Nordic Council of Ministers

A Nordic approach to democratic debate in the age of Big Tech

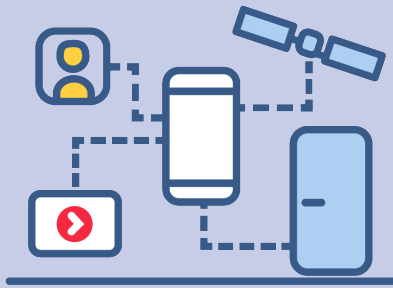Recommendations from the Nordic Think Tank for Tech and Democracy

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> *The big question is no longer if we need more democratic control with Big Tech. The question is how and how fast*

TOBIAS BORNAKKE, CHAIR

Online platforms of Big Tech companies such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter have become integral democratic infrastructure. They allow people to connect across the world, new communities to arise and are a popular source of information. In addition to all their positive potential, however, online platforms and their algorithmic functions may cause serious harm to our democracies and public debate.

Hate speech online may lead certain groups in society to withdraw from public debate, and the spread of mis- and disinformation threatens open, transparent and factual democratic debate and can fuel polarisation. Content moderation is known to be minimal in smaller languages such as the Nordics and thus emphasises a greater need to focus on these problems, especially for vulnerable groups such as children and youth. However, since public scrutiny is often actively counteracted by the platforms, most of the insight we have into the workings of these platforms is from leaks from former employees of the companies.

Our vision for the Nordics is to be a united tech-democratic region, with thriving citizens and open and informed public debate taking place across different spaces. We want the Nordics to have vigilant public oversight over democratic infrastructure, building resilience to already strong Nordic public spheres. The Nordic countries share similar cultures and long-standing democratic values that provide an opportunity for strengthening our democracies even when they take increasingly place online.

VISIONS

We want the Nordics to continue to have healthy and vibrant democratic debates. To that end, we have the following vision:

1. **We want the Nordic countries to be a united tech-democratic region**

2. **We want the Nordic countries to have thriving and digitally literate citizens**

3. **We want the Nordic countries to have access to diverse and credible digital platforms and communities**

4. **We want the Nordic countries to have open and informed public debates**

5. **We want the Nordic countries to have vigilant and well-informed oversight of Big Tech platforms**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Together, the Nordic countries should be a driver for a more forceful and transparent approach when it comes to how we allow Big Tech to influence societies and democracies in the Nordics, in Europe and globally. The Nordic Think Tank for Tech and Democracy proposes the following Nordic recommendations to protect and strengthen the democratic debate in the age of Big Tech:

We recommend that the Nordic governments establish a Nordic Centre for Tech and Democracy to support the enforcement of European tech regulation.

We recommend that the Nordic countries protect the well-being and safety of children and youth online by demanding age verification and special parental functions and push for more general control for their citizens.

We recommend that the Nordic countries establish an online hub for knowledge exchange on digital literacy and to provide support for teachers.

We recommend that the Nordic countries develop and test strategies to support the volunteers who facilitate online communities where democratic debate unfolds.

We recommend that the Nordic countries promote the innovation and implementation of technology that supports open digital public debate to create alternatives to large online platforms.

We recommend that Nordic public service media are given a strong digital mandate for online presence, content creation and development of platforms for democratic debate online.

We recommend that the Nordic countries step up the support to independent fact-checking organisations that guarantee expertise in countering mis- and disinformation.

We recommend that the Nordic countries push for better content moderation in the Nordics and for more transparency on moderation practices to secure transparent and high-quality moderation in the Nordics.

We recommend that the Nordic countries initiate a provisional Nordic task force to explore counter measures to the risks to democracy from disinformation generated by artificial intelligence.

We recommend that the Nordic countries support access to platform data and algorithms for independent researchers by establishing an office to support Nordic actors' access to platform data and guiding researchers in their application processes.

We recommend that the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture commission a biennial report on the state of Nordic digital democracies that can inform public debates on strengthening our societies and democratic debates in the digital age.

About the Nordic Think Tank for Tech and Democracy

In 2021, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture decided to establish the Nordic Think Tank for Tech and Democracy to discuss the increasing influence of social media and Big Tech on the democratic debate in the Nordic countries and to recommend possible political actions to protect and strengthen Nordic digital democracy.

The Think Tank was appointed in May 2022 and consists of 13 members from the Nordic Region. The Ministry of Culture, Denmark, has served as Secretariat to the Think Tank.

- Tobias Bornakke (chair), Denmark
- Anja Bechmann, Denmark
- Bente Kalsnes, Norway
- Carl Heath, Sweden
- Elfa Ýr Gylfadóttir, Iceland
- Fredrik Granlund, Åland
- Hanna Haaslahti, Finland
- Jákup Brúsá, Faroe Islands
- Martin Holmberg, Sweden
- Minna Aslama Horowitz, Finland
- Signe Ravn-Højgaard, Greenland
- Sumaya Jirde Ali, Norway
- Thorgeir Ólafsson, Iceland

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