically let people use it in every country in every language and just assumed as you said, they had that philosophy. You attribute it to eastern and western coast elites. That was mark Zuckerberg floss

Alex Stamos: and I think it turns out that when you let people talk to one another, a lot of bad things happen. I've got a perspective on the me and more part the genocide to me, Mr is a government conducted genocide. They have deployed 50 to 75,000 troops to the north. They have built concentration camps that genocide was

happening no matter what. So when you have a Nobel peace prize winner who is tacitly supporting the genocide, there is a societal issue that is deeper than those few totally cell phones. Right. So I think the Myanmar thing is people are a little facile about putting it on western tech companies instead of focusing on the fact that that is like straight up a government genocide and a place like we're both Sri Lankan Myanmar places. They have a long simmering ethnic tensions that have been to a certain extent unleashed by the fact that these people have communication.

Alex Stamos: But in the Myanmar situation, actually when I was at Facebook, we looked really deeply into this and there's, there's really two different issues. There's the organized kind of hateful aspect of, you talk about like the head of the military, a bunch of, there's a bunch of monks, a bunch of religious leaders who unfortunately are religious leaders who are calling for genocide who have disproportionate voice. And so shutting them down is absolutely the right thing. The other problem in Myanmar is the Burmese speaking population. Something like 60, 70%. The majority population has like deep seated racism towards the Rohingya. And so if you look at kind of just the things people say to one another, it's really horrible and it questions, first off, most of the people don't believe there is a genocide and it's not culturally acceptable there to talk about something bad happening in the north.

Alex Stamos: Right? And so that is a much deeper problem and that's actually a really hard problem for a bunch of people in Silicon Valley to fix, right? Like, and there's a future where, okay, Facebook should just turn off me and mar and maybe that's what would be best for the shareholders. That would not save a single life because all of a sudden they're just be WeChat and we go in 10 cents. Right? Um, and so they're in ticktock. Right. And so, um, I think it's actually a really hard problem and I'm going to say you are a little bit flippant about putting, it just says that you and panel that a UN group whose part of their job was supposed to be monitoring this, uh, that they're throwing it out on like just because these people had Facebook pages, that that is what caused tens of thousands of people.

David K: I do want to Segue to the u situation, right? So you're basically saying that you don't really think Facebook was terribly culpable in overlooking enormous range of hate speech violations. Words in my mouth. Oh, but I'm just saying what, what is it that you're prying with? The management will have to be

Alex Stamos: that like the, these kinds of super broad sweeping statements always break down when you look at the individual issues, right? And when you look at the individual issues, they turn out to be very, very different and they turn out to have very different solutions. And in some cases it's very hard to, the other issue we have to deal with is how powerful we want these companies to be. Right? And so it's one thing to say that the company should silence organized, hateful people. It is another thing to imply that they need to change the mode of speech among millions of people in a, in a country that they don't really

understand. And so part of the argument there is perhaps they shouldn't operate in these countries, which is perhaps, which is legitimate question to ask. And that's also a really tough one because nobody wants to say perhaps, you know, Western companies should not be providing these kinds of models that were based upon kind of, you know, how we use the Internet in the United States. Our, our belief of what hate speeches, like the Western model hate speech breaks down very hard in places like Sri Lanka, Myanmar. And that's like one of the fundamental issues is kind of the rules Facebook has. How much,

David K: okay. But take it to the u s and you know, the one thing you've mentioned, which is such a central problem is the relative power of the companies versus the governments. Right. And how do we deal with that, which is such a vexing problem. Looking at the u s in particular, what do you observe and what do you think should happen?

Alex Stamos: Right? So the companies are acting in a quasi governmental manner in controlling the speech of billions of people. This is also where a lot of kind of the New York DC access of, especially the people on the progressive side are really confused about what their position is. Because a lot of these positions come down to, I think Facebook is way too powerful and I want that power to be used to squash my enemies. Right? And it's, you can have one or the other, right? So at least conservatives, so I testified in Congress yesterday, um, and effectively a member of Congress was asking me like how much does Facebook hate conservatives? Which is really not at all right, but like at least conservatives while basing it upon like a bunch of Anak data have a consistent through line of these companies should not be controlling speech. And I think that's actually a hard thing to try to decide is if we want these problems solved, if you give somebody a responsibility to do something, you also give them the power to do so.

