

Civic Engagement and Internet Platforms

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Abstract:

The 2016 election represented a turning point in the public's view of social media companies and the role they play in elections. After experiencing four years of unrelenting criticism for their mistakes related to disinformation and foreign interference in 2016, these companies looked to the 2020 election as an opportunity for redemption. In addition to adopting new policies regarding disinformation and other content violations, they also took proactive steps to help facilitate voter registration, poll worker recruitment, voter education, and other forms of civic participation. This chapter examines election-related policy changes and initiatives designed by Facebook/Instagram, Google/YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok. This chapter relies largely on the policies and accomplishments as stated by the companies themselves, given that the firms provide very limited data to outsiders relating to the success of their policies. Their efforts to provide accurate information and tools for voters to navigate the election may not have been able to compete with self-serving propagation of disinformation from the Trump campaign and its supporters. Nevertheless, the role that the platforms played in facilitating participation and informing the public about voting-related changes codified their position as key players in the administration of the election.

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I. Introduction

The 2016 Election represented a turning point in the public's view of social media companies and the role they play in elections. After experiencing four years of unrelenting criticism for their mistakes related to disinformation and foreign interference in 2016, these companies looked to the 2020 election as an opportunity for redemption. In addition to adopting new policies regarding disinformation and other content violations, they took proactive steps to help facilitate voter registration, poll worker recruitment, voter education, and other forms of civic participation. This memo examines election-related policy changes and initiatives designed by Facebook/Instagram, Google/YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok.¹

In the run-up to the 2020 U.S. elections, social media platforms launched a series of initiatives related to voter registration and civic engagement. With hundreds of millions of users, technology companies are well positioned to influence the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences. [According to the Pew Research Center](#), in 2018, roughly three-quarters of the public used one or more of eight platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and LinkedIn), with a typical (median) American using a minimum of three of these platforms. Usage of digital communication technologies has only increased since then, especially in the pre-election period as the coronavirus pandemic made Americans ever more reliant on technology and connectivity.

Following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, during which foreign interference and misinformation played an influential role, several technology companies were criticized for inaction towards abuse on their platforms. Consequently, many platforms designed new initiatives and introduced changes to their policies, enforcement mechanisms, and products for the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

Facebook/Instagram, Google/YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok, in particular, have taken steps to promote voter registration and civic education. For example, through the creation of the Voter Information Center, Facebook claims to have reached its goal of registering [over 4 million Americans](#) to vote by providing verified information from election officials and nonpartisan partners. Google added [over 125,000 early voting locations](#) to its Google Maps tool

¹ This chapter relies largely on the policies and accomplishments as stated by the companies themselves, given that the firms provide very limited data to outsiders relating to the success of their policies. Moreover, this chapter does not deal with the problem of pervasive online disinformation, which is covered separately in a chapter dedicated to that purpose. Finally, those wishing to evaluate the success of the platforms' policies confronting election-related disinformation should refer to the work of the Election Integrity Project, and its report: [The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election](#).

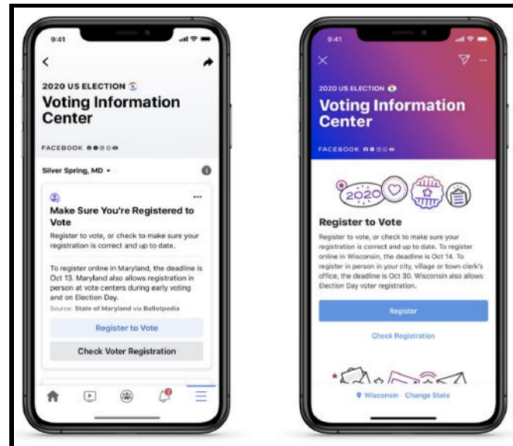
and updated its search features for voter registration and information on a state-specific level. The company’s voter engagement features were seen [nearly 500 million times](#), and reminders for “how to register” and “how to vote” were viewed [over 2 billion times](#) by users across the country using Google Search, Google Maps, and YouTube.

Snapchat undertook a different approach by designing four applications on its platform: a voter registration tool, voter guide, user-specific sample ballots, and checklist. By October, more than [one million users](#) had registered to vote, surpassing the company’s 2018 record when similar tools were rolled out. In parallel with multiple policy and enforcement changes, Twitter launched [an election hub](#) that communicated information on voter registration, early voting, and voting safely during the coronavirus pandemic. And, TikTok created [an in-app guide](#) to the 2020 U.S. elections that was accessible for 100 million platform users.

