▶ YouTube

The 2022 US midterm elections on YouTube:
Retrospective

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Introduction

YouTube provided an opportunity for millions of users from across the United States during the 2022 midterm elections to learn and engage in a variety of ways. Voters were able to learn about political leaders, hear directly from candidates, dig into policy issues, and stay informed on the latest news and election results.

Our goal during this election cycle was to support users finding high-quality information while ensuring that content that violates our policies were removed, authoritative news sources were prominently surfaced and creators with a broad range of voices were rewarded. We're constantly working to make sure we can be a reliable source for timely news and information. That's why over the years we've built policies, systems and teams that connect viewers to authoritative content and limit the spread of harmful misinformation. This work is especially critical when it comes to supporting elections around the world.

The goal of this report is to provide an overview of YouTube's work to support the 2022 U.S. midterm elections. We have organized the aspects of our work in this report according to YouTube's pillars of responsibility:

Remove
content that violates our policies

Connect
people to authoritative information on our platform

Reward
trusted Creators

In addition, we highlight the ways that candidates, political organizations, and creators used our platform to foster civic engagement and political discourse online.

We close this report with a few takeaways that will inform our work heading into future elections in the U.S. and internationally.

🗑 **Remove**

YouTube has clear, public policies via our Community Guidelines which define what is not allowed on the platform, including policies prohibiting hate speech, harassment, deceptive practices, and incitement to violence. We have several policies specific to election-related content, and we enforce our policies consistently for everyone, regardless of the speaker's public figure status or their political viewpoint. In general, content providing sufficient educational, documentary, scientific, or artistic context is allowed on YouTube.

During the 2022 midterm election cycle, we removed a number of videos related to the midterms for violating our Community Guidelines and Terms of Service. This included videos that violated our election integrity policy by claiming widespread fraud, errors, or glitches occurred in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, or alleging past US presidential elections were stolen or rigged. We also issued strikes to channels that uploaded violative content related to the midterms, resulting in a temporary suspension from uploading new content.

■ **Enforcement**

We use a combination of people and machine learning to detect potentially problematic content at scale and identify whether it violates our policies. If it does, the content is removed and is used to train our machines for better coverage in the future. By staying ahead of new technologies and tactics that could be used by malicious actors, we are able to more quickly detect and remove misleading content. We also heavily invest in research and development.

Our Intelligence Desk exists to detect new trends surrounding inappropriate content and problematic behaviors, and to make sure our teams are prepared to address them before they become a larger issue.

Our teams work hard to ensure that we are striking a balance between allowing for a broad range of political speech and adhering to our responsibility of making sure our platform isn't abused to incite real-world harm or spread harmful misinformation. We engage with experts, researchers and organizations to ensure that our policies and products are meeting that goal.

For the 2022 US midterm elections, we did this through a mix of long-standing election integrity policies. For example, throughout this election cycle, we remained vigilant to ensure content intended to mislead voters about where or how to vote was removed so users had accurate information about the upcoming election.

YouTube holds creators accountable who violate our Community Guidelines via a strike system See more about our strike system here.

Additionally, severe misconduct has a zero tolerance policy and results in immediate termination. When a creator's channel is terminated, we consider any attempt by that creator to create or use another channel to upload content circumvention and will terminate those channels as well.

Election-related policies

The tables below provide details of policies relevant to election content, together with corresponding examples. This content is available to all users in the YouTube Help Center.

Election misinformation policies

Candidate eligibility

Content that advances false claims related to the technical eligibility requirements for current political candidates and sitting elected government officials to serve in office. Eligibility requirements considered are based on applicable national law, and include age, citizenship, or vital status.

EXAMPLES
- Claims that a candidate or sitting government official is not eligible to hold office based on false information about the age required to hold office in that country.
- Claims that a candidate or sitting government official is not eligible to hold office based on false information about citizenship status requirements to hold office in that country.
- Claims that a candidate or sitting government official is ineligible for office based on false claims that they're deceased, not old enough, or otherwise do not meet eligibility requirements.

Voter suppression

Content aiming to mislead voters about the time, place, means, or eligibility requirements for voting, or false claims that could materially discourage voting.