Alex Stamos: Right? They kind of implicitly give them the power to do so. And I think when it comes in the u s in other west, I mean this is different, I think this is different places can be Myanmar because you've got the government conducting stuff. And so the company has to basically officially come out and be opposed to the government. And the truth is, is Facebook as opposed to lots of governments, um, and we didn't talk about a lot of things that you haven't heard about that we've had to take care of. Right? Let's hear about them. Much more instances where they've not come down on the gun. Like do territory is a great example where the well entertained was like, I mean, but that's a promise. Duterte was legitimately democratically elected and the distance formation problem in the Philippines has been driven by Duterte followers.

Alex Stamos: The guy has hundreds of thousands of people who will go out and slander anybody who questions him and that becomes really hard should I think Maria Ressa is a great person. I don't think she should be in jail. I think we should be on her side. Should, if I was still at Facebook, should I use my, the fact that I have met Maria Ressa and I like her to shape the shape, the political decisions of

millions of Filipinos, that that is the hard part in the answer. At some point we're going to have to separate between the actions of people where we don't like, but then we're going to not ask these companies to change them because we don't want them to have that power. Right.

Nathaniel P: That's the fundamental exact, I mean if you're forced to just jump in here so I can go five, hold on. You can jump in in a second. Why are we not going to quit all my head here? Believe it or not. I want to just say one thing. Then you can jump in. Moderate is the word amount of I've learned my lesson, not that I should always take the invitation to speak first. You thought that that was my mistake and I'm being punished quickly on, on Duterte in these other countries. Oh, well the point is the government is misbehaving. Thank you Brian. Well, let me, they pick up on this conversation and try to redirect it a little bit, which is that realize that for the most part we're asking the companies to regulate speech that we don't think the government could regulate. Right? And so we're putting burdens on the companies to go beyond what we would call illegal speech to what is sort of harmful speech generally.

Nathaniel P: In fact, there was a, there was a report that recently came out of the British parliament, which was on online harms and they had a whole series of recommendations to deal with illegal speech, things like defamation that you know, uh, are either tortious or criminal. And then they said even beyond that, we think the companies should regulate this other kind of harmful speech. And the hard question is, well, if it's so difficult for the government to regulate it, whether it's hate speech or whether it's a disinformation information, like why do we expect that it's gonna be even easier for Facebook to do it? Because whenever Facebook makes these decisions, right, it's always going to have, they're going to be political winners and losers, right? And this is what Alex was dealing with in Congress yesterday, and that we've always had to deal with, uh, you know, in an environment where this information is more prevalent on one side of the spectrum, should the American companies put a finger on the scale.

Nathaniel P: Right? So that's, that's I think, sort of at, at 10,000 feet. Well, let me also amplify one of the thing that Alex said that we will disagree on some other things, which is that, um, in some ways the problem is even worse than than you're describing, which is that the Internet is to blame and you're sort of, you were sort of pushing on this as well, which is that, um, you know, we've, we've often thought I teach first amendment law at Stanford and so, uh, you know, one of the bedrock principles, the first amendment is that the marketplace of ideas is the best test for truth, right? They, you just allow more speech and then the truth is gonna win out. It's not clear whether that was ever true. It certain it's not, it's certainly not true in the Internet Age, right? Not only because, uh, you know, the loudest speakers or are getting amplified and like, but even it's nonhuman speakers who are having a role to play in this marketplace of ideas, right?

Nathaniel P: So that you are unable to distinguish between a Bot, right? That would be communicating a message or a human being, let alone whether someone's actually here in the u s or whether they're, you know, the prototype, typical 600 pound person sitting in mocks Moscow, uh, you know, tweeting away. Right? Um, and so, so, so that's why so, so this is a fundamental challenge to the way we think about free expression, right? Which is how do you deal with, uh, the problem where the marketplace of ideas is not really working? Okay? And so I think it's wrong to think about this problem is as if it's just about, say, hate speech or if it's just about fake news, because hate speeches as old as speech, fake news is as old as news, right? We have certain, you know, plenty of antecedents of, uh, problems like this in the, in the legacy information ecosystem.