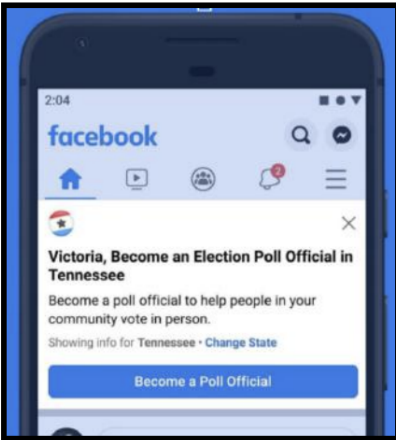
II. Specific Initiatives

A. Facebook/Instagram

In June 2020, Facebook announced its plan to launch ["the largest voting information campaign in American history"](#). With a goal of registering four million new voters, the company unveiled [the Voting Information Center](#), through which it expected to reach at least 160 million Americans. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg [announced](#) that, in the tool’s first three days, nearly 24 million clicks were driven to registration websites. By late September, the tool recorded [39 million visits](#), and the company projected that [an estimated 2.5 million Americans](#) had registered to vote across Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger (Facebook’s messaging platform) collectively. By late October, [4.4 million Americans](#) had registered to vote via Facebook products.



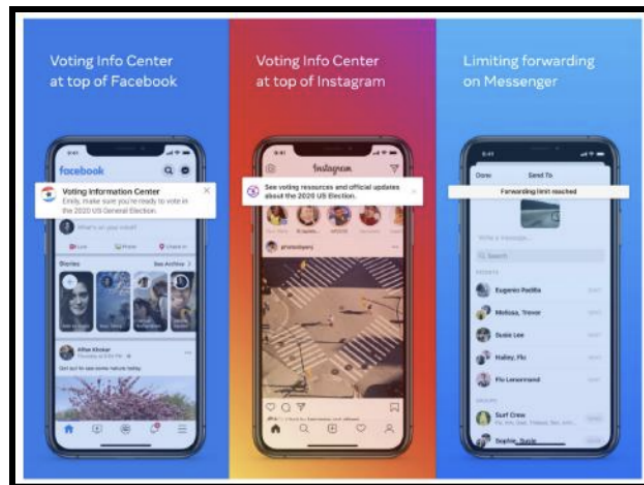
[Critics suggested](#), however, that the effort got off to a slow start, since the Voting Information Center was not launched until August, two months after the initial announcement. Moreover, a planned voter registration drive, originally intended to run on July 3rd and 4th across all of Facebook’s platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Messenger), ran only on Facebook for one day.

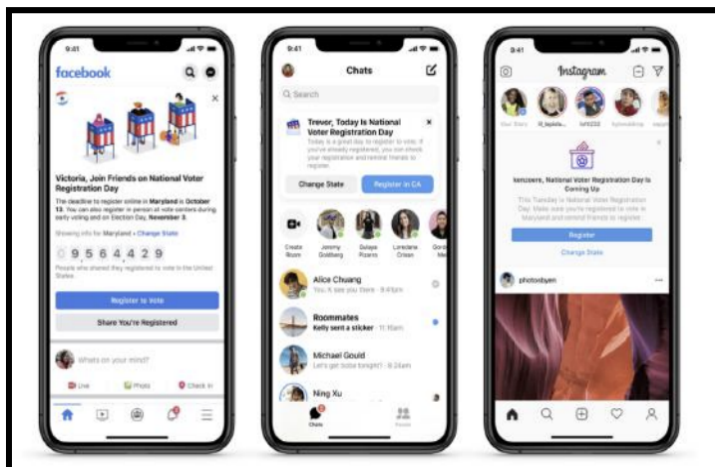


Facebook incorporated elements from its Coronavirus Information Center in crafting the Voting Information Center, which served as the company’s primary tool for providing platform users with information about how to register and vote. Notifications were sent at the top of Instagram and Facebook and targeted users by age and location, so individuals of voting age could view relevant information in their state. The tool helped users check registration status or register directly through a state elections board or [TurboVote](#), a nonprofit service providing voting information.

[Available in 12 languages](#), the Voting Information Center sourced its information directly from election officials, as well as partners such as [VoteRiders](#), [Ballotpedia](#), and [the Bipartisan Policy Center](#). It summarized state-specific vote-by-mail information, upcoming deadlines, and early voting options. It also displayed information for U.S. voters who serve in the military or live overseas. The tool featured opportunities for platform users to serve as poll workers and provided state election authorities with free ad credits to assist with poll worker recruitment. Alongside this effort, Facebook scaled up [poll worker recruitment](#) by pushing a message to U.S. users over the age of 18 and offering paid time off to its U.S.-based employees who volunteered to staff the polls.

The Voting Information Center also functioned as a component of [Facebook’s approach to preventing election interference](#). A voting alert feature helped state and local authorities reach constituents with important voting-related updates, and Facebook added labels to federal politicians’ posts that discussed voting. Facebook ran a campaign for the company and its apps together—titled [“More Questions, More Answers”](#)—to encourage individuals to use the Voting Information Center. The campaign was featured across national broadcast, cable, radio, and digital homepage takeover ads within lifestyle and news outlets. Facebook Watch hosted [a special Vote-A-Thon 2020](#) stream to promote voter registration using notable public figures as guests.





