

June 2023

PLATFORMS' POLICIES ON ELECTIONS MISINFORMATION



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A special thank you goes to the reviewer: **Rasto Kuzel** at MEMO 98



INTRODUCTION

- The present factsheet delves into platforms' policies on elections misinformation, focusing on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter. All these platforms have been qualified as Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) by the European Union Digital Services Act and will have to comply with particularly stringent regulations and justify the means they deploy to combat disinformation. In addition, they will be particularly scrutinised during events with a high social impact, such as elections.
- Generally speaking, all the platforms discussed here have identified the potential for harm that electoral misinformation contains: reduction of trust in democratic institutions, not accepting the outcome of the vote, voter suppression, calls for violence or even the overthrow of the institutions, etc.
- As with our other factsheet on misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic, this document is hampered by the fact that election-related policies are sometimes confused with general policies to combat misinformation. However, this factsheet attempts to focus as much as possible on electoral misinformation and the policies against it.
- This paper is designed to provide a summary of the state of play in order to show how the five largest platforms in the world have taken up the subject of electoral misinformation. In particular, it presents the definitions of prohibited, organic and advertising content, as well as the policy of reducing visibility or deletion.

DEFINITIONS AND ACTORS

| Platform | Definition of elections misinformation | Rationale for removing elections misinformation | Elections misinformation resources | Internal actors | External collaborators |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook | Content determined false by an authoritative third party, except for “political speeches” . | Empowering people to vote . | Meta’s Approach to elections page . | Oversight Board; human content moderators. | Dedicated partnerships for major elections; third-party fact-checkers . |
| Instagram | Content determined false by an authoritative third party, except for “political speeches” . | Empowering people to vote . | Meta’s Approach to elections page . | Oversight Board; human content moderators, artificial intelligence . | Dedicated partnerships for major elections; third-party fact-checkers . |
| YouTube | Certain types of misleading or deceptive content , including but not limited to: voter suppression, candidate eligibility, incitement to interfere with democratic processes, distribution of hacked materials and election integrity. | Serious risk of egregious harm . This includes certain types of misinformation that can cause real-world harm, like certain types of technically manipulated content, and content interfering with democratic processes. | YouTube’s elections misinformation policies . | Human content moderators triggered by reports by users . | Occasional partnerships during high-stakes elections (USA, Germany, Brazil...). |
| TikTok | Misinformation including but not limited to : about how to vote, registering to vote, eligibility requirements of candidates, the processes to count ballots and certify elections, and the final outcome of an election. | Inaccurate, misleading, or false content that may cause significant harm to individuals or society , regardless of intent. | Election integrity page in the Safety Centre. | European Safety Advisory Council ; human content moderators. | Third-party fact-checkers . |
| Twitter | Claims that have been confirmed to be false by external, subject-matter experts or include information that is shared in a deceptive or confusing manner, including posting or sharing content that may suppress participation or mislead people about when, where, or how to participate in a civic process. | Protect the integrity of the conversations on elections or other civic processes from interference and manipulation. | Civic integrity misleading information policy page in the Help centre. | Misleading Info Reporting (unavailable for EU countries); human content moderators. | Volunteer content moderators via Community Notes (previously Bird-watch), Twitter Moments . |