Nathaniel P: The question is what is it about the technology itself, right? The way we communicate now that makes this in disinflation more dangerous or prevalent. Uh, and also I think places a real challenges to democracy. And so what are those features of say, Internet communication? The first is a kind of family of issues, which you alluded to at the beginning when you're talking about outrage in life, which is that, uh, the, the Internet ecosystem, uh, you know, privileges, velocity by reality and volume, the speed at which information travels, um, the fact that it travels through peer to peer communication and the sheer amount of information that we have access to just on our cell phones in our pockets, right? And so, uh, you've probably heard that, um, old line, uh, the, uh, ally will make its way halfway around the world before the truth can put his boots on, right?

Nathaniel P: If you look online, uh, it's attributed to mark twain in 1917, Mark Twain happened to have been dead in 1917 but, so that's a little bit to fake news about fake news, but, but this, but the point still remains right. Um, that, uh, and this is election relevant, right? Because elections take place at a particular time. And so well-placed lies in the run up to an election are more difficult to combat in the Internet era than they were before. And that is because we, the, the information ecosystem is dominated by peer to peer sharing. And as you said, we know what kinds of kinds of communication and information achieved by reality. It's the kind that appeals to outrage, appeals to emotion. Sometimes that emotion is love. That's why you have a lot of cat videos in your, you know, news feed, right? But it's also the kind of outrage, sort of a bidding almost that goes on on Twitter and Facebook and the like second is the problem of that anonymity online, right?

Nathaniel P: Anonymity is constitutionally protected, right? I teach cases to my first amendment class, right, about how it's important that you know, um, uh, petition circulators not have to sign their name. Uh, when they're, you know, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses was, was sort of advocating for particular belief. Uh, in fact, right? The Publius wrote the federalist papers, right? You saw the play. Uh, you know, and so, um, we, we protect pseudonymity and anonymity are unconstitutional tradition, but never before have anonymous speakers had

the kind of megaphone that they have in the Internet age. That brings us two problems, right? One is the hate speech problem online. Now we are living in an age when hate speakers are willing to march in Charlottesville and, and be open, you know, murderers in New Zealand, right? So it's not as if it's always going to be anonymous, but the darkest corners of the Internet, right. Provide havens for the kind of anonymous, a coalescing of hate speakers. The second problem, which is fostered by anonymity is the BOT problem, which I was talking about before, that we are actually unable to figure out if we're talking to a machine or if we're talking to a human being, right. And, uh, you know, roughly 10% of the accounts on Twitter in the u s are bots, roughly 40% of the accounts in Russia. I'm told, uh, we're bots. I think with Facebook it might be,

Alex Stamos: it's special. It's Michelin rare for the IRA on Facebook.

Nathaniel P: No, no, just the bots. I'm just talking about the BOT activity. So no, no, no, not Facebook. I said, did I say Twitter? I said Twitter tonight. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alex Stamos: I'm just, I'm just saying like, Hey, can Facebook as much love as you said, it's a very, the different, this is where you have to get like much more fine grained. It's different platforms have different, very different problem, different kinds of Bot problem,

Nathaniel P: right? Right. And now and Facebook, you know, Facebook explains how it takes down through its filtering mechanisms over a billion accounts every quarter, right? Um, over \$2 billion, you know, do I hear three? You know, I mean, so, so, so, right. They take down lots of accounts, 250, a second, 250 accounts, right? And a lot of this is economic spam, right? That you have, uh, groups that are developing these accounts in order to flood, you know, with advertisements and the delay. Um, now none of this is to say, you know, the, the problems I was just describing, none of this is to take the responsibility away from the platforms because as Alex said, Google and Facebook are in a position unrivaled since the reformation, right? Uh, I mean, maybe the Catholic church is the premium information. Catholic churches, the only sort of information mediated that that would be comparable.