In September, Facebook [announced](#) additional updates, including plans to publish information (e.g., video tutorials about absentee voting; state deadlines for registration and voting) on a daily basis at the top of Facebook and Instagram until Election Day. Furthermore, the platform [collaborated](#) with officials to remove misinformation related to voting; to highlight on its feeds accurate information about voting safely; to attach informational labels

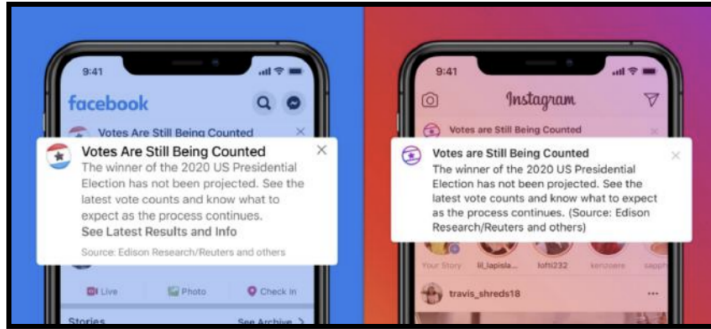
to content seeking to delegitimize the outcome of an election or the legitimacy of voting methods; and to protect election officials from threats of violence and harm. For National Voter Registration Day, September 22, Facebook unveiled a campaign with a multi-day promotion of notifications about voter registration across Facebook, Messenger, and Instagram, and added themed stickers, new challenges, and a designated "Register to Vote" story.

WhatsApp, another messaging platform owned by Facebook, collaborated with the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network to create a fact-checking chatbot. The chatbot, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), provided voting information for the 2020 election. Similarly, WhatsApp created a chat feature with [Vote.org](#) to provide users with information and help, if necessary.

Beginning October 27, Facebook [temporarily paused](#) new political and issue ads. Some experts [contended](#) this pause would muzzle important speech (e.g., time-sensitive reminders) and disproportionately burden challenger campaigns, while favoring more powerful incumbents. All political ads were paused after the polls closed on November 3 in an effort to reduce opportunities for abuse or confusion. On December 16, the company [re-allowed political ads in Georgia](#) during the lead-up to the U.S. Senate runoff elections on January 5, 2021, after which the ban was reinstated. As of March 2021, the pause on social issues, electoral, or political ads on the platform remained in effect.

Facebook launched [The Elections Operations Center](#) in 2018 for real-time monitoring of potential abuse across the network. A parallel viral content review system was in operation to flag posts and serve as an additional safety net. One month prior to the 2020 election, Facebook banned all accounts representing [the QAnon conspiracy theory](#) and [suspended](#) its practice of recommending political groups to users based on their demonstrated interests.

Instagram temporarily [removed](#) a feature from its hashtag pages to slow the spread of



misinformation. In [an error](#), however, Instagram's 'Tomorrow is Election Day' notice was cached for users who had not restarted the app and appeared at the top of their app on Election Day itself, November 3. Instagram [declined](#) to publicize the number of individuals affected by the caching issue.

Regarding [election results](#), Facebook and Instagram acted quickly to display notifications and apply labels to candidates' posts, directing users to its Voting Information Center for facts. To determine projected winners, Facebook [specified](#) it would use "consensus results from the National Election Pool/Edison via Reuters, the Associated Press, and six independent decision desks at major media outlets." Specific information [was provided](#) to alert users about races where the counting process was ongoing and a winner had not yet been determined. Warnings were placed on at least [150 million posts](#) debunked by fact-checkers. Despite Facebook contending that labels provided context, some users, especially political conservatives, levied criticism of these policies and [shifted their messaging to alternative sites](#).

Facebook removed content that featured weapons in polling places or that appeared to be coordinating election interference by a group. In tandem with this policy, Facebook also [removed](#) calls for poll watching that used militarized language or language that suggested a goal of intimidating, exerting control, or displaying power over election officials or voters. For example, [Facebook removed the "Stop the Steal" group](#), which accumulated over 360,000 members, on November 5 for promoting false claims and organizing in-person protests. The morning of its removal, [interactions](#) in the group had increased to 36 posts a minute. Because of increased activity by individual users and groups to coordinate potentially violent actions, Facebook introduced [interim measures](#) to reduce the spread of viral election misinformation, including demoting content on the News Feed, limiting distribution on election-related Facebook Live streams, and adding friction (i.e., forcing people to perform an additional click or two before being able to complete a post). It also [suspended](#) accounts behind inauthentic behavior, such as fake accounts or users who misrepresented themselves on social media.

Facebook developed tools to assist users voting in the U.S. Senate runoff elections in Georgia. With the aim of helping users in Georgia register and vote, information about voter registration, in-person voting, and vote-by-mail ballot requests and returns [was provided](#) at the top of Facebook and Instagram in multiple languages. Facebook [labeled](#) content that sought to delegitimize voting, providing accurate information from the Bipartisan Policy Center and

directing users to the Voting Information Center. To address voter suppression, misinformation, and interference, Facebook [announced](#) it would continue to use the teams and technology it used in the general election to protect election officials' accounts in the Georgia runoffs; to stop coordinated networks from running influence operations to manipulate public debate; to enforce voter interference policies; and to work with state authorities to identify and stop potential voter suppression; among other efforts. In a December [update](#), Facebook explained that its ad pause would be lifted starting December 16th for authorized advertisers running ads about social issues, elections or politics specifically in Georgia.