TYPES OF ACTIONS

| Platform | 1. Labelling of elections misinformation | 2. Downranking of elections misinformation | 3. Demonetisation of elections misinformation | 4. Strike policy | 5. Removal of elections misinformation |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook | Informational labels. | Labels , reduced visibility and removal from recommendations . | There is no specific demonetisation of elections disinformation but some related categories may face reduced or restricted monetisation : “Debated social issues” (“social issues that may provoke debate, such as personal, civil or political rights”) and “Misinformation” (content that has been rated false by a third-party fact-checker). | Meta’s strike policy for violating Community Standards. | Misinformation that is likely to directly contribute to a risk of interference with people’s ability to participate in those processes (detailed list of cases on this Transparency Centre page). |
| Instagram | Informational labels. | Labels , reduced visibility and removal from recommendations . | There is no specific demonetisation of elections disinformation but some related categories may face reduced or restricted monetisation : “Debated social issues” (“social issues that may provoke debate, such as personal, civil or political rights”) and “Misinformation” (content that has been rated false by a third-party fact-checker). | Meta’s strike policy for violating Community Standards. | Misinformation that is likely to directly contribute to a risk of interference with people’s ability to participate in those processes (detailed list of cases on this Transparency Centre page). |
| YouTube | Elections information panels , third-party fact-checker rating system . | Removing borderline content from recommendations . | Withholding, limiting, or suspending channel revenue for violations of guidelines prohibiting elections misinformation. | Community Guidelines strike basics on YouTube . | Disinformation aiming at the suppression of census participation . Content aiming to mislead census participants about the time, place, means, or eligibility requirements of the census, or false claims that could materially discourage census participation. |
| TikTok | Warning labels by third-party fact-checking partners . | Redirect search results and hashtags to our Community Guidelines; Reduce content discoverability , including by redirecting search results or making disinformative content ineligible for recommendation into anyone’s For You feed. | No acceptance of political ads . | Strike policy for violating the Community Guidelines. | Accounts that are found to be dedicated to the spread of election-related disinformation will be banned . TikTok LIVE members who violate the Community Guidelines may lose access to this function. |
| Twitter | Labelling content, prompts when the user engages with a misleading tweet, prebunks, community notes. | Reduce the visibility of the content on Twitter and/or prevent it from being recommended; Turn off likes, replies, and retweets. | Twitter’s Creator monetisation standards , following the company ads content policies, prohibits ads that contain references to political content, including appeals for votes, solicitations of financial support, and advocacy for or against any of the above-listed types of political content. | Strike policy for manipulating or interfering in elections or other civic processes. | The consequences for violating the civic integrity policy depends on the severity and type of the violation and the accounts’ history of previous violations, including tweet deletion, profile modifications, account locks and permanent suspension. |

TYPE OF CONTENT

| Platform | Organic Content | Advertisement Content |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook | Meta does not communicate, beyond its general policy of fighting disinformation and insisting on the integrity of debates and the reduction of non-authentic coordination, on content that is specifically forbidden during an election period. Communications are tailored to the programmes implemented during high-stakes elections . | The Advertising Standards consider that “advertisers can run ads about social issues, elections or politics, provided that the advertiser complies with all applicable laws and the authorisation process required by Meta. Meta may restrict issue, electoral or political ads. In addition, certain content related to elections may be prohibited by local law or removed in specific regions ahead of voting.” |
| Instagram | Meta does not communicate, beyond its general policy of fighting disinformation and insisting on the integrity of debates and the reduction of non-authentic coordination, on content that is specifically forbidden during an election period. Communications are tailored to the programmes implemented during high-stakes elections . | The Advertising Standards consider that “advertisers can run ads about social issues, elections or politics, provided that the advertiser complies with all applicable laws and the authorisation process required by Meta. Meta may restrict issue, electoral or political ads. In addition, certain content related to elections may be prohibited by local law or removed in specific regions ahead of voting.” |
| YouTube | Detailed Elections misinformation policies , including voter suppression, candidate eligibility, incitement to interfere with democratic processes, distribution of hacked materials and election integrity. | YouTube ads must comply with Google Ads Policies , that “expect all political ads and destinations to comply with local legal requirements. This includes campaign and election laws and mandated election “silence periods” for any geographic areas they target.” In some regions, election ads may run only if the advertiser is verified by Google. In other regions, there are restrictions on political ads. |
| TikTok | The elections integrity guidelines prohibit false claims that seek to erode trust in public institutions, such as claims of voter fraud resulting from voting by mail or claims that a vote won’t count; content that misrepresents the date of an election; attempts to intimidate voters or suppress voting. | TikTok elections integrity guidelines stipulate that the platform doesn’t accept political ads. |
| Twitter | The Twitter Rules state that the platform cannot be used for the purpose of manipulating or interfering in elections or other civic processes. This includes posting or sharing content that may suppress participation or mislead people about when, where, or how to participate in a civic process. | It is unclear if elections misinformation applies to inappropriate content and in which cases they may fall under the Eligibility Policy on Sensitive Events . |