Nathaniel P: And so their rules, right, their terms of service, their community guidelines are basically the rules of free speech for a lot of the world. Right? And so who oversees those and what decisions go into that are, are quite important. Now mind you, they had the, these are not, we talk about them as like the new public square, right? It's not as if I'm a, these are unregulated free speech marketplaces. There are serious regulations that these companies, uh, impose on whether it's obscenity, nudity, height, you know, some stuff on hate speech, some on, um, obviously intellectual property. And like, right, so there's, there's, there's considerable money on, right? Amount of regulation. The question is, should we add truth, right? And disinformation to those, um, to those kinds of regulations. And do we want them to be the referees know you guys have contributed to a report with some ideas of what we really should do. So please

explain what you think should happen in the United States. Pat Sajak or Vanna White in this.

Nathaniel P: I want to get [inaudible] why don't you tell them what they want? It's good. I've been real, sorry. I want to get to audience questions and comments, but summarize some key points. Well, there's a lot in here. Um, and so this, just to be clear, the motivation behind this report, which is available outside, was a group of us at Stanford led by Mike McFaul, the former ambassador to Russia and who leads the Freeman Spogli Institute where we work, uh, said, look, there's no, there hasn't been a nine 11 report on the 2016 election. Right? Uh, it doesn't look like there's going to be one any time soon. And so let's try to write what we, based on the public information that's out there as well as, you know, expertise that some of us have from being in the thick of things. Uh, let's, let's come up with recommendations and we came up with a series of recommendations. We talk about, you know, everything from improving voting machines to uh, dealing with this information, political advertising, how you deal with the foreign media organizations, things like RT and Sputnik, these Russian media organizations as opposed to really difficult problems under the first amendment. Should the U.S. basically block these foreign media organizations from having access to the American electorate during election. So there's series of recommendations here.

Alex Stamos: Yeah. I just to take a step back, one of the things we're trying to do with the report is once again, one of the problems with the discussion about Russian interference and people just talk about like the Russians, right? Is this one thing, there's really four different completely distinct Russian interventions in 2016. So there was the online social media campaign. This was mostly conducted by private groups like the Internet research agency that belonged to one or more oligarchs who are well allied with Putin. That was mostly conducted on the social media companies completely without any kind of offensive cybersecurity component and was much more diffused. So it started well before the election. It was much more about driving wedges between people on both sides. So actually a big chunk of it is like fake black lives matter groups, right? Was actually one of the large, was the largest single component of like political groups that the Russians would pretend to be were fake black lives matter groups, right?

Alex Stamos: So they're trying to find real issues in American society and then make it as hard as possible for people to have reasonable discussions about them. So you create a black lives matter group, you create your Po, a pro police group, both in Baltimore, you advertise inside of the inner city for the black lives matter group. You advertise in the suburbs are there pro police, and then you get them to reference each other. And it's the same people in the same floor in St Petersburg pretending to be these totally different groups. And the goal is to pull Americans behind them to get tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Americans to then spread the content and to fight amongst one another and then sit back and watch. So that's the first one. The second is the GRU

campaign. So Gru is the main intelligence director of the Russian military. These are intelligence professionals, much more professional than the IRA.

Alex Stamos: Um, uh, and I mean the Internet research agency like this, there's actually a great here. I don't have to define that, uh, in my classes that I teach cause nobody knows about the Irish Republican Army. Uh, yeah. Uh, but for you folks, I'm at the Internet research agency. Um, and uh, so gru is much more professional. This was gru broke into John Podesta's email broken to colon pals. Email broke into the servers of the Democratic National Committee. They have real offensive cybersecurity capability. They took tens of thousands of stolen documents. They looked at these documents and they said, what is the worst possible thing we can do to hurt Hill Hillary Clinton? And they decided the worst thing we can do is try to convince Bernie voters that everything was stolen from her. So then they selectively leak that information to journalists wrapped around you. They didn't leak all of it. They selectively leak the stuff that supported these ideas and they were able to change the entire narrative.

