

DISINFO DEFENSE TOOLKIT

FOR ORGANIZERS &
ADVOCATES

CURATED BY:



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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

Welcome to the Disinformation Defense Toolkit curated by [ReFrame](#) and [PEN America](#) for the Disinformation Defense League. As a network, we generate a wealth of resources, but it can be hard for groups to quickly know where to find the information and how to best make use of it in existing work. We created this toolkit as a go-to list of resources for racial, economic, gender, and climate justice organizers and advocates to learn about the threat of disinformation and how to employ tools to combat its spread, heading into the election and beyond.

The toolkit has four main sections:

- 1) Introduction to Disinformation and Misinformation
- 2) Solutions to Combating Disinformation: Inoculation and Response
- 3) Tools for Working with Journalists
- 4) Messaging and Content Guides

We need to scenario-plan for the weeks and months after the election as misleading narratives that seek to undermine our institutions and discredit movement building may find fertile ground. We acknowledge that this toolkit is *just* a starting point, but a powerful one that may empower our communities as we confront daily reminders of forces seeking to maintain white supremacy, further erode democracy, and wield words as a weapon to shut down the more vulnerable.

We look forward to doing some of this work within the League, and we hope this toolkit can at least serve as a starting point as each of our organizations manages disinformation fires on our own fronts.

This is a living toolkit: it can be added to, edited or changed at any time; this is not and will not be the end-all/be-all collection of resources for combating misinformation and disinformation. If you have additional tools to add to this kit, please email Jess St. Louis at ReFrame at jess@reframementorship.org.

Thank you to all who contributed to this first edition:

[American Press Institute](#)

Claudia Flores-Saviaga

[First Draft](#)

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[Strategic Victory Fund](#)

[The Leadership Conference](#)

[Ultraviolet](#)

[United We Dream](#)

[University of Wisconsin-Madison](#)

[Voting Rights Lab](#)

[Win Black/Pa'lante](#)

[Wisconsin Watch](#)

With solidarity and longing for a new world,

Jess St. Louis, [ReFrame](#) Senior Strategist

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INTRODUCTORY TOOLS

"While the details of disinfo might be new, the underlying narratives that make disinfo believable have been advancing for decades. We combat this by moving strategically to control the debate, and by building social power for the long term."

- ReFrame

DEFINITIONS

DAY 1 - DEFINITIONS



Disinformation is false information that's created and shared to deliberately cause harm.



Misinformation is false information that's shared by people who don't realize it's false and don't mean any harm. Often they're just trying to help.

So disinformation might be a racist meme posted by Russian 'trolls', designed to divide Americans.

Misinformation would be when your aunt shares that meme on Facebook because she thinks it's useful information, not realizing that it's false.

The main difference here is the **MOTIVATION**.

Next time you see something you're not sure about, think about whether it seems like mis or disinformation.

Further resources

[The 7 most common types of information disorder](#)

[Why we don't say f*** news](#)

You can find out more about our work at firstdraftnews.org and follow us at twitter.com/firstdraftnews.

Fighting Disinformation, Building Narrative Power



At ReFrame, we envision a world where marginalized communities have the power to shape meaning and material conditions toward justice. To get there, we first need to understand that the terrain on which we're operating is stacked against us. We are organizing and telling stories on an uneven playing field, where the underlying narratives have long been shaped by a vast and resourced network of highly conservative forces. While narratives are never static and are always up for contention, conservative narratives of racism, sexism and homophobia have been built into the functioning of society and continue to undergird many systems and institutions today.



This is the playing field on which disinformation and misinformation is spreading. Disinfo and misinfo spread because the content invokes narratives that feel like common sense to certain audiences, including anti-Blackness, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and red-baiting. While the details of the disinfo might be new, the underlying narratives that make the disinfo believable have been advancing for decades. These new disinformation streams give emotional urgency to these narratives, often by exploiting fear, and thrive in voids of

clear, factual and equally emotional information.

So how do we combat disinformation and misinformation? The same way we work to even the playing field and shape meaning and conditions toward justice for the long term. By moving strategically to control the debate, and by building social power for the long term.

Another way to talk about social power is narrative power. At ReFrame, we define narrative as a collection of related stories that are articulated and refined over time to represent a central idea or belief¹. We must build the power we need to have our narratives matter-- narratives that advance racial, economic, gender, and climate justice. The more our narratives build influence and traction, the more we even the playing field toward justice, and the more we change conditions to even this playing field, the more our narratives can matter. As we respond to disinformation and misinformation, it's our job to start seeding counter narratives that inoculate against disinformation by creating a new common sense where racist, sexist and homophobic values have no



¹ This definition was developed by Narrative Initiative in conversation with 100 strategists, as outlined in their paper [Towards a New Gravity](#)

place, and therefore little cognitive traction through which to spread.