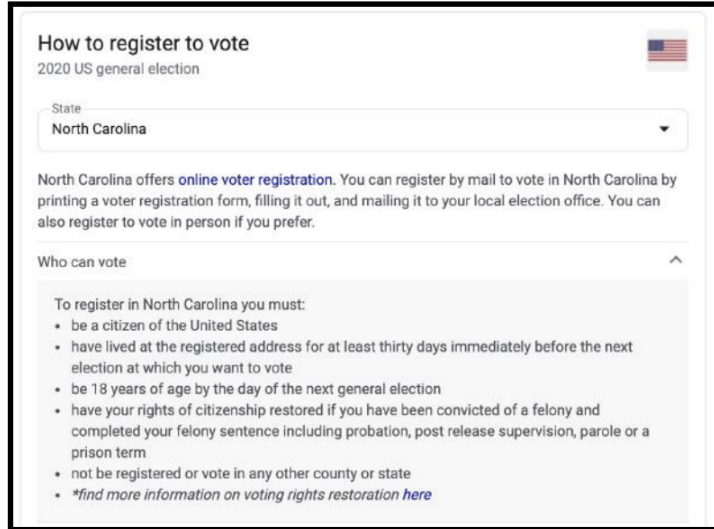
Nevertheless, many critics viewed the platform as an engine of harm for enabling viral disinformation. After the platform temporarily lifted its ad pause in Georgia for the runoff election, research [assessed](#) that "News Feeds became dramatically more partisan and less informative" for users in Georgia, with political content from news organizations such as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* or *The Wall Street Journal* replaced by paid political content. Numerous ads that were demonstrably false were [promoted](#) on the site, even after Facebook moderators had taken down earlier versions. Although their specific critiques differed, both political conservatives and liberals [expressed](#) grievances over Facebook's handling of ads during the Georgia runoff.

Facebook also faced criticisms that its platform specifically fueled far right misinformation. A 2021 Cybersecurity For Democracy [study](#) surveying 8 million posts from 3,000 accounts found that far right misinformation Facebook accounts drove 65% more engagement per follower than other far right pages. Sources of misinformation categorized as "slightly right" marginally outperformed non-misinformation content; in all other partisan categories, misinformation sources did not drive engagement as much as non-misinformation sources. In response, a Facebook spokesperson emphasized the difference between engagement and total viewers, and claimed that data (which the company did not cite or release) demonstrated that the total reach of misinformation posts was "not at all as partisan as this study suggests." A researcher on the study further [criticized](#) Facebook for its lack of transparency in "how it tracks impressions and promotes content."

B. Google/YouTube

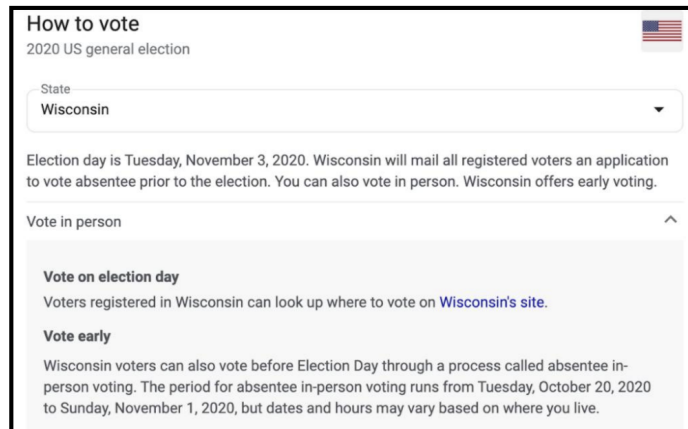
In parallel with equipping campaigns against threats, Google supported election-related communications by educating voters, connecting individuals, and enhancing election security and transparency. YouTube released [a summary](#) that similarly reviewed its support of and policies surrounding elections.

In helping voters access information from official sources, Google released [two new Google Search features](#) which provided detailed information about how to vote and how to register to vote. If a Google user searched “how to register to vote,” relevant state-specific information would appear, including deadlines and registration options. For example, a user in North Carolina would see the following:



The tool also offered information in a dropdown menu about voter registration online, by mail, on Election Day, in-person, and for military and overseas voters.

Similarly, if a user searched for “how to vote,” the search engine generated details on any requirements, registration and voting deadlines, and guidance for different means of voting, i.e., in-person or by mail. A user in Wisconsin would therefore see the following:



What to bring

- You will need to show a photo ID to vote in Wisconsin. An acceptable photo ID is not required to contain a current address. These photo IDs are acceptable and can be unexpired or expired after the date of the most recent general election, currently, the November 6, 2018 election: Wisconsin DOT-issued driver license, even if driving privileges are revoked or suspended; a Wisconsin DOT-issued identification card; military ID card issued by a U.S. uniformed service; U.S. passport; an identification card issued by a federally recognized Indian tribe in Wisconsin
- The following photo ID is also acceptable for voting purposes, and can be expired after November 6, 2018: a photo identification card issued by a Wisconsin accredited university or college that contains date of issuance, expiration date no later than two years after issuance, and signature of student (must be accompanied by a separate document that proves enrollment).
- The following photo IDs are also acceptable for voting purposes, but must be unexpired: a veteran's photo identification card issued by the Veterans Health Administration of the federal Department of Veterans Affairs; a certificate of naturalization that was issued not earlier than two years before the date of an election at which it is presented; a driving receipt issued by Wisconsin DOT (valid for 45 days); an identification card receipt issued by Wisconsin DOT (valid for 45 days).
- Voters without ID: If you are unable to provide photo ID, you will be able to vote a provisional ballot. Your provisional ballot will not count unless you provide an acceptable photo ID to your municipal clerk in person by 4:00 p.m. the Friday after the election.