EXAMPLES
- Telling viewers they can vote through fake methods like texting their vote to a particular number.
- Giving made up voter eligibility requirements like saying that a particular election is only open to voters over 50 years old.
- Telling viewers an incorrect election date.
- Claiming that a voter's political party affiliation is visible on a vote-by-mail envelope.

Incitement to interfere in democratic processes

Content encouraging others to interfere with democratic processes, such as obstructing or interrupting voting procedures.

EXAMPLES
- Telling viewers to create long voting lines with the purpose of making it harder for others to vote.
- Telling viewers to hack government websites to delay the release of election results.

Distribution of hacked materials

Content that contains hacked information, the disclosure of which may interfere with democratic processes, such as elections and censuses.

EXAMPLES ● For example, videos that contain hacked information, such as hacked emails, about a political candidate shared with the intent to interfere in an election.

Election integrity

Content that advances false claims that widespread fraud, errors, or glitches occurred during certain past elections to determine heads of government

EXAMPLES ● Content advancing false claims that widespread fraud, errors, or glitches occurred in certain past elections to determine heads of government.

● Content that claims that the certified results of those elections were false.

● These policies currently apply to:

  ○ Any past U.S. Presidential election
  ○ The 2021 German federal election
  ○ The 2014, 2018, and 2022 Brazilian Presidential elections

In addition to those policies, several other policies in our Community Guidelines may be relevant to 2022 U.S. midterm election content. These are outlined below.

Policies relating to violence, hate, and harassment

Violent or graphic content
Violent or gory content intended to shock or disgust viewers, or content encouraging others to commit violent acts are not allowed on YouTube.

EXAMPLE
- Encouraging others to go to a particular place to commit violence, to perform violence at a particular time, or to target individuals or groups with violence.

Hate speech
We remove content promoting violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on protected attributes, including ethnicity, race, and immigration status.

EXAMPLE
- Encouraging violence against individuals or groups based on any of the attributes listed in our policy. We don't allow threats on YouTube, and we treat implied calls for violence as real threats.

Harassment
Content that threatens individuals is not allowed on YouTube, for example election workers. We also do not allow content that targets an individual with prolonged or malicious insults based on intrinsic attributes, including their protected group status or physical traits.

EXAMPLES
- Threatening someone's physical safety. This includes implied threats like "when I see you next, things will end badly for you," explicit threats like "when I see you on Saturday I'm going to punch you in the face," or implying violence by saying things such as "You better watch out" while brandishing a weapon.

- Content that incites others to harass or threaten individuals on or off YouTube.

- Content making implicit or explicit threats of physical harm or destruction of property against identifiable individuals, for example poll workers.

- Content that targets people as part of a harmful conspiracy theory where the theory has been linked to threats or violent acts

Live streams featuring firearms
YouTube doesn't allow live streams that show someone holding, handling, or transporting a firearm.

EXAMPLES
- Live streams that feature someone holding or handling a firearm, regardless of whether or not they are firing it.

- Live streams that feature someone transporting firearms from place to place, such as by carrying them or traveling with them by car, truck, or other vehicle.

We terminate channels for the following Community Guidelines violations:

Policies relating to misrepresentation

Impersonation

A channel that copies another channel's profile, background, or overall look and feel in such a way that makes it look like someone else's channel or that intends to look like someone else is posting. The channel does not have to be 100% identical, as long as the intent is clear to copy the other channel. We also terminate channels that misrepresent their country of origin or conceal their association with a government actor.

EXAMPLES
- Setting up a channel using the name and image of a person, and then pretending that person is posting content to the channel.
- Channels impersonating an existing news channel.

Fake engagement

YouTube doesn't allow anything that artificially increases the number of views, likes, comments, or other metric either through the use of automatic systems or by serving up videos to unsuspecting viewers. Additionally, content that solely exists to incentivize viewers for engagement (views, likes, comments, etc) is prohibited.

EXAMPLE
- Using someone else's real name, user name, image, brand, logo, or other personal information to trick people into believing you are that person.

