Smart Social Listening
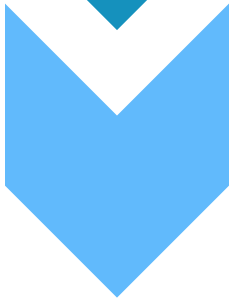## What to Look for and What to Do
August 2021

Agenda

Defining the threat of mis/disinformation

Understanding right-wing tactics on social media

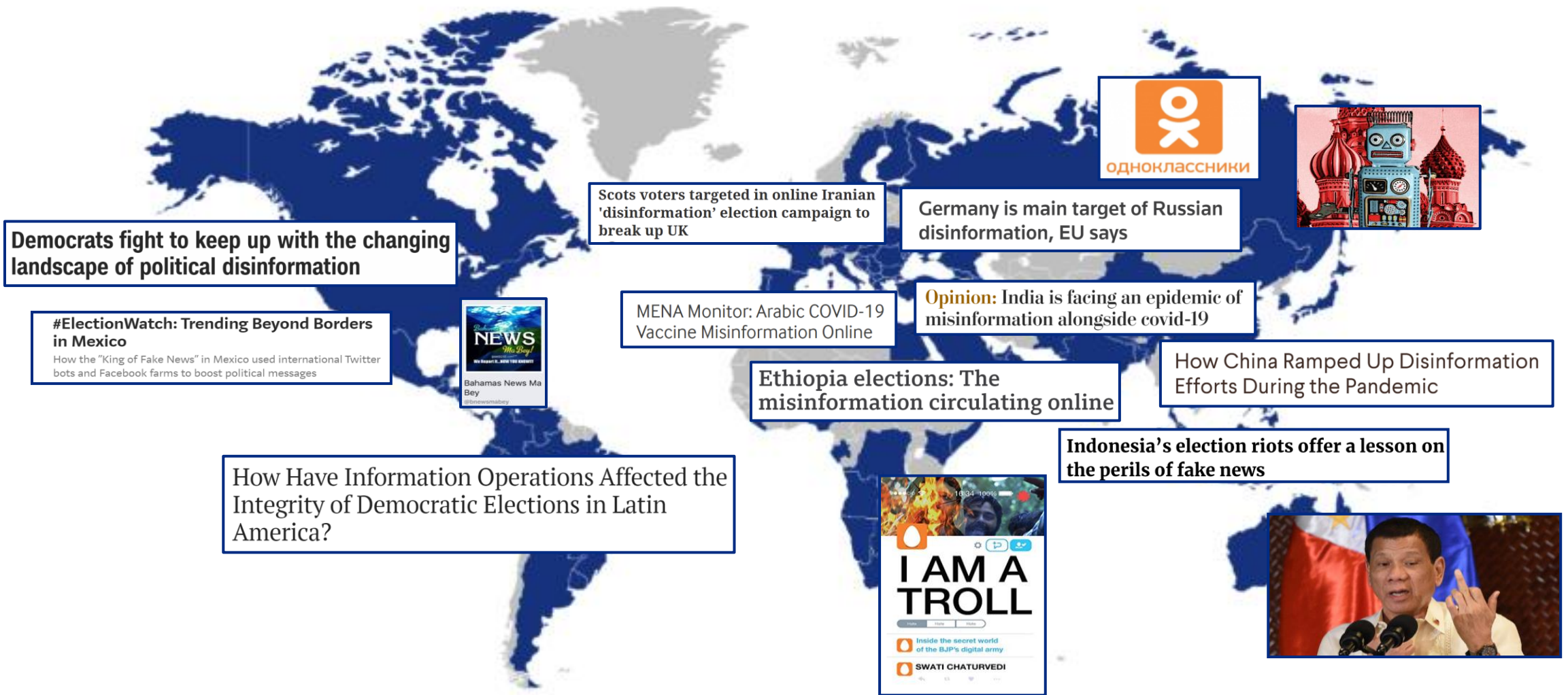Assessing what *really* matters and adhering to best practices

Discussion and possible next steps
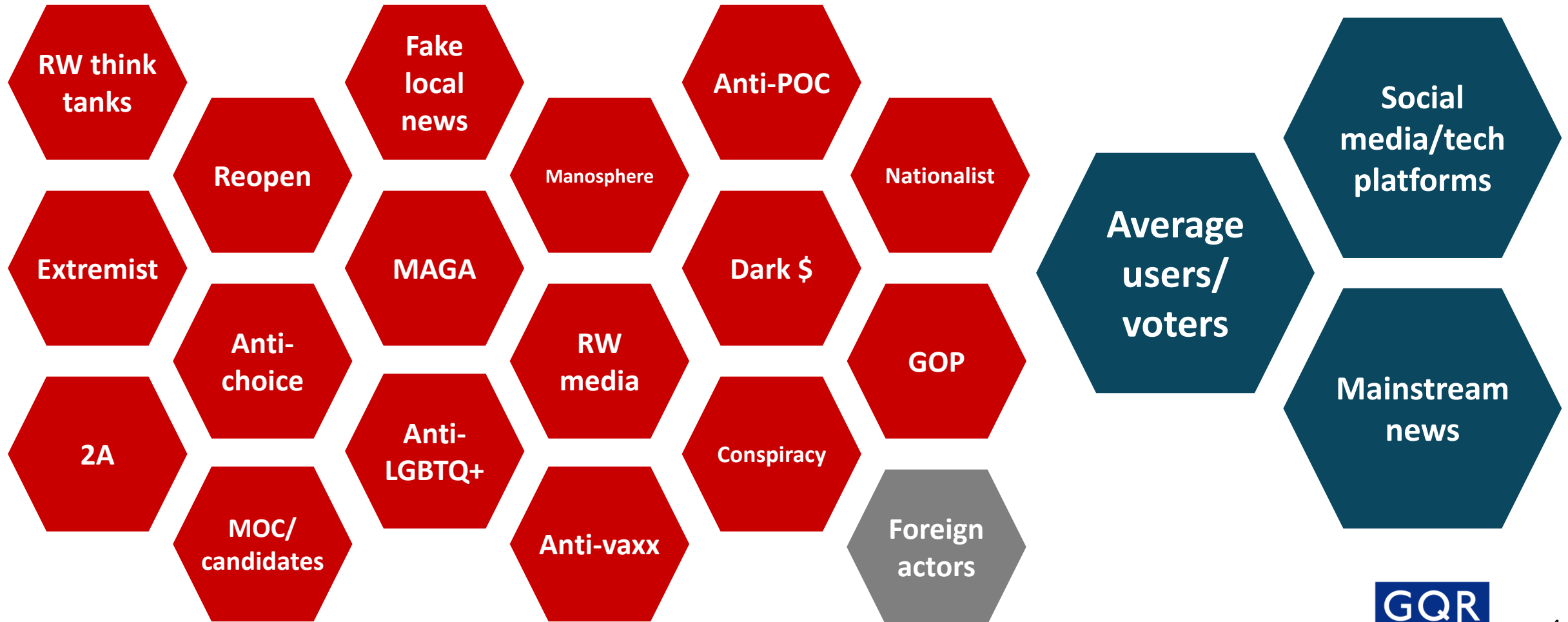
DEFINING THE THREAT OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