We've known for years that our opponents lie and manipulate people to maintain and consolidate power. They've used advertisements in news media, made deceitful phone calls to voters, and posted anonymous and misdirecting flyers in shops. What's different is that the digital realm, a realm in which we make meaning and sense of the world and connect with people, has created the opportunity for a wider range of bad actors to spread disinfo, and has allowed for more varied and targeted ways for it to be spread.² That is exactly what's happening today, and it is contributing to a sense of chaos that can feed into mounting fascism, unless we launch an increasingly coordinated movement response.

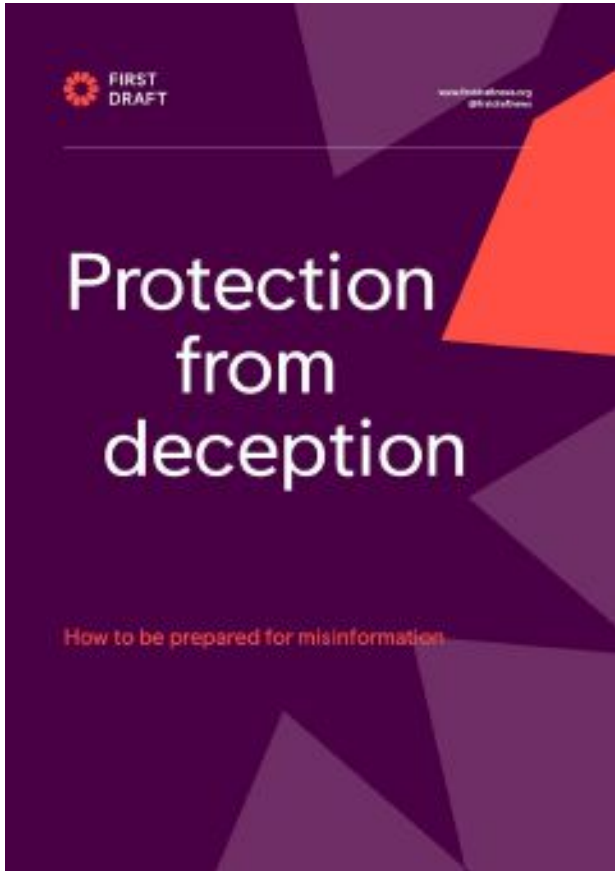
Tracking, combatting, and neutralizing disinformation isn't separate from our narrative power-building approaches as organizers and advocates. Instead, we see it as something we should integrate into the work we're already doing -- print and social media scanning, 1:1 conversations on the doors and on the phones, the ways we communicate with our bases and our members, and how we organize and work with journalists and digital platforms. That said, we also need to combine forces with others who are doing larger platform accountability campaigns, journalist education and organizing, and building networks of trusted messengers, disruptors and meaning makers across all sectors of society (see our [Movement Framework for Disinformation Response](#)).

It's going to take more than a pithy tweet that goes viral to neutralize disinformation and seed the narratives that we want to be common sense, although it might help from time to time. We don't have to choose to strategically respond to disinformation or spend our time building narrative power - to try to prioritize one or the other. In these times and in the fights we are in for our lives and the lives of people we love and care about, we can and need to do both.

Let's build power, fight lies and fascism, and win the world we long for.

² The concept of the internet as the "digital realm" comes to us from Kairos, from their Medium post [Building Power Online](#)

FIRST DRAFT COURSE: PROTECTION FROM DECEPTION



[ENGLISH](#)



[SPANISH](#)

First Draft has a free two-week text message course in English and Spanish for the Disinfo Defense League that shows how you and your community can get prepared for the threat of U.S. election misinformation.

- Sign up for the course in English: [bit.ly/protection-from-deception](https://firstdraft.arist.co/courses/5f4f5d727ad51e4eccf33054)
- Sign up for the course in Spanish:
<https://firstdraft.arist.co/courses/5f4f5d727ad51e4eccf33054>



TIP SHEET

#WhatToExpect2020

WHAT TO EXPECT THIS ELECTION SEASON

The 2020 general election will be unlike any previous election, happening against the backdrop of a pandemic, and with disinformation running rampant. It's vital that voters know what to expect. Here are five things to keep in mind.