Coordinated influence operations

To combat foreign and domestic coordinated influence operations looking to interfere in electoral processes, we coordinate closely with Google's Threat Analysis Group (TAG) to identify bad actors and terminate their channels and accounts. Through TAG, we work with other technology companies to share intelligence and best practices, as well as to share threat information with law enforcement. We publish information about action taken on YouTube accounts in Google's quarterly TAG bulletin.

Throughout the 2022 midterms, our Trust and Safety team and TAG worked around the clock to monitor and stop any significant coordinated influence campaigns targeting, or attempting to influence, U.S. voters on our platforms. Beyond election cycles, we've continued to make significant investments in our global operations to ensure our products remain safe and secure.

Remove by the numbers

Videos removed for violating our policies (as of December 2022):

> 10,000

We removed over 10,000 videos related to the midterms for violating our Community Guidelines.

> 75%

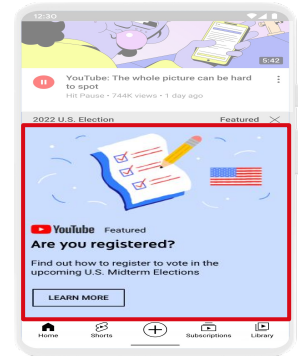Over 75% of those removed videos were taken down before they had 100 views.

Raise

It is critical for viewers to be connected to authoritative content on our platform such as high-quality election news and information. When users searched for midterms content on YouTube, our systems prominently recommend content coming from authoritative national and local news sources like PBS NewsHour, The Wall Street Journal, Univision and local ABC, CBS and NBC affiliates.

Voter reminders

Throughout the election cycle, we provided viewers links to timely, authoritative information about the voting process directly on the homepage, such as how to register to vote, how to vote, and how to volunteer to be a poll worker.

Mock display. For illustration purposes only.

Authoritative news

During major news moments, YouTube shows content from trusted sources for viewers in prominent news shelves, and the midterms were no exception. In the month of November alone, our Top News shelf surfaced more than 900,000 times at the top of search results in both English and Spanish. Over 85% of recommendations on midterms-related topics came from authoritative news sources, such as Univision and NBC News. And we found that when people searched for news and information about the midterms, on average, more than 85% of the videos in search results came from quality news sources, such as CNN en Español and The Wall Street Journal. The remaining content covered topics like entertainment and finance.
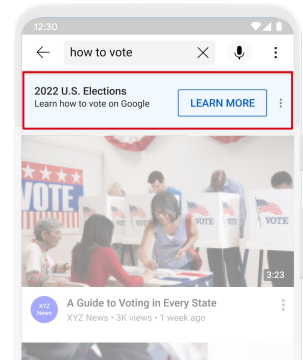
■ Information panels

As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure users have access to high quality, authoritative information about important civic events, YouTube uses a variety of information panels to provide viewers with additional context in response to certain types of search queries and alongside certain types of video content. For the 2022 midterms, these panels were available in both English and Spanish, and linked out to voter registration steps, content from authoritative sources, candidate information panels, and more. These panels also directed users to a variety of sources, including Google Search's election resources and the Bipartisan Policy Center. We detail each of these relevant panels in the table below. In total, our election-related information panels and reminders have been shown over 2 billion times, over 100 million of which were in Spanish.

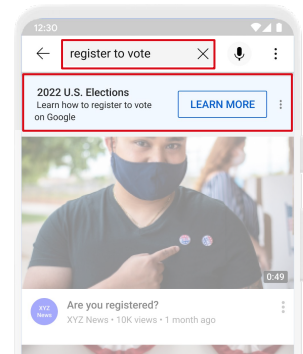## Voting and candidate information panels

How to vote

We showed an information panel at the top of results when users searched YouTube for specific queries related to how to vote. This panel linked to Google's "How to vote" feature, with authoritative information about how to vote in a user's state, including details such as ID requirements, registration and voting deadlines, and guidance for different means of voting, such as in person or by mail.

Images, headlines, and sources are simulated in order to illustrate this feature
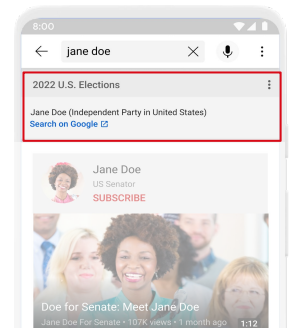
Register to vote

When users searched for specific queries related to voter registration on YouTube, they were shown an information panel at the top of the page that linked to Google's "How to register to vote" feature for their state. Information relating to how to register to vote included details such as deadlines, registration options, and an easy way to check the status of your registration.