CROSS-PLATFORM COMPARISON

| Common traits | Facebook | Instagram | YouTube | TikTok | Twitter |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|--------|---------|
| Definition of elections misinformation based on falsity and/or mislead | X* | X* | X | X | X |
| Definition of elections misinformation based on third-party assessment | X | X | | | X |
| Rationale for removing elections misinformation based on risk of harm | | | X | X | X |
| Specific elections resources | X | X | X | X | |
| Human content moderators | X | X | X | X | X |
| Collaboration with local authorities and organisations | X | X | X | X | X |
| Collaboration with fact-checkers | X | X | X | X | X |
| Labelling of elections misinformation | X | X | X | X | X |
| Downranking of elections misinformation | X | X | X | X | X |
| Demonetisation of elections misinformation | X | X | X | ** | X |
| Strike policy | X | X | X | X | X |
| Removal of elections misinformation | X | X | X | X | X |
| Prohibition of elections misinformation | X | X | X | X | X |
| Advertising standards for elections misinformation | X | X | X | ** | X |

*"political speeches" are excluded from this policy under the principle of ["newsworthiness"](#).

**Not applicable (no political ads).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This final section offers the opportunity to express some considerations that emerged from compiling this factsheet.

- One of the most positive findings of this study is that all of the platforms studied identified electoral misinformation as a specific risk deserving special attention because of the potential public harm it can cause. Although many of the guidelines on this form of misinformation are common to other misinformation prevention policies, the fact that all platforms offer a resource centre dedicated to elections and other civic events is a sign of their interest.
- All platforms show their intention to set up partnerships to counter electoral misinformation: several are already working with third-party fact-checkers, members of the International Fact-Checking Network regularly. Some are setting up special arrangements for high-stakes elections, either because of the size of the country or because the election is likely to be violent.
- To go into more detail, Meta (whose policies on disinformation are almost entirely aligned between the two platforms studied, Facebook and Instagram) is undoubtedly the most proactive platform, displaying firm commitments and promises of resources. It is also the platform that makes the most effort in terms of resources invested and transparency with its Oversight Board.
- However, Meta is also the platform with the heaviest record, which has tainted its image. Cambridge Analytica scraped the data of 87 million of its users in order to target pro-Brexit messages in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the US in 2016, as well as in other votes. Following this scandal, the impact of which on the outcome of the votes is challenging to assess with certainty, but undoubtedly significant. Facebook made major changes to its operations and strengthened its user protections. However, in 2021, the Facebooks leaks, published by whistle-blower Frances Haugen, recalled, among many other critical elements, the role of the platform in several violent events during votes in developing countries (India, Ethiopia, etc.), due to the lack of human resources to remove hate speech or speech involving certain ethnic groups.
- The information on the Twitter website should be taken with great caution following its takeover by [Elon Musk](#). A significant proportion of the company's policies pre-date his arrival and have not yet been updated. All the developments since then (including the dismissal of a large number of integrity, security, and moderation staff) are extremely worrying. Whatever guidelines for election integrity are published on Twitter's corporate website, it remains to be seen whether the company has the means and the will to implement them in future elections. In any case, the Turkish elections in May 2023 provided a first worrying case in point when Elon Musk agreed at the request of the Turkish president to block the accounts of a dozen opposition figures. From this point of view, the European regulation, because it is binding and provides for heavy financial penalties, could be a particularly useful safeguard.
- TikTok tries not to interfere too much in (mis)information-related issues by insisting in its policies that it is, first and foremost, an entertainment platform, not a media outlet. Its policy on preventing electoral misinformation is probably the least developed, and it believes it can avoid any problems by banning political advertisements (it could be embarrassing if hidden political advertisements escape the ban).
- YouTube can rely on its parent company, Google, which has enormous resources, including solid legal teams. However, the pandemic has shown a certain permissiveness toward medical misinformation content and a lack of responsiveness. While moderation of political speech remains an extremely sensitive issue (see Meta's caution), YouTube has nonetheless been able to make firm decisions, for example, by removing videos of [Donald Trump](#) in the face of the Capitol Hill attack.