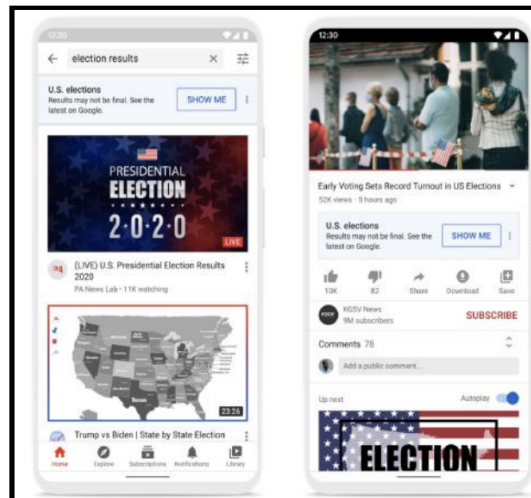
In collaboration with non-partisan, third-party partners, such as [Democracy Works](#) (a team of software developers, public policy experts, and civic organizers), Google aggregated official data from state and county election administrators and provided links to official state government websites. The company updated its [“2020 US Election” experience on Google News](#) to include extensive coverage of major issues, live-streams of major events, and reminders of registration and voting timelines. It also promoted YouTube as a platform for people to access and watch political debates and live-streamed events, emphasizing attempts to [elevate](#) “quality content” from authoritative voices for election-related search results that were previously prone to misinformation.

Through a partnership with the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism program, Google expanded [its efforts](#) to protect political campaigns from digital attacks, aiding nearly 4,000 participants in all 50 states. As part of Google’s [Civics Outreach Virtual Training Series](#), Google held [21 training sessions](#) for more than 900 candidates, public officials, campaigns, and nonprofit leaders and [a total of 45 trainings](#) for nearly 3,000 election workers learning to use Google tools and better connect with voters through digital events. Alongside these initiatives, Google created [Protect Your Election](#), a suite of free tools to protect candidates, campaigns, and journalists from phishing scams and denial of service (DoS/DDoS) attacks. Protect Your Election aimed to support campaigns and ensure that voters received transparent, accurate, and reliable information. And Google subsequently distributed [over 10,500 Advanced Protection kits](#) (including [free security keys](#), that are the strongest form of two-factor authentication).

Google committed to enforcing policies against [advertisements](#) that undermined the democratic process, such as those promoting false information about the U.S. Census or voting process, but it announced that it expected to take action on a limited number of political ads. Google said it would take action [only on ads that included clear violations](#) of its policies or [illegally obtained materials](#), adding that “robust political dialogue is an important part of democracy, and no one can sensibly adjudicate every political claim, counterclaim, and insinuation.” The Tech Transparency Project, however, found that Google users who typed in such search terms as “register to vote” and “vote by mail” were presented with ads linking to websites that charged large registration fees to register, harvested user data, or planted software on devices. Google later [removed](#) those ads, saying it did not know how the ads got past its policy. Google enforced its Sensitive Events ad policy after the polls closed, temporarily pausing over five million ads as results were certified; the pause [was lifted](#) for advertisers in early December.

In October, [Google Search and Maps](#) began displaying information about voting or ballot drop box locations (e.g., if a user searched “early voting locations” or “ballot drop boxes near me”). From mid-October until Election Day, [over 125,000 locations](#) were added to Google Maps. Google Assistant also could share details about the locations on an enabled phone, smart speaker, or Smart Display.

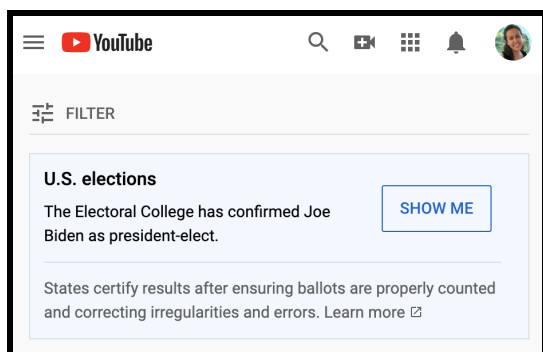
[In collaboration with The Associated Press](#), Google provided election results on federal and state-level races in over 70 languages through Google Search and Google Assistant. Real-time election search results were consulted by users [more than six times](#) as much in 2020 as in 2016, and YouTube’s link to [this feature](#) in its election results information panel was shown [over 4.5 billion times](#). Voter engagement features were seen [nearly 500 million times](#), while reminders for “how to register” and “how to vote” were seen [over 2 billion times](#) across the country on Google Search, Google Maps, and YouTube.