Images, headlines, and sources are simulated in order to illustrate this feature

Candidate info panels

When a user searched for 2022 midterm candidates on YouTube, we surfaced an information panel with information about that candidate—including party affiliation, office and, when available, the official YouTube channel of the candidate—above search results.

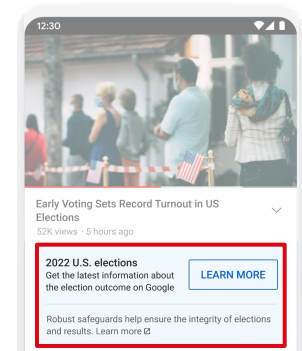*Images, headlines, and sources are simulated in order to illustrate this feature*

Information panels to connect users to additional authoritative context
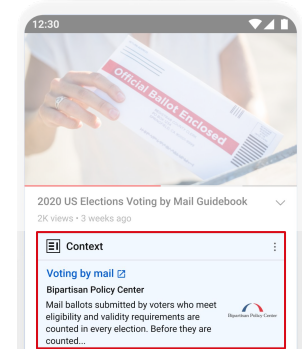
Election results

On Election Day, we pointed to Google's election results page, which included information from the AP.

Images, headlines, and sources are simulated in order to illustrate this feature

Vote by mail

In 2018, we started to show information panels linking to third-party sources around a small number of well-established topics that are subject to misinformation, such as the moon landing or QAnon. For the 2020 presidential elections and 2022 U.S. midterm elections, voting by mail was available in this set of topics as well. Available in both English and Spanish, when U.S. users search for queries related to voting by mail or view a video with related content, we show an information panel that links to authoritative information from the Bipartisan Policy Center, a bipartisan third-party think tank.
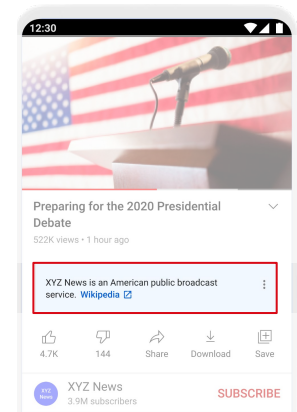
Images, headlines, and sources are simulated in order to illustrate this feature

Fact check info panels

In spring of 2020, we rolled out our fact check information panels to the United States. This feature expanded on the other ways we raise and connect users with authoritative sources by providing fresh context from third-party fact-checked articles above search results for relevant queries—including specific claims about the elections. For example, in the wake of the January 6 incident at the Capitol, our fact check panels surfaced articles debunking rumors that the perpetrators were antifa posing as Trump supporters when users searched for terms like "antifa at capitol" and "antifa capitol hill."

Publisher context

We show information panels below videos uploaded by news broadcasters that receive some level of government or public funding. Our goal is to equip users with additional information to help them better understand the sources of news content that they choose to watch on YouTube.

X, Y, Z, News is a simulated news service for demonstration purposes only. Images, headlines, and sources are simulated in order to illustrate this feature.

▪ Hit pause

Beyond election-specific policies, in September 2022 YouTube launched a new Media Literacy campaign, named Hit Pause, to help viewers better assess content they watch and share. The program teaches viewers how to identify different manipulation tactics used to spread misinformation – from using emotional language to cherry picking information. Content was developed in partnership with the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) and with the goal of providing all viewers with resources to assess all kinds of information.

▪ Raise by the numbers

900K+
From November 1 until November 15*, top news shelf in Search featuring authoritative news sources was shown over 900K number of times in the US in both English and Spanish.

65M+
From November 1 until November 15, our breaking news and top news shelves on Home received more than 65M views in the US.

2B+
As of December 2022, our election-related information panels and PSAs have been collectively shown over 2B times in the US, 100M of which were in Spanish.

1B+
As of December 2022, our voter education PSAs and information panels, which helped people learn how to vote and how to register, were collectively shown in the US over 1B times.