Global problem, constantly evolving, grim outlook

Scots voters targeted in online Iranian 'disinformation' election campaign to break up UK

Germany is main target of Russian disinformation, EU says

Democrats fight to keep up with the changing landscape of political disinformation

#ElectionWatch: Trending Beyond Borders in Mexico
How the "King of Fake News" in Mexico used international Twitter bots and Facebook farms to boost political messages

MENA Monitor: Arabic COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation Online

Opinion: India is facing an epidemic of misinformation alongside covid-19

How China Ramped Up Disinformation Efforts During the Pandemic

Ethiopia elections: The misinformation circulating online

Indonesia's election riots offer a lesson on the perils of fake news

How Have Information Operations Affected the Integrity of Democratic Elections in Latin America?

I AM A TROLL
Inside the secret world of the BJP's digital army
SWATI CHATURVEDI

3

Many players in the "game," with different incentives

Right-wing infrastructure is deeply connected, often overlaps

Other core players

RW think tanks

Fake local news

Anti-POC

Reopen

Manosphere

Nationalist

Extremist

MAGA

Dark $

Anti-choice

RW media

GOP

2A

Anti-LGBTQ+

Conspiracy

MOC/ candidates

Anti-vaxx

Foreign actors

Average users/ voters

Social media/tech platforms

Mainstream news

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4

Social media giants are good at PR, bad at solving issues

Policy violations are inconsistently labeled and removed
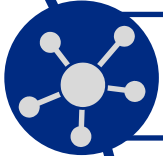
Content removal is slow, allowing widespread sharing before enforcement

Poor moderation of foreign accounts and in languages beyond English

Algorithms still actively recommend some mis/disinformation to users

Simple enforcement-evasion techniques are often effective

Consistently allow paid advertising with false or misleading claims

Impact on Latinx and Spanish-speaking communities

Targeted to Latinx Communities

- Broad, national right-wing narratives: anti-COVID, anti-Dems/Biden, harmful immigration framing, disinfo about media control, etc.
- Harassment and hate speech from fringe communities
- Propaganda around conservative issues
- Anti-socialism messaging
- Exploitation of information voids in Latino and Hispanic news; especially on popular apps like WhatsApp

About Latinx Communities

- Anti-immigration and anti-migrant fear mongering, sustained by the right-wing
- Attacks on Democrats for releasing "dangerous criminals," using examples and images of Latinx individuals
- False information around relief and benefits offered to non-citizens
- Placing blame on immigrants for rising COVID-19 rates, esp in states like FL/TX

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UNDERSTANDING RIGHT-WING TACTICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

5 Tactics to Know

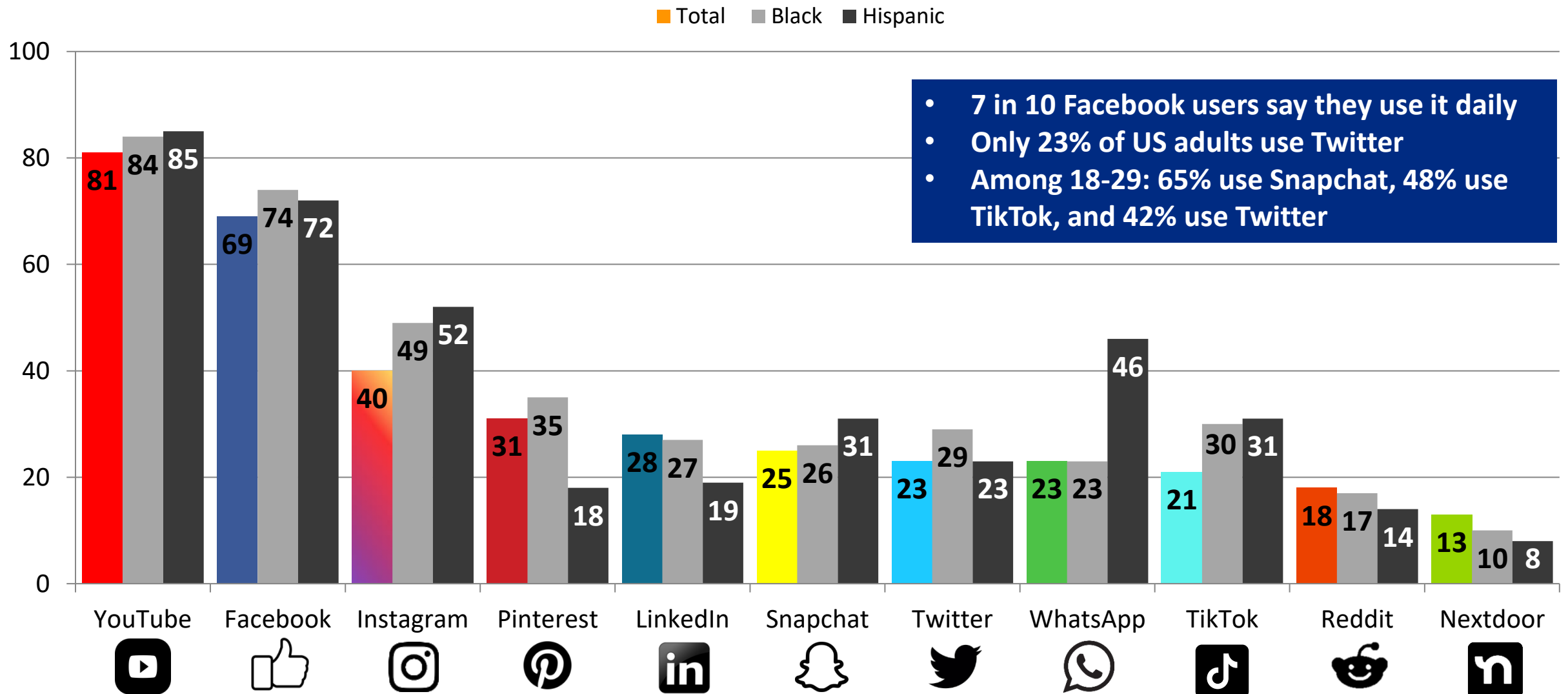**1** **Prioritize major platforms**

2 **Cross-channel repetition**

3 **Build topic momentum**

4 **In-network sharing**

5 **Lean into algorithms**

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Most Americans are using YouTube and Facebook

Total ■ Black ■ Hispanic

- **7 in 10 Facebook users say they use it daily**
- **Only 23% of US adults use Twitter**
- **Among 18-29: 65% use Snapchat, 48% use TikTok, and 42% use Twitter**

	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Snapchat	Twitter	WhatsApp	TikTok	Reddit	Nextdoor
Total	81	69	40	31	28	25	23	23	21	18	13
Black	84	74	49	35	27	26	29	23	30	17	10
Hispanic	85	72	52	18	19	31	23	46	31	14	8

Note: Data sourced from 2021 Pew Research report on social media usage.