YouTube claims that it elevated authoritative content, reduced the spread of borderline content, removed videos, and created [information panels](#) for federal and presidential candidates and voting by mail. YouTube’s community guidelines prohibit misleading claims about voting or content encouraging voting interference, in addition to prohibiting harassment, deceptive practices, hate speech, and incitement of violence. YouTube promoted links to relevant information on its homepage, including Google’s [how to vote feature](#) and [where to](#)

[vote feature](#). Election night live streams and coverage from what it deemed authoritative news providers were available on YouTube and elevated related news and information queries in the search results and “watch next” panels. YouTube claims that the recommendations system sought [to limit](#) the spread of borderline content and election-related misinformation.

From September through early December 2020, YouTube claims that it removed [thousands of channels and videos](#) that violated site policies, with more than 77% of them removed before reaching 100 views. Information panels from third-party fact checkers were triggered [over 200,000 times](#), including voter fraud narratives. [According to YouTube](#), 88% of videos in the top 10 most searched results related to elections were from what it described as authoritative news sources. Over 70% of the video and channel recommendations on election-related topics came from authoritative news sources, YouTube claims. YouTube [noted](#) that on election-related content, the top 10 authoritative news channels were recommended over 14 times more frequently than the top 10 non-authoritative channels.



YouTube’s policy was seen by some as a [“light-touch approach”](#) towards misinformation relative to other platforms. Its policy [was denounced](#) by many critics, including those who noted that [videos falsely endorsing widespread fraud](#) were viewed [over 138 million times](#) during the week of November 3. Researchers identified nearly 5,000 videos that mentioned voter fraud, with a combined 409 million views. The company [acknowledged](#) that there was room for “ongoing

improvements” and that videos which were not prominently recommended continued to receive a high number of views. YouTube [said](#) it “understands the need for intense scrutiny on our elections-related work... to ensure we are striking a balance between allowing for a broad range of political speech and making sure our platform isn’t abused to incite real-world harm or broadly spread harmful misinformation.” On December 9, YouTube [announced](#) that, given the fact that enough states had certified their presidential results to have essentially determined the winner, it would begin removing uploaded content “alleging that widespread fraud or errors changed the outcome of the 2020 U.S. Presidential election.”

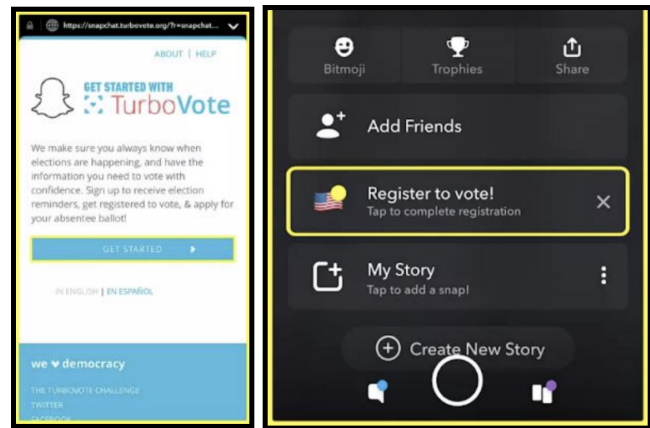
C. Snapchat

During the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, [Snapchat](#) partnered with [TurboVote](#) to promote [National Voter Registration Day](#) to its users. Democracy Works reported that [450,000](#)

[individuals](#) on Snapchat used the tool to register successfully in 2018, of whom [57% cast a ballot](#). In the 2020 general election, [over 1 million Snapchat users](#) registered to vote via the app, surpassing Snapchat’s 2018 record. In partnership with [Get to the Polls](#), Snapchat also helped [users determine their voting locations](#) using its Snap Map feature, a location sharing and mapping tool.

For the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Snapchat promoted four applications on its platform, with features that included a voter registration tool, voter guide, user-specific sample ballots, and checklist:

1. *Voter Registration.* The voter registration tool allowed users [to register to vote](#) directly on Snapchat, and it included a tracker to monitor how many users had registered through the app. (By mid-September, [over 400,000 users](#) had already registered using the tool.) [Its voter registration initiative](#) also pushed alerts and reminders to U.S. users when their profiles indicated they turned 18, with directions about registering to vote. The



messages contained a link to a TurboVote registration page, which was also accessible from relevant news stories on the platform. Snapchat encouraged users to register and vote with curated “Our Stories” centered on the election and an “I’m Registered to Vote” filter. Throughout the fall, nonpartisan public service announcements featured notable politicians and celebrities.

2. *Voter Guide.* The voter guide featured [resources](#) from initiatives and organizations, such as the NAACP, the ACLU, BallotReady, Democracy Works, APIA Vote, I Am a Voter, Vote Early Day, and National Voter Registration Day.

3. *“Before You Vote.”* Created in partnership with BallotReady, this feature [informed](#) users on how to vote and voting options (e.g. in-person voting, vote-by-mail, etc.) offered within their state.

4. *Voter Checklist.* Lastly, the voter checklist was [an interactive platform](#) to ensure that users were registered and ready to vote; this tool was a key part of Snapchat’s effort in registering thousands of voters in 2018.