1. EXPECT VOTING TO REQUIRE MORE TIME AND PREPARATION THAN USUAL.

A variety of things may look or feel different this year: long lines on Election Day, for example, should not be taken as a bad sign; they may be necessary to allow for social distancing. Whether it's vote-by-mail, early voting, or voting in-person on November 3, figure out a plan to vote and recognize that there may be wrinkles. [Local guidelines and deadlines](#) for registering to vote, and for requesting and submitting mail-in ballots, differ by state. Some states allow early in-person voting at designated polling places, and some states have secure bins where you can drop off your mail-in ballot, while others don't. Go to the National Association of Secretaries of State's ["Can I Vote" page](#) to confirm your own voter registration status, [check your state's deadlines and procedures](#), and make your plan.

2. EXPECT TO FACT CHECK EVERYTHING YOU HEAR—EVEN FROM PEOPLE YOU TRUST.

Americans get their news and information from a wide variety of sources, some verified and trusted, and others not. It can be hard to tell the difference between a report from a credible news source and a piece of propaganda being spread for partisan or monetary gain. During this election, almost everything will benefit from a good fact-check, even if it's coming from someone you know and trust. (You can learn how to fact-check what you see [with PEN America's resources](#), or take First Draft's text message-based course in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).) So, make sure you're bringing the same level of scrutiny to what your trusted sources say as you do to the news you see and read online. And even for news reports, checking with more than one outlet is always a good idea before you share or react to breaking news.

3. EXPECT THE MEDIA'S REPORTING ON EARLY RESULTS TO LOOK DIFFERENT FROM USUAL.

On election night, you're probably used to seeing "percentage of precincts reporting" as results trickle in. But those percentages usually reflect ballots cast *in-person*. This year, with so many people voting by mail, those numbers won't mean as much, and many outlets may not report them. In fact, because different states also count their mail-in ballots at different times, **with 14 states not even starting until the polls have closed**, it's important this year to take early results for what they are: partial tallies that won't necessarily reflect what final results will be. The Associated Press, or AP, is widely considered the gold standard in tabulating votes and declaring election winners. The AP **has said that it will not call a race** until it concludes the trailing candidate will not catch the leader. Be patient, check multiple news outlets for results coverage, and be alert to how results are being reported on election night.

4. EXPECT AND ACCEPT DELAYS IN ELECTION RESULTS.

The vote tabulation process will likely take longer than usual this year because of the increased use of mail-in ballots and other effects of the coronavirus pandemic. And that might be especially true for the presidential election. We should not necessarily conclude these delays mean there is "chaos" or a "rigged election." Many election experts **have pointed out** that election night is likely to become "election week" or even "election month." However, this is likely to be a period during which disinformation is used to cast doubt on the credibility of the electoral process. Voters will need to be patient while election officials count the ballots accurately and avoid mistakes. "The need to take a longer time to process and count these ballots is a sign of the process working," a Department of Homeland Security official **told *The New York Times***. Keep in mind that you also have the power to help shape how people respond to a delay in results; when you post on social media, be careful to cite trusted news sources, and avoid language that would sow unfounded doubt in the process.

5. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED.

You should be ready for anything this election season. Maybe it's verifiably false headlines, which **PEN America can help you learn to spot**. Or, there may be legitimate concerns about voter suppression, voiced by knowledgeable and experienced activists and more than one expert. You might hear candidates claiming victory before results have been announced by official or independent sources. And for all the caution about results taking a long time, it's certainly still possible the presidential election could be called on election night. This list is just a starting point. No matter what, prepare for the unexpected. We know that 2020 will be an election like no other, so no matter what happens, think before you react.

Beyond Demography

BLACK AUDIENCES ONLINE

Using media data to understand where Black Americans are and what they care about to inform more impactful outreach ▯

WIN BLACK / PA'LANTE

A/B

HARMONYLABS

Understanding people’s media habits gives us a deeper view into who they are, the values they hold, and how we might best engage them. To do this well, we need to move beyond the traditional demographics provided by polls and surveys and create a more complete picture of the culture people are consuming, creating, and being inspired by.

Win Black / Pa’lante, A/B Partners, and Harmony Labs teamed up to produce this report to deepen our understanding of distinct audience segments for Black Americans, and how they might differ from other segments of the population, as well as to surface insights that can help sharpen the stories we are telling and improve how and where we reach these audiences.