Share of U.S. adults who say they ever use the following*

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Right-wing sources consistently perform better on Facebook

Top Web Publishers on Facebook: June 2021	
1. Daily Wire	6. BBC
2. Daily Mail	7. The Blaze
3. Fox News	8. The Guardian
4. Rumble	9. NBC News
5. CNN	10. Western Journal

Data from NewsWhip

Cristiano Lima ✔
@viaCristiano

New: A study found sites that mislead attracted a record share of Facebook engagements in Q2, even as engagement overall took a dive
washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/... tip @Techmeme

Analysis | The Technology 202: Study finds sites that mislead, not flat-out lie, a...
Facebook has tackled the "low-hanging fruit," one analyst said. What's next is the real challenge.
🔗 washingtonpost.com

9:18 AM · Aug 24, 2021 · Twitter Web App

37 Retweets   **6** Quote Tweets   **55** Likes

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Right-wing accounts are also more active on Facebook

Top 10 pro-voting tweets	Top 10 anti-voting tweets
• **Only 1 tweet** has a corresponding FB post	• **5 of 10** have a corresponding FB post
• **4 of the 10 authors do not have** an active FB account FB account	• **All 10 authors have** an active FB account
• **Average engagement is lower on FB post** than corresponding tweets	• **Average engagement is higher on FB posts** than corresponding tweets

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5 Tactics to Know

1 **Prioritize major platforms**

2 **Cross-channel repetition**

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Right-wing content often sees speedy cross-channel repetition

GOP ✓
4d · 🌐

Biden's open borders budget would:

👎 Eliminate $1.5 billion in border wall funding
👎 Cut CBP funding for "Procurement, Construction and Improvements" by 50%
👎 Slash ICE funding in that area by 47%

This is #BidensBorderCrisis.

😠👍😂 642

398 Comments 101 Shares

---

r/Conservative · Posted by u/canfbar Churchillian 2 months ago 🔒

233

Democrats want open borders but won't say so, causing today's cruel crisis

nypost.com/2021/0... ↗

💬 17 Comments ⊞ Award ↗ Share 🔖 Save ⊘ Hide 🚩 Report   82% Upvoted

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OPEN BORDERS

CLOSED SCHOOLS

risepacny

risepacny GOOD MORNING, AMERICA! us #opentheschools #closetheborder #buildthewall #stopbiden #crisis #bordercrisis #uspolitics #political #disaster #democratsdestroyamerica #nomoredemocrats #saveamerica #maga #government #worstadministration #vote #registertovote #helpsaveamerica #voteright #us
6w

keithcraig5349 These and everything else equates to TREASONOUS ADMIN.
6w Reply

101 likes
APRIL 20

Add a comment...   Post

Benny ✓
@bennyjohnson

Biden's First 100 Days Accomplishments:

- Kill Keystone XL Pipeline
- Gas Lines
- $3 Gas (National Avg)
- Inflation
- Crumbling Dollar
- Rising Unemployment
- Open Border Crisis
- Antifa Terror Squads
- Skyrocketing Homicides
- Israel Burning
- China Rising
- Vaccinated Masking

11:17 AM · May 11, 2021 · TweetDeck

6,374 Retweets 608 Quote Tweets 14.1K Likes

Biden's Open-Borders Agenda Is Anything But Humane | Chad Wolf on Fox Business

611 views · Jun 2, 2021   👍 85 👎 2 ↗ SHARE ≡+ SAVE ...

The Heritage Foundation ✓
210K subscribers

13

5 Tactics to Know

1 **Prioritize major platforms**

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The Left leads on HR1/FTPA; the Right leads on voting. Why?

- Right/Left have similar post and interaction trends when it comes to HR 1 or state election policies.

- Right-leaning pages dominate more generic terms related to voting and elections.