Snapchat claimed that its 100 million U.S. users included [75% of](#) people in the U.S. between the ages of 13 and 34. It also claimed that 80% of its U.S. users were of voting age, and that between 300,000 and 500,000 users turned 18 every month. By October, [over one million users](#) had registered to vote on Snapchat, surpassing Snapchat’s 2018 record. Over 80% of these individuals were younger than 30 years of age.

D. Twitter

For the 2018 midterm elections, Twitter designed several initiatives related to voter registration and civic engagement. The [#BeAVoter campaign](#) promoted voter registration and election-related information and became the top U.S. trend on the platform. The 2018 U.S. midterm elections were [the most Tweeted-about midterm elections in history](#). In addition, five days before the 2018 elections, U.S. users saw [an Election Day countdown](#) on the site. [In the week before Election Day](#), users saw labeled accounts approximately 100 million times per day. Twitter also partnered with TurboVote; [68% of Twitter users](#) who viewed TurboVote’s resources turned out to vote.



[For the 2020 election](#), Twitter says it undertook numerous policy, enforcement, and product changes to “add context, encourage thoughtful consideration, and reduce the potential for misleading information to spread on Twitter.” In September 2020, Twitter created a “2020 US Election” [hub](#) to help platform users access accurate information and guidance on voter registration, early voting and voting safely during the coronavirus pandemic. (In an update from the 2018 elections, political ads—including those from state-owned media—were [banned](#) from the platform beginning October 2019.)

Appearing at the top of the “Explore” tab, [the election hub](#) provided information about poll worker recruitment, and featured local news and resources. It included a series of public service announcements that ran through Election Day. Related news in English and Spanish, as well as live-streamed debates and other major events, was also available. Platform search results about voter registration led [with official sources](#). Timely updates were shared on [TwitterGov](#) and [TwitterSupport](#).

In late September, in partnership with [National Voter Registration Day](#) Twitter [launched](#) new tools and in-app experiences: 1) a timeline prompt encouraging U.S. users to register to vote or confirm their registration via TurboVote; 2) a push alert directing users to a landing page with additional registration information; 3) a promoted campaign with registration resources; and 4) a Twitter hashtag emoji with #VoteReady and #NationalVoterRegistrationDay to empower civic engagement. Both the prompt and push alerts were available in over 40 languages. [A new voter registration search prompt](#) directed individuals who searched for key terms related to voter registration toward official sources. Twitter also launched efforts within the company: employees were provided with resources through [PowerThePolls](#) to sign up to serve as poll workers.

To inform users about primary and presidential election candidates, Twitter used the same [Election Labels](#) it initially launched in 2018. Through its partnership with [Ballotpedia](#), Twitter [identified](#) the accounts of candidates for U.S. House of Representatives, Senate, or Governor who qualified for the general election ballot based on users' location. Twitter also [announced](#) the proactive implementation of several security measures for designated election-related accounts (e.g., U.S. Executive Branch; Congress; Governors; Secretaries of State; presidential campaigns; political parties; candidates for U.S. House, Senate, or Governor; and major news outlets and political journalists).

Furthermore, Twitter expanded [its civic integrity policy](#) to clarify how the site would address misleading information about elections or other civic processes, and it selectively turned on a labeling tool. To confirm the results of a U.S. election, Twitter [required](#) an announcement from state election officials or public projections from at least two national news outlets that made independent calls (ABC News, Associated Press, CBS News, CNN, Decision Desk HQ, Fox News, and NBC News). Tweets that falsely claimed a win for any candidate [were labeled](#) as false to provide context but were not removed from the platform; when other users attempted to retweet these messages, they would see a prompt directing them to what Twitter determined was credible information about the topic. Such false messages were also demoted in the platform's recommendations systems. Tweets encouraging violence or calling for interference with election results or the operation of polling places [were supposed to be removed](#), although the success of those efforts remains unknown.

Twitter implemented several other notable product changes. To encourage users to add their own thoughts and perspectives to a conversation, rather than just retweet an article they had not yet read, Twitter [urged](#) users to use "quote tweets"—retweets with a comment. Twitter said this change [did successfully slow](#) the spread of misleading information through a 20 percent reduction in the amount of sharing on the service. Nevertheless, by mid-December, Twitter [decided](#) it would no longer promote quote tweets, because the feature did not appear to

increase context (nearly 50% of additional quote tweets included just a single word, and 70% contained fewer than 25 characters). Twitter re-enabled standard retweet behavior.

Next, to slow the spread of tweets from certain accounts and election topics, the company [stopped](#) the appearance of “Liked by” and “Followed by” recommendations from accounts whom users did not follow. However, Twitter did not see a statistically significant difference in the spread of misinformation, nor any meaningful reduction in abuse reports as a result of the paused recommendations, and it [reversed](#) the change in mid-November. Finally, Twitter added more human oversight and altered the trending topics in the “For You” tab to [surface](#) only with the inclusion of additional context. Consequently, there was a significant reduction in reports but also a limitation on the number and breadth of trends available to be shown to users. Twitter, therefore, [decided](#) to continue reviewing and adding context but not make it a requirement.