Alex Stamos: The victim of that was not social media was the mainstream media. So New York Times is the Washington Post. It was CNN, MSNBC who went 24 seven on all of the Hillary email coverage in the, like. The third was the direct attacks against election infrastructure. This is what we know the least about in the non-classified side. This is why we really needed in the nine 11 commission with the ability to get clear data because the u s government has been very, very sketchy about sharing what they know about direct attacks intellectually of a structure. A bunch of what we know. We only know because a woman named reality winner took a bunch of documents out of the NSA, hid them in her clothes and snuck them out. She's in federal prison for that, but that's why we know some of this stuff we know now about those attacks.

Alex Stamos: And then the fourth is the kind of overt campaign, rt, Sputnik and the like. Apparently there's lots of people that don't understand the R and r t is Russia or they don't care and that's like actually of all of this stuff. That's the most depressing to me is that even if people know this content is like coming from the Russian government, as long as it corresponds with their prior beliefs, they're happy to reshare it. And so we tried to address all four of those classes of issues. My number one recommendation in here is when advertising absolutely is a problem. It's not a problem at some of the issues brought up in in the u s election. It is advertising is the most dangerous part of the social media platforms because it gives you the most amplification possibility. You trade money for amplification. It also allows you to put content in front of people who didn't ask to see it.

Alex Stamos: So it has the least kind of free expression concern. If somebody joins a private anti-vaxxer group on Facebook, they have said, I want to consume anti-vaccine material. There's a real free expression concern about them saying, no, that's not good for you. Right? But allowing people to put their stuff in front of others is not like a freedom that we really get. So what's the top recommendation? So

our top recommendation is to have laws that expand the definition of what a political ad is to include issue ads. 80 90% of the Russian ads did not mention a candidate and therefore were not actually technically illegal. Right? So we want to make that illegal.

Nathaniel P: This was social media as well as general media or

Alex Stamos: no? Social media. Yeah.

Nathaniel P: The whose job would it be to decide that?

Alex Stamos: Uh, well that's, that's, that's the really, that's one of the really hard parts right now. Google and Facebook are making their own decisions and they make totally incompatible decisions. So somebody like Congress is going to have to have guidelines and then like the FTC or f or FEC, probably judges and then we have a bunch of limits on those ads. So like if something's an issue ad it has to be run by an American, it has to be in a transparent archive. And, um, a big thing that I, I'm really pushing for is you can't use the AI hyper targeting that is available on Google and Facebook for political ads. That's less about the Russians. That's more just about American billionaires. Like, we're in this real world where you'll probably, the first election that was really influenced by Facebook was 2012 when the Obama campaign did a lot of stuff that was later, a scandal under Cambridge Analytica.

Alex Stamos: But apparently the New York Times thought it was fine when the Obama campaign did it. Um, the Obama campaign did a bunch of stuff. Super duper good, smart ad targeting kicked the Romney campaigns, but the Republican donors did not like that. And so they built all of this capacity starting in 2012 hiring people in silicon valley, hiring x tech people to build Republican ad tech. Donald Trump absorbed that capability. So was it their campaign as much as the fact that the RNC had built a whole capability that once he was the candidate he got, and then he wants he beat in 2016 and now you've got Michael Bloomberg wanting to spend half a billion dollars to build a better [inaudible] capability to win 2020. Well, I agree with his goals. I don't like this idea that it's like whoever has the best billionaires, uh, wins, right? And no offense to all the billionaires in the room of which there are several. Um, and so like, I think we need to limit the capability cause there's basically 30 Cambridge Analytica ads that are running right now that just haven't broken Facebook's policies. And we gotta, we've gotta limit those kinds.

Nathaniel P: But there we're talking macro, the problem of disinformation in the world, but particularly American politics. You've said one concrete thing, which is obviously a good idea to label more ads as political ads that would not necessarily, but that's clearly not even close to enough to deal with the macro problem of disinformation in American politics. So are there other ideas that you have or know of that would potentially really move the needle for this upcoming election, which is only 16 months away? Or are we just kind of screwed? Well,

so there's recommendations in here to the government, but also to the social media platforms, right? And so there is a lot that they have already done. I mean, people may not, that you might not know all that Facebook, Twitter, and Google have done since 2016, um, uh, where they're really throwing everything in the wall to see what sticks.

