

MEMO: FACEBOOK IS FAILING ITS OWN ELECTION TESTS

Facebook has failed to deliver on a slew of public commitments it made before, during, and after Election Day -- and the damage is far from over.

In September 2020, Mark Zuckerberg [said](#) that for Facebook, the U.S. presidential election “is not going to be business as usual.” In October 2020, Facebook’s Vice President of Global Affairs and Communications Nick Clegg [made](#) an even bolder commitment: “Today we can say it: we are ready.” The weeks since have shown how woefully unprepared Facebook was to protect the integrity of the 2020 election. Despite warnings from election and technology experts, Facebook failed to meet a slew of important policy commitments it made to the public, including on misinformation, false claims of victory, advertisements, false claims of voter fraud, and incitement of violence.

When evaluating the company against its own promises, a clear picture emerges: Facebook’s measures were inconsistent, reactionary, and inadequate -- often written to avoid responsibility and prioritize the protection of its own image above American democracy.

[FACEBOOK ON GROUPS](#) (10/7/20): “We continue to take down content proactively, including in groups that are private. We also -- once we have misinformation that our third party fact checker has rated, we also match it to content inside private groups and that ensures that even those spaces are spaces where our [policies] are enforced.”

[ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING:](#) “Facebook Groups pose a singular threat to this election season. They’ve become hidden breeding grounds for disinformation campaigns and organizing platforms for extremists.”

REALITY:

- > [Axios | Facebook Groups are Turning into Election Disinformation Vectors](#)
- > [Snopes | Violence Brewed in Facebook Groups Ahead of ‘Stop The Steal’ Protests](#)
- > [Mashable | After Ban, New ‘Stop the Steal’ Groups Spread Conspiracy Theories on Facebook](#)
- > [Detroit Metro Times | Detroit Election Disruption Linked to Private Facebook Group](#)
- > [Newsweek | Trump Supporters That Harassed Biden Bus Organized in Private Facebook Group That Touted QAnon](#)

[FACEBOOK ON REPEAT MISINFORMATION SPREADERS](#) (10/21/19): “[I]f Pages, domains or Groups repeatedly share misinformation, we’ll continue to reduce their overall distribution”

ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING: “A disproportionate amount of harmful misinformation on social media platforms can be tied back to a relatively small number of accounts...that effectively serve as superspreaders...By imposing a series of escalating penalties for repeat offenders during election season, platforms can head off the most insidious vectors of voting disinformation.”

REALITY:

- > [Washington Post | Trump Allies, Largely Unconstrained by Facebook’s Rules Against Repeated Falsehoods, Cement Pre-Election Dominance](#)
- > [AP | Report: Social Media Influencers Push Voting Misinformation](#)
- > [Politico | Pressure Rises on Facebook, Twitter to Rein in Trump as False Claims Spread](#)

[FACEBOOK ON FALSE VICTORY CLAIMS](#) (10/7/20): “We will apply a label when a candidate posts prematurely about victory.”

ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING: “Social media platforms should implement a rapid preclearance process for high-reach accounts to screen posts for violations of...civic integrity policies in the volatile period after polls close.”

REALITY:

- > [VICE | Facebook Fails To Halt Trump’s Premature Victory Claims](#)
- > [CNBC | Twitter And Facebook Race To Label A Slew Of Posts Making False Election Claims Before All Votes Counted](#)
- > [New York Times | False Claims That Biden ‘Lost’ Pennsylvania Surge, and Tech Companies Struggle to Keep Up](#)

FACEBOOK ON FALSE CLAIMS OF VOTER FRAUD (9/3/20): “We will attach an informational label to content that seeks to delegitimize the outcome of the election or discuss the legitimacy of voting methods, for example, by claiming that lawful methods of voting will lead to fraud.”

ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING: “All platforms should make clear these neutral labels are distinct from, and not a substitute for, fact-checking treatments. Facebook’s efforts have already drawn consternation for this ambiguity.”

REALITY:

- > [Guardian | Trump's Vote Fraud Claims Go Viral on Social Media Despite Curbs](#)
- > [Washington Post | Twitter and Facebook Warning Labels Aren't Enough To Save Democracy](#)
- > [Business Insider | Twitter Did a Better Job than Facebook at Reining in Trump's False Election Posts, Misinformation Experts Say](#)

FACEBOOK ON ADS (9/3/20): “In the final days of an election there may not be enough time to contest new claims. So in the week before the election, we won't accept new political or issue ads.”

ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING: “Facebook[’s ad moratorium will] block campaigns and even officials from running new ads at a critical juncture.”

REALITY:

- > [Recode | Facebook's Political Ads Policy is Predictably Turning out to be a Disaster](#)
- > [Protocol | Democrats Say Facebook Cost Them Days of Critical, Last-minute Advertising](#)
- > [CNET | Facebook, Google Face Criticism Over Political-ad Bans Ahead of Senate Runoffs in Georgia](#)

FACEBOOK ON VIOLENCE (9/30/20): "We are very focused on getting all mentions of hate and violence down before the election and after election."

ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING: "Social media platforms should implement a rapid preclearance process for high-reach accounts to screen posts for violations of violence incitement."

REALITY:

- > [Buzzfeed | Facebook Has A Metric For "Violence And Incitement Trends." It's Rising](#)
- > [Reuters | Thousands of Facebook Groups Buzzed with Calls for Violence Ahead of U.S. Election](#)
- > [HuffPost | Pro-Trump Groups Call For Civil War, In Apparent Defiance Of Facebook's Policy](#)

FACEBOOK ON VOTER SUPPRESSION (6/26/20): "We'll also remove any threats of coordinated interference... which can be used to intimidate voters. We will continue to review our voter suppression policies on an ongoing basis as part of our work on voter engagement and racial justice."

ACCOUNTABLE TECH WARNING: "Facebook's internal civil rights audit...makes clear that the platform is actively facilitating voter suppression, magnifying rampant election disinformation, and seeding hate."

REALITY:

- > [NBC News | With Days Left, Black Voters Face Orchestrated Efforts to Discourage Voting](#)
- > [NPR | Black And Latino Voters Flooded With Disinformation In Election's Final Days](#)
- > [NBC News | In Florida, Spanish-Language Misinformation Embraces Misleading Election Day Claims](#)

Facebook's missteps and empty promises continue to erode a shared baseline of truth that a functioning democracy requires. If left unchecked, the company will continue to foment misinformation, provide an organizing platform for hate groups, and profit off of polarization-- driving the country further and further apart. Facebook must be held to account for the damage it continues to do.