Generic voting
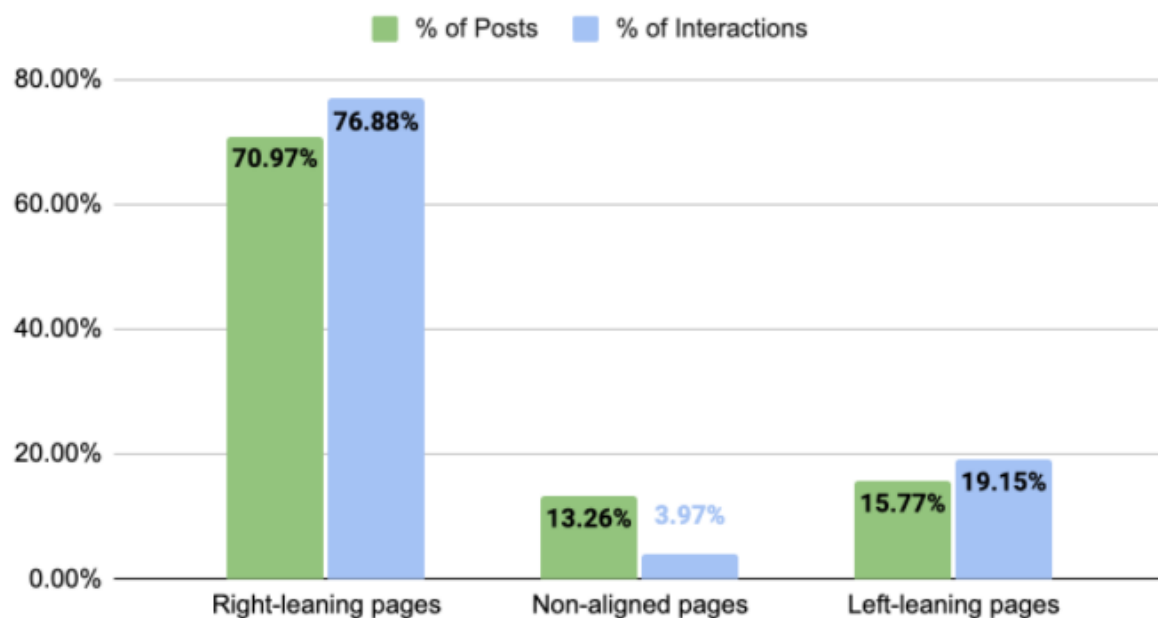
Policy specific
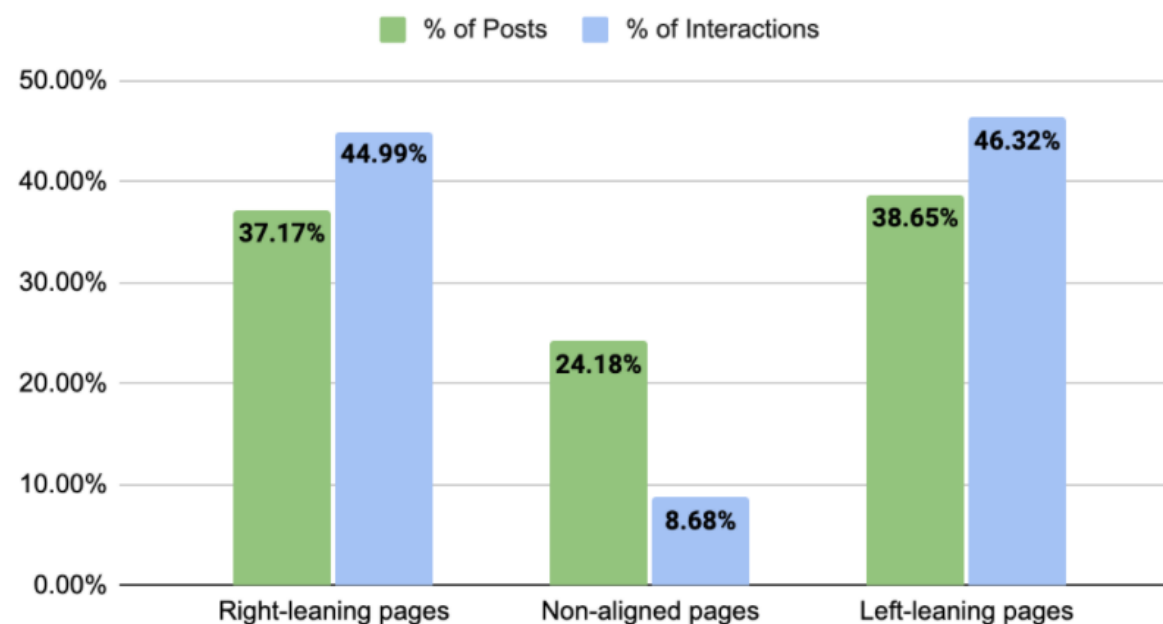
Topic momentum: building up a conversation steadily over time

Florida bans 'critical race theory' from classrooms

Republicans applaud win in TX school board race; a few liberal influencers begin engaging on CRT

TOPIC MOMENTUM

Bill Opposing Critical Race Theory Clears Idaho Senate

DeSantis knocks critical race theory in civics curricula
Associated Press   March 17, 2021

Social media mentions

Fox News mentions
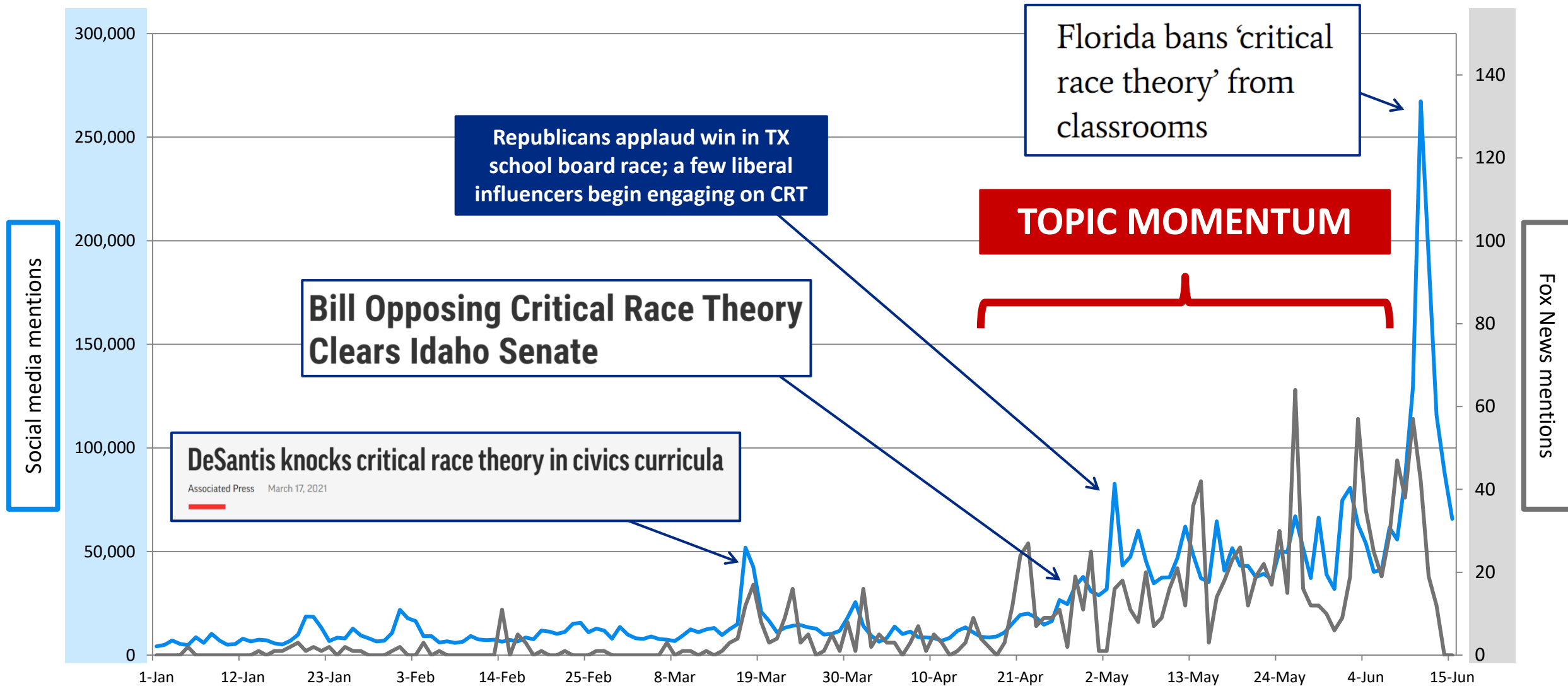
*Note: Social media data pulls from Meltwater firehose and other publicly available social data; Facebook and Instagram are under-represented; cable data courtesy of Media Matters for America

Volume of conversation about critical race theory*, January 1 – June 15, 2021

MEDIA MATTERS FOR AMERICA

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They use events to make *moments* and raise salience of their issues

- **Media Matters data shows:**

  - Fox News increases immigration coverage after Biden's inauguration

  - Fox amplifies, sets terms of the "border crisis" narrative.

