

# I Invented the World Wide Web. Here's How We Can Fix It.

I wanted the web to serve humanity. It's not too late to live up to that promise.

By Tim Berners-Lee

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Credit...Wren McDonald

My parents were mathematicians. My mother helped code one of the first stored-program computers — the Manchester Mark 1. They taught me that when you program a computer, what you can do is limited only by your imagination. That excitement for experimentation and change helped me build the World Wide Web.

I had hoped that 30 years from its creation, we would be using the web foremost for the purpose of serving humanity. Projects like Wikipedia, OpenStreetMap and the world of open source software are the kinds of constructive tools that I hoped would flow from the web.

However, the reality is much more complex. Communities are being ripped apart as prejudice, hate and disinformation are peddled online. Scammers use the web to steal identities, stalkers use it to harass and intimidate their victims, and bad actors subvert democracy using clever digital tactics. The use of targeted political ads in the United States' 2020 presidential campaign and in elections elsewhere threatens once again to undermine voters' understanding and choices.

We're at a tipping point. How we respond to this abuse will determine whether the web lives up to its potential as a global force for good or leads us into a digital dystopia.

The web needs radical intervention from all those who have power over its future: governments that can legislate and regulate; companies that design products; civil society groups and activists who hold the powerful to account; and every single web user who interacts with others online.

We have to overcome the stalemate that has characterized previous attempts to solve the problems facing the web. Governments must stop blaming platforms for inaction, and companies must become more constructive in shaping future regulation — not just opposing it.

I'm introducing a new approach to overcome that stalemate — the [Contract for the Web](#).

The Contract for the Web is a [global plan](#) of action created over the past year by activists, academics, companies, governments and citizens from across the world to make sure our online world is safe, empowering and genuinely for everyone.

The contract outlines steps to prevent the deliberate misuse of the web and our information. For example, it calls on governments to publish public data registries, so that they are no longer able to conceal from their own citizens how their data is being used. If governments are sharing our data with private companies — or buying data broker lists from them — we have a right to know and take action.

The contract sets out ways to improve system design to eradicate incentives that reward clickbait or the spread of disinformation. Targeted political advertising is giving political parties the ability to subvert the debate. We need platforms to open their black boxes and clearly explain how they're minimizing or eliminating risks their products pose to society. In my view, governments should impose an immediate ban on targeted political advertising to restore trust in our public discourse.

Crucially, the contract also contains concrete actions to tackle the negative — even if unintended — consequences of platform design. For example, why on an exercise app should women [have to worry](#) that their precise jogging routes are shared by default with other users? Perhaps because they were designed by people not thinking about the safety needs of women. We need a tremendously more diverse work force in our technology industries to make sure their products serve all groups. And companies should release reports that meaningfully demonstrate their progress toward those diversity goals.

To make the online world a place worth being in, we must all use the Contract for the Web to fight now for the web we want.

Governments must support their citizens online and ensure that their rights are protected through effective regulation and enforcement. Companies must look beyond next-quarter results and understand that long-term success means building products that are good for society and that people can trust them.

There's already a powerful coalition backing the contract. The governments of nations such as France, Germany and Ghana have signed on to its principles. The tech giants Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Reddit sit alongside other specialists such as the search engine DuckDuckGo in committing to action. Many civil society organizations, including the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Reporters Without Borders and AccessNow, have joined the growing movement, as well as individuals such as Representative Ro Khanna of California.

In endorsing the contract, governments and companies commit to taking concrete action across several issues. Some changes may take a long time: We are not expecting overnight transformation. But we will track their efforts, and if they fail to make progress, they will lose their status as a backer of the contract.

The contract is already being used to inform policy decisions, as a best-practice guide for government and company officials, and as a tool to help civil society advocate change, measure progress and hold governments and companies accountable.

But that alone is not enough. Our [World Wide Web Foundation](#), together with its global partners, will work to mobilize people around the world. As elections approach, raise these issues with your political representatives and candidates. The best way to change the priorities and actions of those in power is to speak up.

Join our foundation, our partners and people around the world in the fight for the web.

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