

September 2, 2021

Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Susan Wojcicki
Chief Executive Officer
YouTube, LLC
901 Cherry Avenue
San Bruno, California 94066

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter Inc.
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, California 94103

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg, Mr. Pichai, Ms. Wojcicki, and Mr. Dorsey:

As millions of Californians cast ballots by mail or prepare to vote in-person in the state's recall election on September 14, the specter of online disinformation to confuse voters, drive down turnout, and interfere with the democratic process looms large.

Less than a year ago, the large social media and technology companies you run implemented several measures to limit the spread of disinformation related to the 2020 election, including enhanced content moderation, labeling of disputed or inaccurate information, and highlighting authoritative information and news sources. While those steps were far from perfect, they nevertheless had the material effect of slowing the spread of dangerous lies, conspiracy theories, and attempts to deceive voters.

But today, with roughly two weeks remaining for Californians to vote in the recall election, many of the same disinformation narratives your platforms grappled with last November are at play once again. And so far, Facebook, Twitter, Google, and YouTube have failed to put in place the necessary safeguards to protect California voters from an onslaught of disputed, misleading, or outright false information about the election. The false and destructive narratives on your platforms about elections are not going away. It's time to increase your diligence and enforce civic integrity policies at all times.

In the past several weeks, baseless claims about the integrity of California's vote-by-mail process, the impact of Covid-19 on voting, and additional conspiracy theories debunked by [independent fact checkers](#) have spread online. As election day approaches, the problem is likely to escalate unless your platforms take immediate action. We know from the measures you put in place last year that limiting the spread of election-related disinformation is possible — if you make doing so a priority.

To protect the integrity of the California recall election in particular, we ask that you implement the following measures immediately:

- **Elevate official voting information about the 2021 California recall election.** Inoculating California voters against ongoing misinformation on the voting procedures is essential to empower every eligible person to participate in the recall election. To this end, platforms should help users find official voting information, such as registering or updating their registration, tracking their ballots in the mail, and identifying in-person polling sites.
- **Focus on preventing disinformation targeting non-English speaking communities.** With [immigrant voters making up 21% of California's eligible voters](#)—mainly from Mexico, the Philippines, and Vietnam—platforms should make voting information available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. Non-English language disinformation has continued to spread beyond the 2020 election. The language gap between content moderators and content has created enforcement disparities leaving non-English speaking communities vulnerable to false claims and disinformation. Platforms must provide adequate resources to enforce non-English content moderation, to prevent the further spread of disinformation.
- **Prioritize fact-checking of electoral content.** Platforms should intensify their efforts to address voter interference and fraud and rapidly fact-check content relating to the California recall election, especially when that information comes from people wielding power or influence. In the case of electoral content from high-reach accounts with a history of violating platform policies, platforms should also consider introducing ‘holding areas’ where human reviewers can evaluate content against platform policies before making it public.
- **Introduce friction to reduce the distribution of content containing electoral misinformation and close loopholes that allow bad actors to spread disinformation.** While misleading claims should be appropriately labeled to provide context, a [growing body of research](#) shows that information-only labels are largely ineffective to halt the spread of misinformation. To reduce the distribution of electoral disinformation, platforms should also change their algorithms to demote or downrank this content and turn off users’ ability to engage with it. Platforms must also close other loopholes that bad actors exploit to spread disinformation. For example, platforms should apply third-party fact checkers to political advertisements and remove exemptions for public figures that allow them to spread disinformation with impunity.
- **Provide real-time access to social media data to external researchers and watchdogs.** Researchers and watchdogs can play a key role in preventing, identifying, and addressing the harms of electoral mis and disinformation. But to do that, they need reliable access to the data platforms have been reluctant to provide. By allowing greater access to social media data, platforms can improve overall transparency while increasing the safety of elections.
- **Consistently enforce civic integrity policies during both election and non-election cycles.** Platforms have several civic integrity policies in place to combat the spread of election disinformation, but they are not consistently enforced. Enforcement tends to become more relaxed during non-election cycles. Platforms must commit to upholding their own civic integrity policies and consistently enforce them throughout elections as well as non-election cycles. These policies must address content that calls for political violence and content that could inspire violence such as doxing and attacks on election workers.

As you all can certainly agree, voters in each and every election deserve accurate information on which to cast their ballots, not an information ecosystem dominated by deceptive content and conspiracy theories. With elections in Virginia and New Jersey just months away and the 2022 midterm elections around the corner, now is the moment for your platforms to demonstrate a sustained commitment to protecting elections across the country.

With the proper oversight and protections, your platforms can be helpful tools to promote a strong democracy. At the same time, if you allow disinformation about elections to spread largely unchecked, your platforms will become known as the dominant threat to a thriving democratic process. As the California recall election approaches, we urge you to take this opportunity to demonstrate that your companies are committed to playing a productive role in the democratic process.

Sincerely,

Accountable Tech
ADL
APIAVote
Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
Courage California
California Voter Foundation
Decode Democracy
Indivisible South Bay LA
National Hispanic Media Coalition
New America's Open Technology Institute
Public Knowledge
Secure Elections Network