  - Right-wing social media helps to amplify framing further.

  - CNN and MSNBC adopt framing, belatedly follow with "border crisis" mentions.

Immigration segments on weekday cable news programming

November 2, 2020 – April 23, 2021

Legend: MSNBC, Fox News, CNN
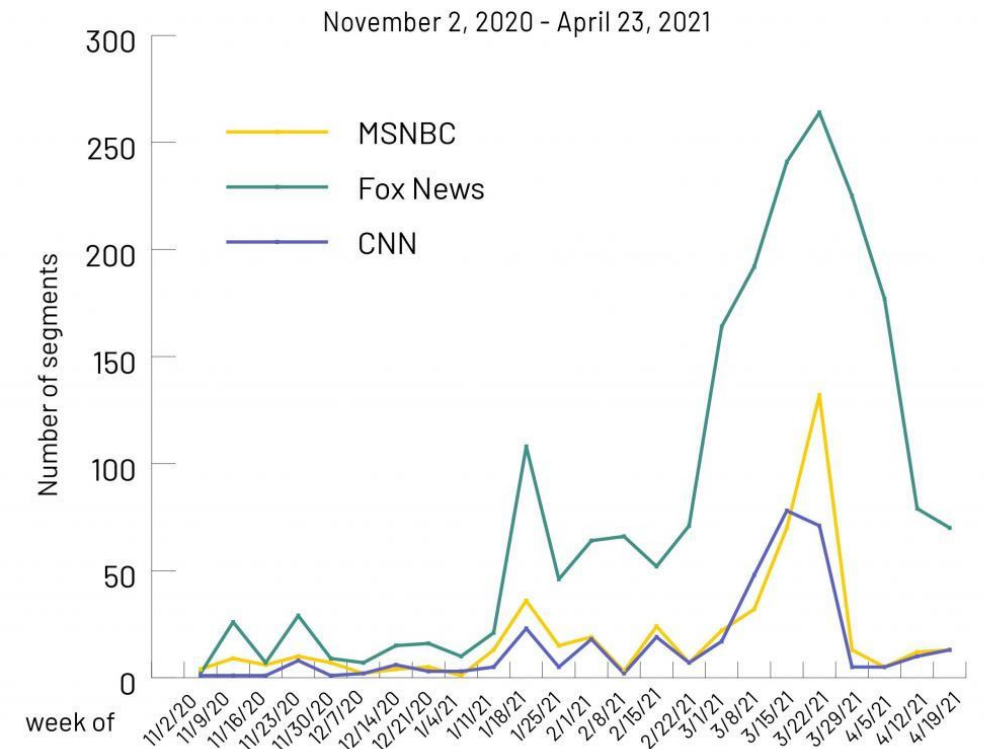
All original weekday programming from 6 a.m. EST through midnight. Media Matters determined segments to be about immigration when immigration was the stated topic of discussion or when two or more speakers in a multi-topic segment discussed immigration with one another.

MEDIA**MATTERS** FOR AMERICA

5 Tactics to Know

1 **Prioritize major platforms**

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Local and in-network disinformation is the most dangerous
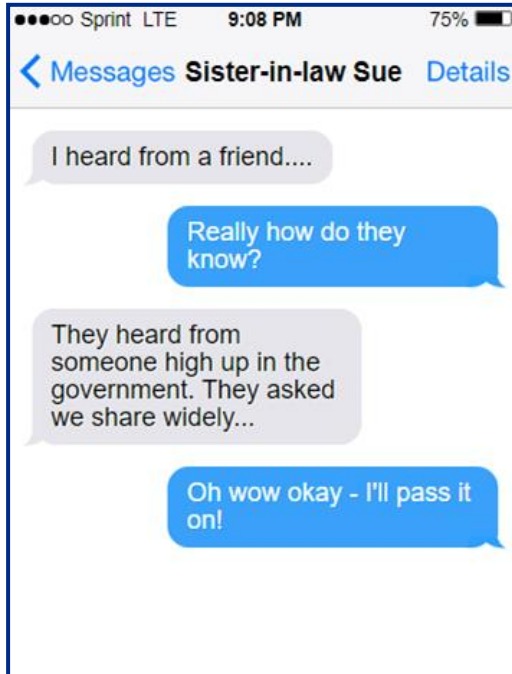
- Bad actors want to **_bypass credible sourcing_** of information.

- Bad actors **_want us sharing the content within our networks_** – so it seems more credible.

- Breaking this down helps curb the spread of disinformation – people do not like to be conned but you cannot just call out the con – have to break down the con.
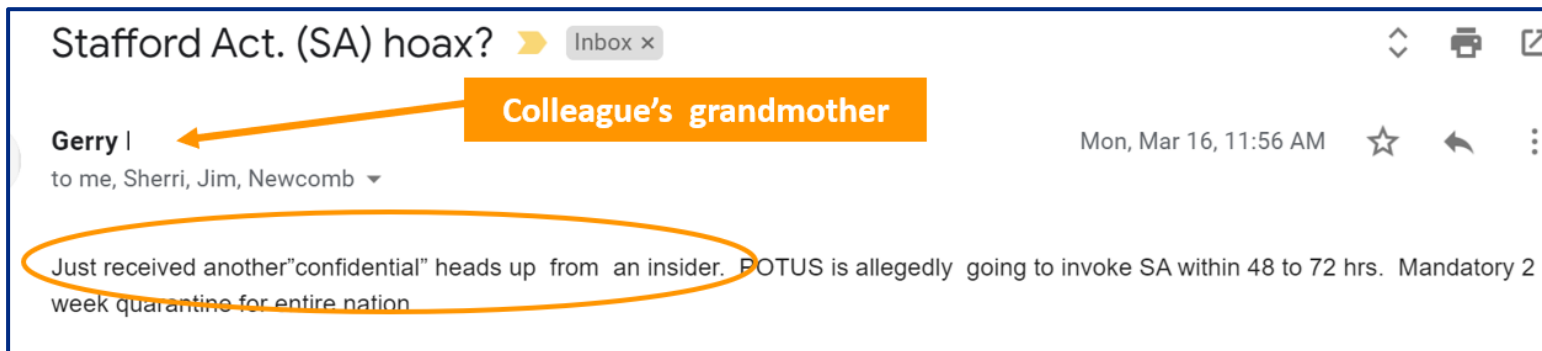
Rise in political Facebook groups to seed messaging locally

OPPOSING COVID RESTRICTIONS

Reopen Arizona
Community Organization

~1.2K members
Based in AZ

ReOpen PA
Protect The Vulnerable, Open The Economy, Champion Liberty
ReOpen PA
PRIVATE GROUP · 69,618 MEMBERS
Join Group

105K members
Based in PA

ReopenVA
Public group · 2.7K members
Join Group
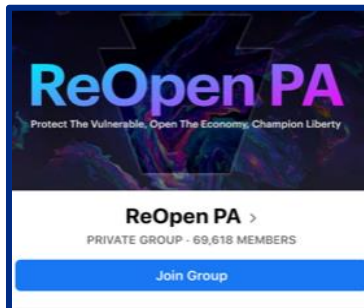
2.7K members
Based in VA

SUPPORTING TRUMP/GOP

KAYLEIGH MCENANY FAN CLUB
Unofficial Fan Group
Kayleigh McEnany Fan Club
Public group · 470.4K members
Join Group

470.4K members

RECALL MOVEMENT
Group by The Recall Movement - of Michigan.
The Recall Movement - of Michigan
Public group · 2.7K members
Join Group

2.7K members
Based in MI

THE PARTY OF TRUMP
Group by Ryan Fournier
The Party of Trump
Public group · 126.4K members
Joined   Invite
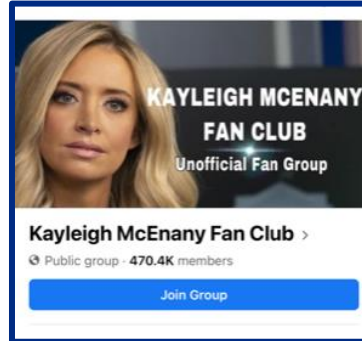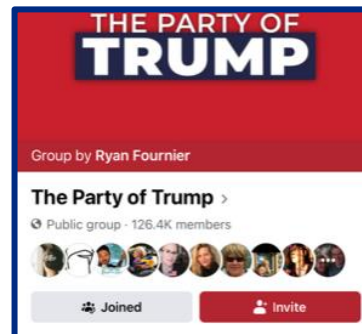
126.4K members

INTERESTS (E.G. GUNS)
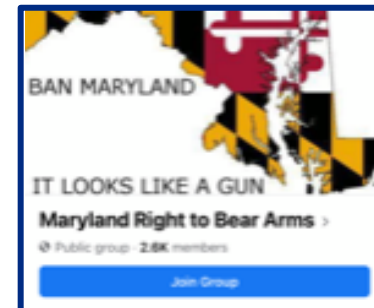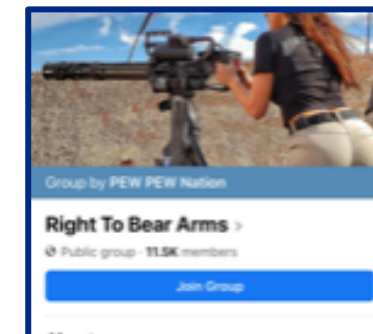
GUN LOVERS
Public group · 41.3K members
Join Group

41.3K members

BAN MARYLAND
IT LOOKS LIKE A GUN
Maryland Right to Bear Arms
Public group · 2.6K members
Join Group

2.6K members
Based in MI

Group by PEW PEW Nation
Right To Bear Arms
Public group · 11.5K members
Join Group

11.5K members

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5 Tactics to Know

1 **Prioritize major platforms**

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Algorithms!

- The "secret sauce" or a fixed series of steps used by a computer model to make something happen.

- This is how social media platforms determine what will show up in your newsfeed, what is considered "trending", what should be shown to fewer people, etc.

- Algorithms change all the time and it's important to follow the news around changes.

- Algorithms can be and are often manipulated.

What do algorithms reward?

- Platforms don't give us a clear explanation of how their algorithms work. But goal is to keep people on site.

Case in Point:
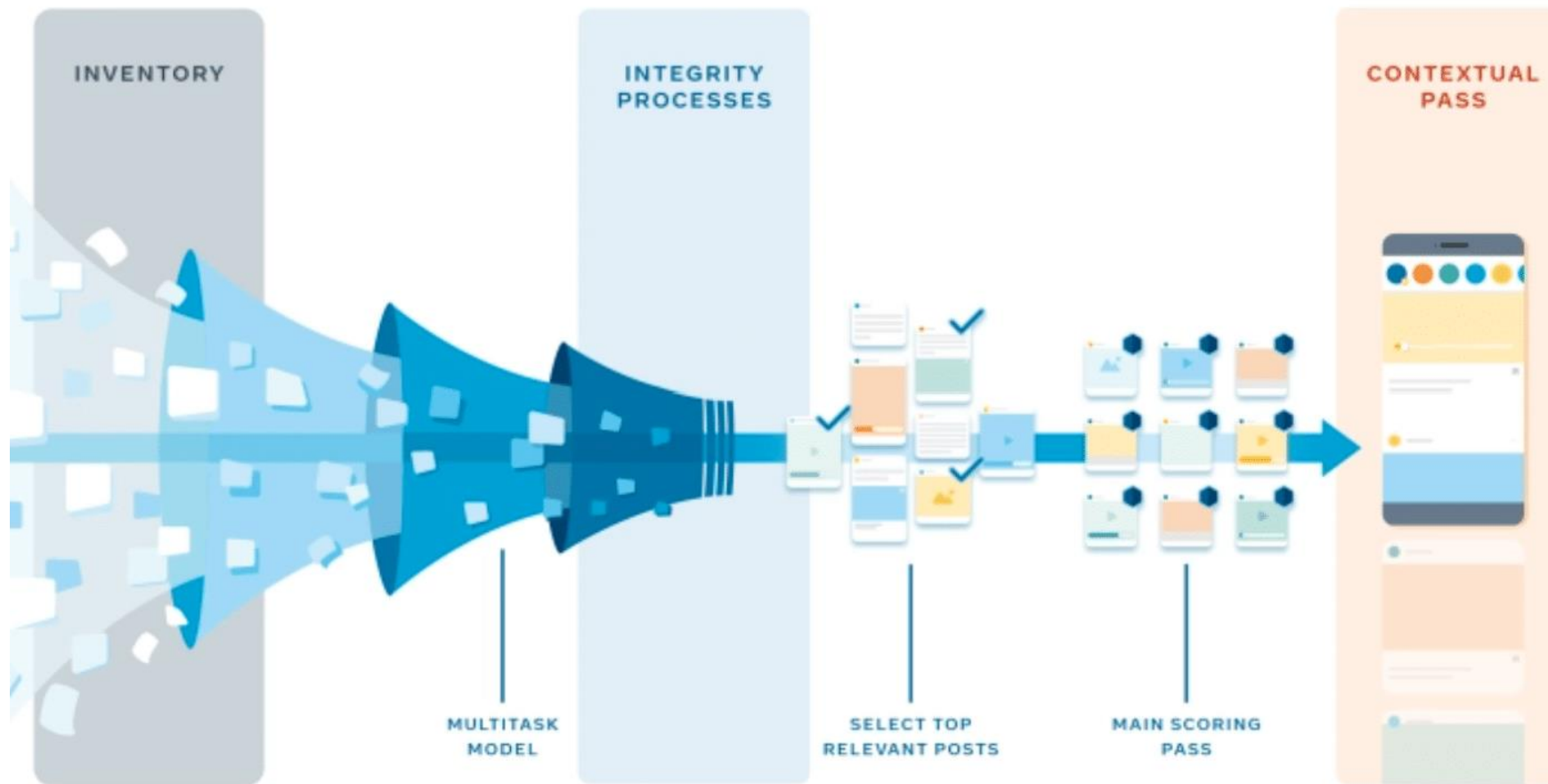
What do algorithms reward?

- Platforms don't give us a clear explanation of how their algorithms work. But goal is to keep people on site.

- On Facebook, organic reach is declining on average. Since 2018, branded content is deprioritized in favor of in-network sharing.

- Factors the algorithm considers:
  - ✓ Likes, shares, comments
  - ✓ View time
  - ✓ Amount and speed of engagement
  - ✓ Video content
  - ✓ New features (stories, reels, live video)
  - ✓ Relationships
  - ✓ Recency and timing
  - ✓ Groups

Example: Gaming platform algorithms

- **Far-right influencers and other bad actors often experiment with algorithms, including asking followers directly for help getting an organic boost**

- Includes direct asks for users to take new actions to engage with content in order to maximize reach – often feeds the "conservative tech censorship" narrative too
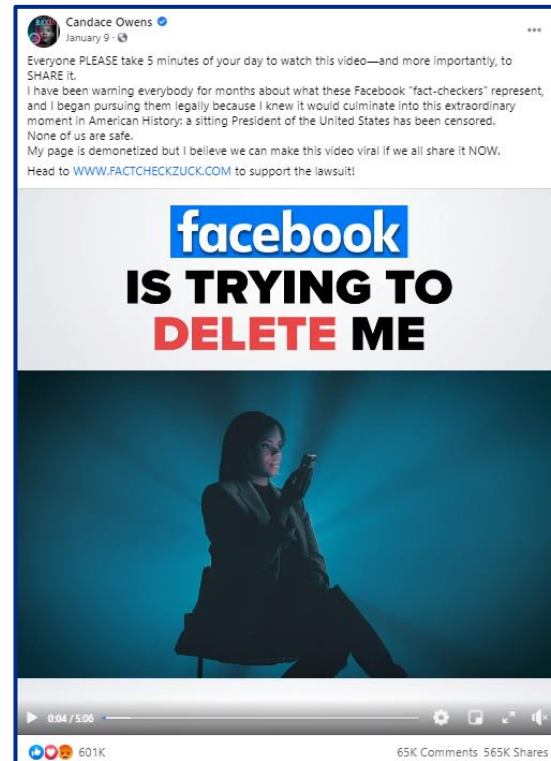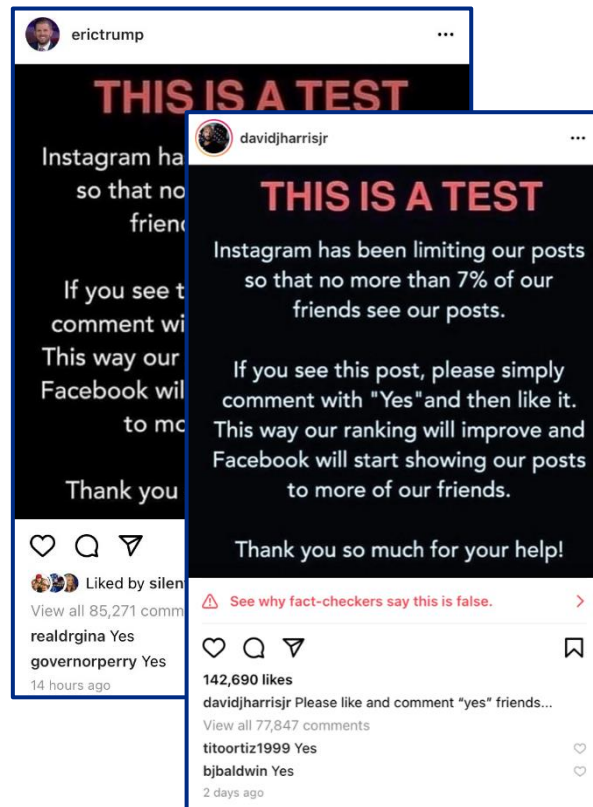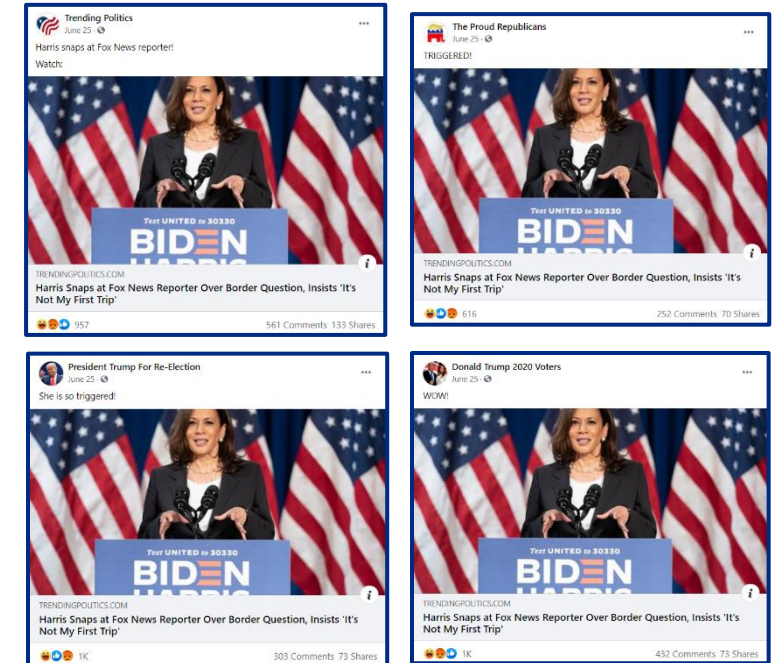
Example: Coordinated network sharing