To support early voting efforts in late October, Twitter [announced](#) that all accounts located within the United States would begin to see: 1) a home timeline prompt designed to encourage early voting; 2) interactive features on all tweets with the hashtags #VoteEarly, #IVoted, #IVotedEarly, and #YoVoté; and 3) a push alert towards a public service announcement with additional early voting resources. In partnership with the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) and the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED), Twitter [hosted](#) over one dozen Twitter Q&A events with chief election officials in order [to answer questions](#) about the election process. [A series of pre-bunk prompts](#), designed to pre-emptively debunk false information and remind individuals that election results were likely to be delayed and that voting by mail is safe and legitimate, was viewed 389 million times.

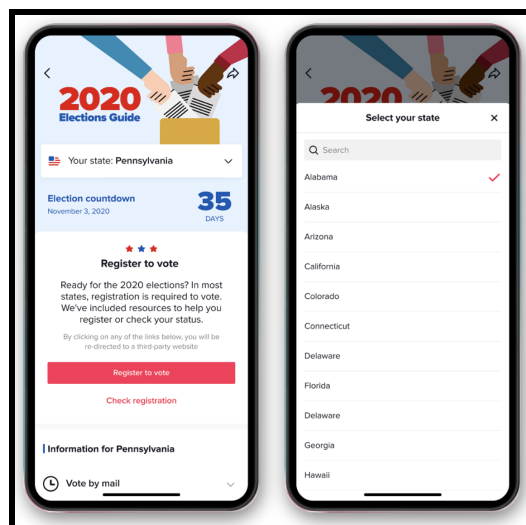
Ultimately, record levels of election-related conversation took place on Twitter in 2020. Between October 27 and November 11:

- Approximately 300,000 Tweets were labeled as disputed or potentially misleading content, representing 0.2% of all US election-related Tweets sent during this period;
- 456 of those Tweets were also covered by a warning message and had limited engagement features (i.e., tweets could be quote tweeted but not retweeted, replied to, or liked);
- Approximately 74% of the users who viewed those tweets saw them after the label or warning message was applied;
- Due to a warning prompt, there was a nearly 30% decrease in quote tweets of these labeled tweets.

Twitter affirmed that it would “continue to apply labels to add context and limit the risk of harmful election misinformation spreading without important context.” In [an update](#), the platform noted that it would share a comprehensive report on the election in early 2021; the platform had not published the report as of March 2021.

E. TikTok

As part of [its larger efforts](#) to support the integrity of U.S. elections, TikTok launched [an in-app guide](#) to the 2020 U.S. elections. This tool was accessible to platform users through the Discover page, election-related search results, and videos from verified political accounts. Through the guide, information was provided for 100 million Americans: on voting in every state, from the National Association of Secretaries of State; on misinformation and media literacy, from MediaWise; on voting as a student, from Campus Vote Project; on voting as an overseas citizen or service member, from the Federal Voting Assistance Program; on voting as a person with disabilities, from SignVote; on voting as a person with past convictions, from Restore your Vote; and on federal, state, and local candidates, from BallotReady.



TikTok [announced](#) additions to its in-app guide on October 28, 2020, including several policy updates to limit the distribution of misleading content, unverifiable claims, premature declarations of victory, and attempts to dissuade voters by exploiting the coronavirus pandemic as a suppression tactic. Banners were also added to direct users to the elections guide, which featured new resources from the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#). In addition, TikTok [provided](#) the Election Protection Hotline number in multiple languages, including an option for American Sign Language.

Because the majority of users interact with content on their ‘For You’ feed, TikTok [collaborated](#) with the Associated Press to provide access to an interactive map displaying live election results for various candidates and ballot initiatives at the federal and state levels. Moreover, individuals could more easily [reference](#) frequently asked questions and answers from the National Association of Secretaries of State regarding the voting process and election results. In early October, TikTok also created [an elections integrity page](#) within its [Safety Center](#) in order to

provide transparency about the platform's policies regarding misinformation, disinformation, and foreign interference. TikTok does not allow [paid political advertisements](#).

III. Conclusion

For the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Facebook/Instagram, Google/YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok launched numerous election-related initiatives and tools related to voter registration and civic education. Facebook/Instagram's tools aimed to promote voter registration, poll worker recruitment, and other forms of civic participation through the Voting Information Center. Similarly, Twitter introduced an election hub that brought together its engagement tools, educational resources, and related policies. Google updated its search feature to drive voter registration and improve elections-related information, while Snapchat created several applications that featured voter registration, a voter guide, user-specific sample ballots, and a reminder checklist. TikTok also launched an in-app guide that provided information for millions of Americans.

Across the various platforms, these policy, enforcement, and product changes collectively offered numerous avenues for U.S. users to engage in the electoral process, including checking voter registration status, registering to vote, requesting and returning an absentee ballot, reviewing state-specific deadlines, safely casting an in-person ballot during the coronavirus pandemic, serving as a poll worker, viewing a sample ballot or voter guide, watching live-streamed events and candidate debates, and more generally, accessing elections-related information and media.