3.5M+
As of December 2022, candidate information panels were surfaced for viewers over 3.5M times on related searches in the US, over 60,000 times of which were in Spanish.

> 85%
On election-related searches between one week leading into and following election day (November 1 to November 15), at least 85% of videos results came from authoritative sources.

* Metrics encompass news sources and engagement the two weeks surrounding Election Day, from November 1 to November 15.

$ Reward

YouTube empowers Creators to earn money directly on our platform in a variety of different ways, including through placed advertising, merchandise sales, and subscriptions. Creators must first be eligible for the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) in order to earn money from advertising on their videos and live streams. Monetization is a privilege, and we reward only Creators who meet eligibility thresholds and follow our guidelines. We review Creators' channels prior to approving YPP applications and review channel content periodically as well to ensure their content adheres to our Community Guidelines and advertiser-friendly content guidelines.

Monetization of election-related content

Advertising is the primary way Creators can earn money on YouTube. Advertising revenue is generated when people watch ads that are running on videos. This revenue from ads is shared between YouTube and the Creator—thus empowering Creators to directly profit from their work. YPP Creators who monetize via advertising must adhere to our Ad-Friendly Guidelines for their content. These guidelines go above and beyond our Community Guidelines to hold monetized content to an even higher standard. If Creator content violates any of our Community Guidelines, including the election-related policies outlined previously, that content will be removed from YouTube. If a video violates our Ad-Friendly Guidelines, we may demonetize or limit monetization on that video. Creators who repeatedly violate our rules may be suspended from YPP either temporarily or permanently, depending on the scope and frequency of violations.

Political advertising

Throughout the course of the election cycle, candidates ran advertisements on YouTube. Because Google's ads policies govern all ads that run on YouTube, every political ad that ran on our platform were subject to Google Ads policies specific to political advertising. When it comes to elections, the Google Ads misrepresentation policy prohibits advertising content "making claims that are demonstrably false and could significantly undermine participation or trust in an electoral or democratic process."

Verified U.S. election advertisers can only target election ads based on age, gender, location (e.g., postal code), and context (e.g., topics). Both machine detection and human review are used to enforce these policies. Finally, clear disclosures are required for all election ads to help users better understand who is paying for them. This data is publicly available in Google's Political Advertising Transparency Report.

◼ Engagement

As a platform that welcomes diverse points of view and open discourse, we are proud of the role that YouTube can play in major civic moments. Alongside our always-on product features that raise information from authoritative sources on our platform, we adopt additional measures during key civics and election moments. For example, in addition to our information panels, we directed users to information about voting and election results on Google search.

YouTube offers a range of tools and resources to help civics partners build their brands and connect with constituents, including a series of guides to help partners get started. Throughout the 2022 U.S. midterm election season, we saw candidates and campaigns use YouTube to directly speak to and hear from a diverse set of communities. They hosted town halls, sat down for in-depth interviews with Creators, and created videos explaining their position on America's most pressing issues. To do this, they used a range of YouTube's features such as:

- Cards and end screens, to encourage action beyond YouTube, including links to approved crowdfunding sites—which now include ActBlue and WinRed.

- Live streaming, to hold events such as roundtables and press conferences, allowing for substantive discussions directly with the audience, in real time.

- Shorts and Community, to interact with voters and continue the conversation, even after an official campaign event.

To help navigate these features and ensure they're using YouTube effectively, candidates and campaigns across the political spectrum also received support from our partnerships team.

■ Conclusion

We understand the need for intense scrutiny of our election-related work. Our teams work hard 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 spread harmful misinformation. We welcome ongoing debate and discussion and will keep engaging with experts, researchers, and organizations to ensure our policies and products are meeting that goal. And as always, we'll apply learnings from this election to our ongoing efforts to protect the integrity of elections around the world.

■ Additional resources

- [How YouTube Works](#)

- [YouTube Transparency Report](#)

- YouTube blog posts:
  - [December 2022](#)
  - [September 2022](#)

- Guides:
  - [Global Getting Started Guide for Civics](#)
  - [Live streaming Guide for Civics](#)

- Political advertising:
  - [Political advertising report](#)