

Social media platforms implement aggressive censorship during the 2020 US elections

Kevin Reed
5 November 2020

The major social media platforms stepped up their censorship operations before, during and after election day on Tuesday as the ruling establishment—especially the Democratic Party and the US intelligence state—attempted to control online public political discussion and debate.

All of the platforms assembled teams of moderators and used some form of fact-checking labels on content posted by users about the elections purportedly to “slow the spread of disinformation.”

In the case of Twitter, posts were fact checked after they were determined by a combination of algorithms and human analysts to be “false claims.” The Twitter labels—which have been used on numerous tweets by President Trump since the polls closed on Tuesday evening—included two different messages.

The first of these Twitter fact-checking labels allows posts in question to be displayed but with a label below them which states, “Official sources may not have called the race when this was posted.” Used primarily on Tweets claiming election victories, the label also contains a link to a Twitter “Election Results” page that hosts the video feed of an “authoritative news source” such as ABC News.

Another Twitter fact-check label covers up the posted content and says, “Some or all of the content shared in this Tweet is disputed and might be misleading about an election or other civic process.” Twitter users can still see the content by clicking on a “View” button, but they are not permitted to share or comment on the content in question.

Opting for a reactionary dragnet censorship approach, Facebook has placed a fact-checking label on every single post by all users that in any way mention the election. The fact-check label says, “See the latest updates on the 2020 US Election” and includes a link to

the Facebook Voter Information Center.

This extraordinary measure by Facebook—no doubt also accompanied by a mechanism that throttles the circulation of the posts—shows the enormous fear that predominates within big tech that any post about the elections by users has the potential to go viral on the platform and spread outside of their control. As of this writing, the outrageous Facebook blanket labeling of political posts by users has not been mentioned anywhere in the corporate news media.

Other fact-checking labels from Facebook—which were also used on numerous posts from Donald Trump post-election day—are designed to suppress claims about vote counting or election results.

One label says, “Election officials follow strict rules when it comes to ballot counting, handling and reporting,” and the another says, “Final results may be different from the initial vote counts, as ballot counting will continue for days or weeks after polls close.” Both of these labels state that their source is the Bipartisan Policy Center and contain links to the Facebook Voter Information Center.

In the case of YouTube, the fact-checking label is displayed below posted videos and says, “US elections: Results may not be final. See the latest on Google,” and includes a “Show Me” button that links to a curated Google search result on the elections with a national election summary at the top of the page from the Associated Press.

Reuters reported that TikTok removed a video by a group called Republican Hype House that featured “a false claim that Michigan found 138,000 ballots in a lake.” TikTok said the video violated its policy against misleading information.

The alignment of the social media censorship operation during the elections with the interests of the

Democratic Party and the US intelligence state is evident in a report published in the *New York Times* on Monday entitled, “What to Expect from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on Election Day.”

Starting off with a reference to the unsubstantiated assertion that social media was misused by Russians “to inflame American voters with divisive messages before the 2016 presidential election,” the *Times* endorses the 2020 censorship regime of the platforms. The *Times* journalists, including Daisuke Wakabayashi, write that the social media companies have spent four years and billions of dollars to “clamp down on falsehoods and highlight accurate and verified information.”

In one significant passage, the *Times* states that one of the Facebook teams—among the 35,000 people working on “election security operations”—is led by a former National Security Council operative. This unnamed individual has been tasked with leading an effort to search for “coordinated inauthentic behavior” by “accounts that work in concert to spread false information.”

The *Times* also reports that Facebook has set up a “war room” of employees working remotely in order to “identify efforts to destabilize the election.” As reported previously on the WSWS, Facebook has “special tools” prepared for election-related violence and, although the details of these censorship techniques have not been revealed, their purpose is to slow down or squash the spread of information on the platform identified as “inflammatory.”

The *Times* goes on to state that “Facebook has also worked with government agencies and other tech companies to spot foreign interference.” Exposing the fraud about the unconfirmed threats of “foreign interference,” it is legitimate to ask: Why is it necessary to label the comments of every single user, including all 223 million US users, who is making a comment about the 2020 elections?

The *Financial Times* reported on Wednesday that the social media companies had been implementing election censorship operations for weeks and developing it right up to the day before the elections. The FT report says, “Facebook, in particular, raced out eleventh-hour policy changes, confirming just hours before election day that it was temporarily disabling its recommendations tool that directs users to join political

groups, and also temporarily restricting Instagram users from discovering certain content from users they do not know.”

It is clear that these reports tell only part of the story of what the social media companies are doing to block the exchange of ideas on their platforms and make sure that political discussion that falls outside of the two-party system—especially left-wing, socialist and class-conscious dialogue—gets stifled and is prevented from getting widespread exposure.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact