

Ahead of Mexican elections, social media companies, corporate press launch censorship operation

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5 April 2018

Over 60 Mexican media organizations, universities, and civil organizations have launched an initiative to crack down on “fake news” regarding the upcoming July 1 Mexican general elections.

Up to 88 million voters are scheduled to elect a new president, all members of Congress, and local officials in 30 out of the country’s 32 states in what are being dubbed as the largest elections in Mexican history.

The project, titled #Verificado2018 (#Verified2018), was launched on March 12 under the guise of protecting Mexicans from supposed Russian meddling in the election. Presenting unproven allegations by intelligence agencies as fact, the project’s web site provocatively states: “More than 10 million potential voters had access to fake news that were spread on social media. Today we know that there was ‘Russian meddling’ in [the US presidential] election, precisely by spreading fake news...In Mexico this is not yet a mass phenomenon. And Russian interference is—for now—just a possibility, not a fact.”

In reality, the #Verificado2018 campaign—likely born in the halls of the Pentagon and at CIA headquarters in Langley—is itself damning proof of American imperialism’s own “meddling” in foreign elections.

Since its launch, many major Mexican and international media outlets have joined the initiative, including *El Universal*, *Proceso*, *El Economista*, *Forbes*, *Al Jazeera Español*, the *Huffington Post*, and *Buzzfeed News*.

In line with similar efforts to censor social media internationally, #Verificado2018 has the direct backing of Facebook, Google, and Twitter, and thereby the military-intelligence agencies of American imperialism. The social media platforms, working closely with the

US government, are using the initiative to ramp up Internet censorship by controlling what information millions of users can see, favoring major news outlets as “authoritative” and increasingly demoting “unverified” or “alternative” information.

Facebook will reportedly give the group a list of widely shared articles to be reviewed, and possibly censored, on the platform. Facebook has previously reported that news stories that have been labeled as “false” see its future impressions on the platform drop by 80 percent. To aid the censorship of news online, Facebook recently stated that it aims to hire up to 20,000 staff to review users’ content by the end of the year.

Google is providing the group with data on online searches to “understand what election themes Mexicans are looking for.” News stories that have been screened by the group will also receive a “Verified News” seal on Google searches to “assure readers that the information they are reading is true.” The clear implication of these efforts is that news stories without the backing of the group should be regarded by readers as “false” or “untrustworthy.”

Google’s efforts are of a piece with its recently announced “news initiative,” which aims to bolster major media sources at the expense of independent news outlets. In April of last year, Google introduced new algorithms that have decreased traffic to left-wing, anti-war, and progressive web sites by over 50 percent.

#Verified2018 has pointed to “fake news” shared in the aftermath of last year’s September 19 earthquake to justify the campaign, seeking to exploit legitimate social anger about the round-the-clock coverage by the corporate media to what turned out to be false

reports—such as the “rescue” of a non-existent girl in a collapsed school.

#Verificado2018 is supported by organizations with ties some of the world’s most powerful private foundations of the super rich. The project is being spearheaded by newspaper *Animal Político*, which last year received 25 percent of its funding from grants by the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundation, both of which have deep ties to the US military and intelligence agencies.

The initiative is an intensification of “Russian meddling” claims in the Mexican elections. In January, then National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster stated that there were “initial signs” of a Russian intervention in the country’s election, supposedly by using social media to aid the campaign of the “left” candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena).

Mexican and US media outlets, along with US Senators and Mexican politicians, jumped at the remarks to try to discredit López Obrador’s campaign and ratchet up tensions with Russia. Mexican voters began receiving automated calls claiming that López Obrador was seeking to sell Mexico’s oil to Russia, and there were demands by leading members of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to open an investigation against López Obrador.

Despite these efforts, López Obrador has maintained a double-digit lead as he continues to posture as the “anti-establishment” candidate. While López Obrador will do nothing to address Mexico’s social crisis, he is exploiting a profound dissatisfaction with social inequality and the continued militarization of the country.

The Peña Nieto administration has presided over the privatization of the oil industry, attacks on public education, and over 70,000 deaths due to the “war on drugs.” At the same time, Trump’s bullying threats to rip up the NAFTA agreement, deport tens of thousands of people, and build a border wall between the two countries have only exacerbated tensions ahead of the elections and put wind in López Obrador’s sails.

Efforts to censor the Internet must be seen under the context of an intensification of the international class struggle. The year 2018 has seen an eruption of teachers’ strikes worldwide, including protests by teachers in the United States, Tunisia, Algeria,

Argentina, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. Over a million workers and young people took to the streets two weeks ago to demand an end to violence in schools.

The ruling elite sees the fact that workers and students are using social media to organize their struggles independently of official channels as a life-threatening development. More and more, workers and youth are coming into conflict with the tools that the ruling elite has traditionally relied on to suppress social tensions, including the trade unions and nominally “left” bourgeois parties.

Under these conditions, Internet censorship is aimed at preventing the struggles of workers and youth from finding a conscious socialist leadership that will link their struggles under a common program. The *World Socialist Web Site*, Socialist Equality Party, and International Youth and Students for Social Equality are organizing public meetings throughout the United States to alert workers and youth to the far-advanced efforts to control and censor the Internet. We urge our readers to join this fight by attending a meeting in their area or contacting us to set up additional meetings.



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