24 Western Journal Pages

9 Daily Wire Pages
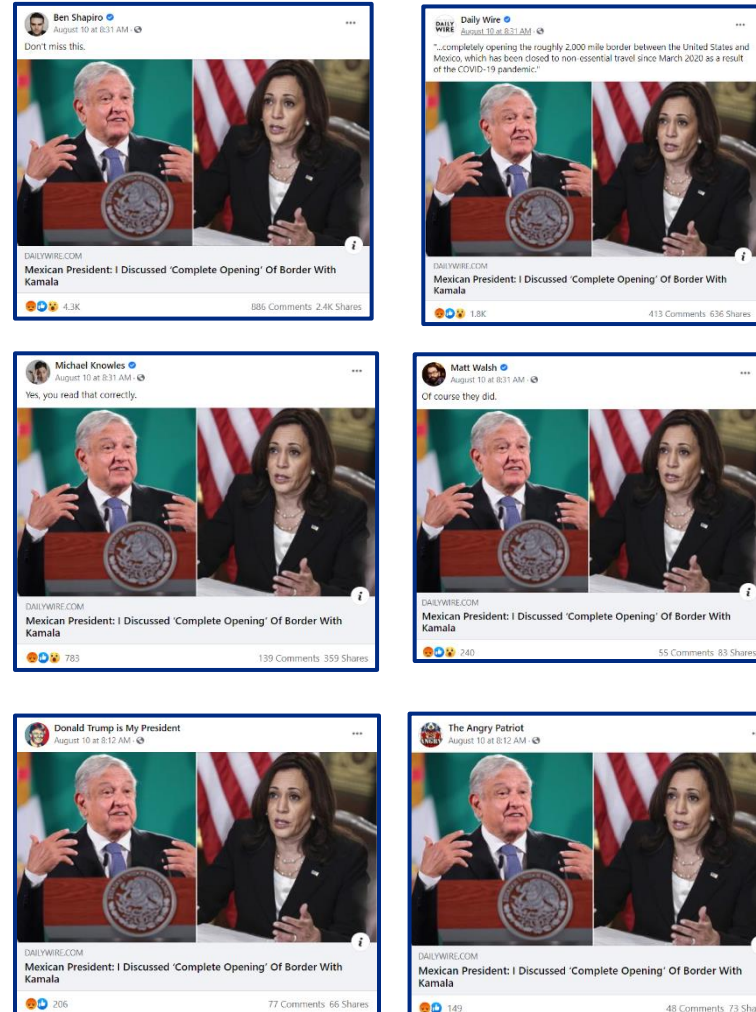
4 Trending Politics Pages

Posts shared at nearly the same time, with nearly the same caption, across networks

ASSESSING WHAT *REALLY* MATTERS AND RESPONDING

Please do not panic.

First decision: How bad is it? How bad could it be?

Most important criteria: REACH vs. IMPACT

REACH = Are real people seeing it, or is it stuck in partisan spaces?

IMPACT= Will it change the offline situation: turnout, reputation, support?

Considerations within Reach/Impact

- Time horizon? Immediate vs. long-term impact
- Who are the actors? GOP, far-right, foreign, conspiracy theorists, etc.
- Types of accounts? Bots, fake news, trolls, deep fakes, etc.
- Type of disinfo? True, false, out-of-context, character attacks
- Platform violations? Behavior vs. content
- Impact? Effective vs. attempted

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Have a plan and a framework for responding

	REACH: Likelihood of disinformation, etc. targeting key constituencies*		
	High	**Med**	**Low**
IMPACT: Likelihood we are losing support or will lose support ** / High	• Platform takedown request • Change the subject • Attack messenger • Outreach to communities • Press statement or earned media play • Run paid campaign • Deploy digital organizers or field • Response from allies or influencers or media coverage • Monitor for topic momentum	• Rapid response/Change the subject • Damage control with journalists/donors • Arm organizers with talking points and inoculation messages • Consider targeted response to impacted communities • Explore takedown options • Monitor for escalation/suspect features	• Rapid response/Change the subject • Monitor for suspect features • Outreach to experts/allies to ask them to explore further attribution and take down options; pursue platform pressure
Med	• Determine strategy on messenger • Consider content campaign options • Arm organizers with talking points and inoculation messages • Consider reaching out to the press • Consider engaging allies • Put leads on alert	• Consult available experts • Arm organizers with talking points and/or inoculation messages • Get handle on press/opinion elite if needed • Check in with regional/target influencers on the ground • Monitor for escalation; put field leads on alert	• Flag for experts • Monitor for escalation • Do nothing
Low	• Send in incident • Flag for issue experts, policy experts, other • Request outreach to affected communities for awareness ONLY if appropriate/time	• Flag for someone else • Do nothing	• Do nothing.

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When should we issue a more direct response?

When reach/impact is high

- People are the victim, not you! This is an opportunity to connect with voter frustrations
- Take action to expose the source and motive
- Communicate in a way that will actually reach supporters
- Give information from trusted sources
- Change the narrative – do not overly harp

When you are a DIRECT target

- Sometimes a direct, simple denial can shut it down

When the potential impact is severe

- Always report threats to platforms and authorities

Effective messaging for disinformation

Always avoid arguments and confrontation; you may deepen their belief.

1. **Acknowledge shared concerns.**
   - "This pandemic has been hard on everyone…"
   - "I also get frustrated when health guidance changes…"

2. **Undermine the messenger.**
   - "That source actually has a history of lying and promoting biased information. I prefer to trust…"
   - "Some people are trying to make it seem like this vaccine does XYZ because they benefit from the confusion and division, but health officials agree…"

3. **Return to the truth and share positive, proactive information.**
   - "This is why it's so important that people like you and me get vaccinated."
   - "That's why I think you should just talk to your doctor about what you heard."

Goal is always to pivot to a more positive, proactive story.

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Thank you

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