Nathaniel P: And so there, you know, we have to understand that, that when we talk about going after this information, we are talking about deciding which speech is going to be prioritized when you open up your computer or your phone, right? And so we can't run away from that. Now Facebook and Google make a decision about how to organize speech in your feeds no matter what. Right? And so there I think on the hook for the value judgments that go into that, right? And the question is, you know, are you going to make, are they, is their algorithm, is there, uh, other search results going to prioritize the New York Times, say over Alex Jones, right? And what is going to be the decision rule that makes that possible where you don't just say it's what we disagree with or what we think is I'm a bad on some vague sense, right?

Nathaniel P: And so they can delete the content. So look at the way that the different platforms dealt with the Nancy Pelosi video. Right? Youtube took it down. Facebook left it up. But what they did is they said, we are going to reduce the reach of this video by 80% by basically making sure that it's not going to be the top thing that you see in your newsfeed, but we're going to keep it up. And for anyone who sees it, we're going to put related articles next to it that say it's not true. Okay. You can disagree. I mean, I think reasonable people can disagree as to whether youtube or Facebook did the right thing there. But what Facebook was thinking is like, all right, what are we going to do for manipulated video for the next, you know, 20, 50 years. So they can delete the content.

Nathaniel P: They can disclose it, right? They can. This is what they, what they've done, um, with the Nancy Polosi video. But they also found, you know, Facebook used to, when they went after this information, they would put a big disputed tag over something that had been fact checked. I don't know if any of you saw this, what they find out? Well, when you put a big red disputed flag over something on Facebook, people say, oh, that's interesting. You know, it's like, it's like I'm gonna let it lead to greater engagement. It's like, oh my gosh, well you don't want that. Right? To some extent ends up being truth in advertising, but then that then it leads to greater engagement. Right. And so now they've come up with this other scheme of related articles, right. And the problem is that we're, we're seeing that the most kind of authoritarian responses to disinformation are the things that work, right?

Nathaniel P: The deletion of content. We're trying to push it out of the sight of people, but those are the ones that are most risky from a first amendment standpoint. One thing Facebook has is in the process of creating is this supreme court for content right now that's an external entity that they will sort of, but not really control or maybe not really, but sort of, I don't know whether they will or not. Maybe

that's a longer conversation, but it is the interesting thing about it is it's an external entity that theoretically they don't control. And to me it sounds like that's what you both would like to see more of. Maybe government and the platforms and civil society broadly coming together to come up with some kind of oversight mechanism. Is that in general the direction we have to go? I think we do need greater government regulation of the platforms.

Nathaniel P: Um, and actually, you know, the platforms are coming around to this cause they realize they can't decide these issues, whether it's privacy, whether it's disinformation, hate speech, uh, and like advertising. I mean, just to tell you a little story. So Nicholas Clegg, right? Who a former head of the Liberal Democrats in in Britain and then became a vice president of Facebook, went to the European Commission of European Parliament, I think four months ago to announce what the rules would be on advertising for the European parliamentary elections. Right. So digest that for a second. You have an American technology executive, right? Who is announcing what the rules of speech right in the European parliamentary elections are going to be. But that's because Facebook is the only one that was going to get anything done. Uh, and they made a decision for example, to um, regulate, you know, political ads. And so now Facebook is determining what is an issue of national legislative importance.

Nathaniel P: Okay. Hey, by the way, we've got to go to questions because this is by the way, 10 minutes longer than it. Okay. Um, but shouldn't make it so humongous if it's wrong. It's so big. I know it's a very big numbers, but one of the things we have, hold on, one of the things we haven't even discussed is the fact that Facebook itself is an autocracy and basically there is no real accountability for that company, even in its own board of directors, which is a challenging aspect. That is what this, first of all, Zuckerberg this afternoon is going to talk about the content review board. This is this idea of an outside body that will then, uh, handle appeals from internal content decisions. Like if Alex Jones gets taken down that he can then appeal it is extremely difficult. Once you see, I taught a class on this with our students at Stanford will issue a report on this and the next month we, it's extremely difficult once you start thinking about how to develop this so-called Facebook supreme court that will be internationally representative that will deal with the millions of takedowns per day that that Facebook deals with. And that also what are the, it's not as if there's a Facebook constitution that exists that you could then use to like overrule the kind of statutes that Facebook isn't because you're hitting on the key issues. But I think we hear her from the audience

Alex Stamos: wait, but us or another recommendation tied to that, we don't know about what content is moderated. So another thing we're calling for is for Congress to create a safe harbor and for the companies to create a archives for all of the moderated content so that academics can study what decisions are being made. It's just, it's impossible right now for academics to make a decision to make a determination of what what is and is not happening, and that also the way that

it gets deleted makes it very hard for us to study things like the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the Russians, other people's just to, that would be mandated by government. Should that basically happen in every country? Then what? So the, the people, it's crazy for me to say this, the people who were most awful with this, right? Notice the French, right? So the French government has a really interesting proposal about the creation of self regulatory regimes that Western democracies work with. One of the real problems with regulation is that most of the countries in the world are not free. We got to remember that, right? So when we think about like our Eurocentric American centric regulatory framework, we have to be really careful creating precedents. That means very different things in Turkey, in Vietnam, even in democracies like India, where you don't have free speech as like a basic constitutional right like we do. And so the French have an idea of a model, a multistakeholder model where democracies participate in the net would require a

Nathaniel P: bunch of things that you could then keep the autocracies from trying to make it is a huge problem. 190 countries one system. But okay, who's got a comment or a request and I see a hand right there. Could we get the mic and identify yourself please? We've all, unfortunately, we've only got six minutes, but be quick. My name is Joyce and I was wondering, you know, going back to surveillance capitalism and the whole idea of research around behavioral modification and, and it's a pretty sophisticated set up and I don't worry about our age, I don't worry about our children's age. But when you look at our, these grant, our grandchildren's, um, four year olds are on the Internet are on the computer all the time. And I think that's the biggest worry for me are those that generation send me the children. Yeah. I'll just say one thing.

Nathaniel P: There's a lot of quantitative social science research that shows most of the fake news problem is that baby boomer problem. Right? Actually so that it goes the opposite way that it's people that grew up in the Walter Cronkite era who were having trouble fall for it. You being fought for an and forwarded forward it way more. There's a lot of, there's an interesting story as to why that happens as to whether some of it, there's a technological reason for this, which has to do with the number of friends that older people have on Facebook. Wow. So that the demotion algorithm doesn't actually get at that, but also with these people who are new to the Internet who are more likely to trust your issue here, which is that the regulations around the kids used to the Internet is actually kind of a disaster and that effectively there's one law that basically says it's almost impossible to service anybody under 13 and over 13 year old adult and it's ridiculous because all you have is then parents letting kids under 13 lie about their age.

Nathaniel P: And so like we need to have a legal framework by which we treat people of different ages of the companies having different levels of responsibility and not just having like this hard line that is just people who talking about making this worse by just raising that hard line to 16 which just means every 13 to 16 year old puts in 1901 is their birth date. Right. And we end up with all these hundred

18 year olds on the Internet. Right, right. Okay. Over here. Yeah. Just quick comment a, I'm a district judge in La, so I sort of practice in the first amendment world and you know, it seems to me we're dealing with the marketplace of ideas versus um, the fact that propaganda kills. And I just would like your opinion about whether you think that the sort of new social media model we have now, um, presents an existential threat to our democracy.

Audience Member: So let's sort of see at what level this discussion really belongs. And the other thing is, you know, what do you do in a situation where, you know, when you read the 20% of Americans or some number around that they don't understand cause and effect. They don't know if they went to a public or private school. And don't we need to sort of take it down in terms of basic issues about education, maybe fun public television, 24 hours a day. So we have competing news cycles and just sort of work on core issues. Let me, let me just summarize the question and ask you about the quickly answer cause it's a great question. The existential threat one is can this problem be solved, both of you very quickly? No, it cannot be solved. It can be managed, right, because you're okay because whether it be sufficiently addressed that democracy will survive. How about that? Yes,

Alex Stamos: yes I did. You can look back and find New York Times articles about how radio and television that everything else has destroyed democracy. Our society adapts. And that's the benefit of it's an old person problem is that young people are already adapting to this kind of multipolar media universe in which they have to be less trustworthy. They, Satan's AC. So I think, I think in the long run, our democracy would be stronger because again, me too. Black lives matter. These were things that were happening in the 80s but because there are a handful of gatekeepers who did not represent those equities, they did not happen. And so I think we're going to take the good with the bad and I think we're going to adjust as a society. We're going to survive.

Nathaniel P: The global context though is what really is different here, right? Which, you know, yes, there's, there's prior, uh, you know, times of disinformation and the like, but thinking about how you have new international structures that are not, you know, simply for profit companies that are going to be regulating the speech marketplaces. The key question, do we need those? Yes. Well, you know, and that then how do you, you know, the whole idea of globalization is politically polarizing right now. So if you start thinking about international organizations that are going to be setting the rules for political speech around the world, right? That as a particular political Taylor,

Alex Stamos: we're, we're moving to a cold internet cold war where everybody in the world is using platforms that are either made by Americans or by the Chinese, right? And so you can't discount the fact that we chat and 10 cent and Weebo and Baidu are national and tick Tock Tick Tock Tick Tock has a massive child safety issue. It's incredible. It's, it's growing. And um, and a number of US companies wanting to buy them and then Chinese blocked it because the Chinese are smart.

Nathaniel P: 100 million accounts in the u s on Tick Tock, which is owned by the Chinese. A huge mechanism for gathering. It's a short video social media platform that's primarily used by young teenagers. Any young teenager, you know, knows all about it too

Alex Stamos: since anybody in this room. And it was a massive intelligence gathering operation by the ministry

Nathaniel P: security and in some countries and in some countries it has already been specifically identified as a political manipulation vector. So it is not just something that kids play around with. But yeah, let's go to one. This is why we're mostly focusing on numbers,

Alex Stamos: western nations because everybody's looking in the u s and Europe, like Taiwan. January, 2020 is going to be a crazy online election for this kinda stuff.

Nathaniel P: It's not a 50 minute topic. Okay, let's go way, way back there. Okay. Is there, Mike, do you have the mic? I'm know over this guy. Right? Okay. We've only got time for this last question. Unfortunate or comment.

Audience Member: Hi. Uh, my question is about a comment Alex made briefly about the, what we know on the nat non-classified side about interference. And so on, uh, realizing this may maybe a bit of a conundrum to ask you. What do we know about the classified side or what do we, about the classified

Nathaniel P: side? In other words, what are we not knowing as a, as a general public that maybe congress people and others know.

Alex Stamos: So again, uh, W I would like to see Congress to do is I would like them to set up right now before we know what happens in 2020, there should be a commission set up that is monitoring what is happening in does report within six months of the 2020 election, no matter what the outcome is, because there will be things we can do better. The things we don't know right now we, so one thing came out in the mole report, so I can talk about it now without violating [inaudible] is in the mall report. There's a footnote about how the Russians reached out to people who were part of us activist groups to try to recruit them to push Russian propaganda. Even though they're Americans, they even reached out to the family members of people whose children were killed by police officers. Right. To try to get them to create content for their fake black lives matter groups like the amount of Russian, like inserting themselves into our society.

Alex Stamos: It's all the stuff that KGB used to do in the 60s but they don't have to land people here anymore to go infiltrate some student communist group. They can do it from 4,000 miles away. And so we don't know about that and we really don't know about them breaking into the elections. That's what's been really secretive and it's leaked out bit by bit. And I think what's going on is the government didn't want to talk about, cause they don't want people to think

the elections are rigged, but it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy if we don't feel like they're being honest to them. We have a ton of recommendations in here about how to improve election security at the federal level. We have a real problem of 10,000 different election authorities running in our elections and so we don't really know what's going on.

Speaker 5: Sure.

Alex Stamos: So that was in classified, but that was like not revealed until it was in the morning.

David K: That's fine. That's fortunately, we're at a time. I think there's a bunch of investigative stuff that hasn't come out of the FBI. This is a really important conversation. I think we've touched on a lot of really important issues. So I think it's also very, very valuable to all of us that their report exists. You can take it outside. We all have to continue this conversation as a nation and as a world. So thank you all for being here.