To create a map of media consumption for this report we used the following online usage data:

JAN-APR 2020	47K VOLUNTEER PANELISTS, 7.5K WHO IDENTIFY AS BLACK	MINUTE-BY-MINUTE, URL-LEVEL DATA	USAGE DATA PAIRED WITH AGE, GENDER, EDUCATION, INCOME, FAMILY SIZE, AND OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS
		DESKTOP ONLY	



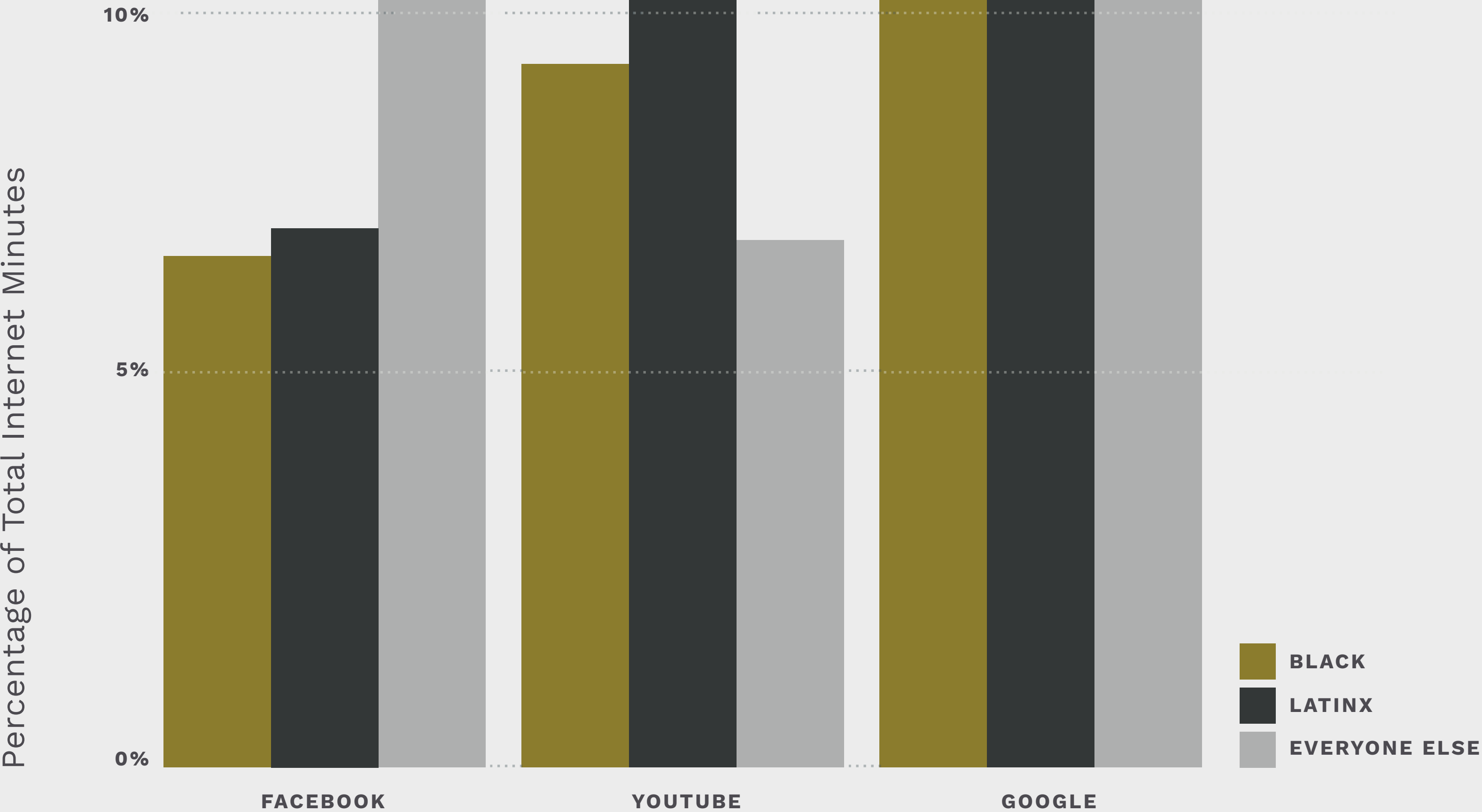
Photo Kyle Sykes | @kylesykes

This report is being created at a historical moment for the Black community and democracy, writ large. We’re facing a global pandemic that disproportionately affects Black communities; **#BlackLivesMatter** protests are rising across the globe; and media and democratic systems are in more need of transformation than ever. Too often, Black audiences are treated as a monolith. At this moment when Black communities are raising their voices and others are shifting their perspectives, we aim to understand the nuanced identities and perspectives that fuel digital consumption behaviors.



MAPPING MEDIA CONSUMPTION ONLINE AND IN THE NEWS

Google and YouTube more popular than Facebook



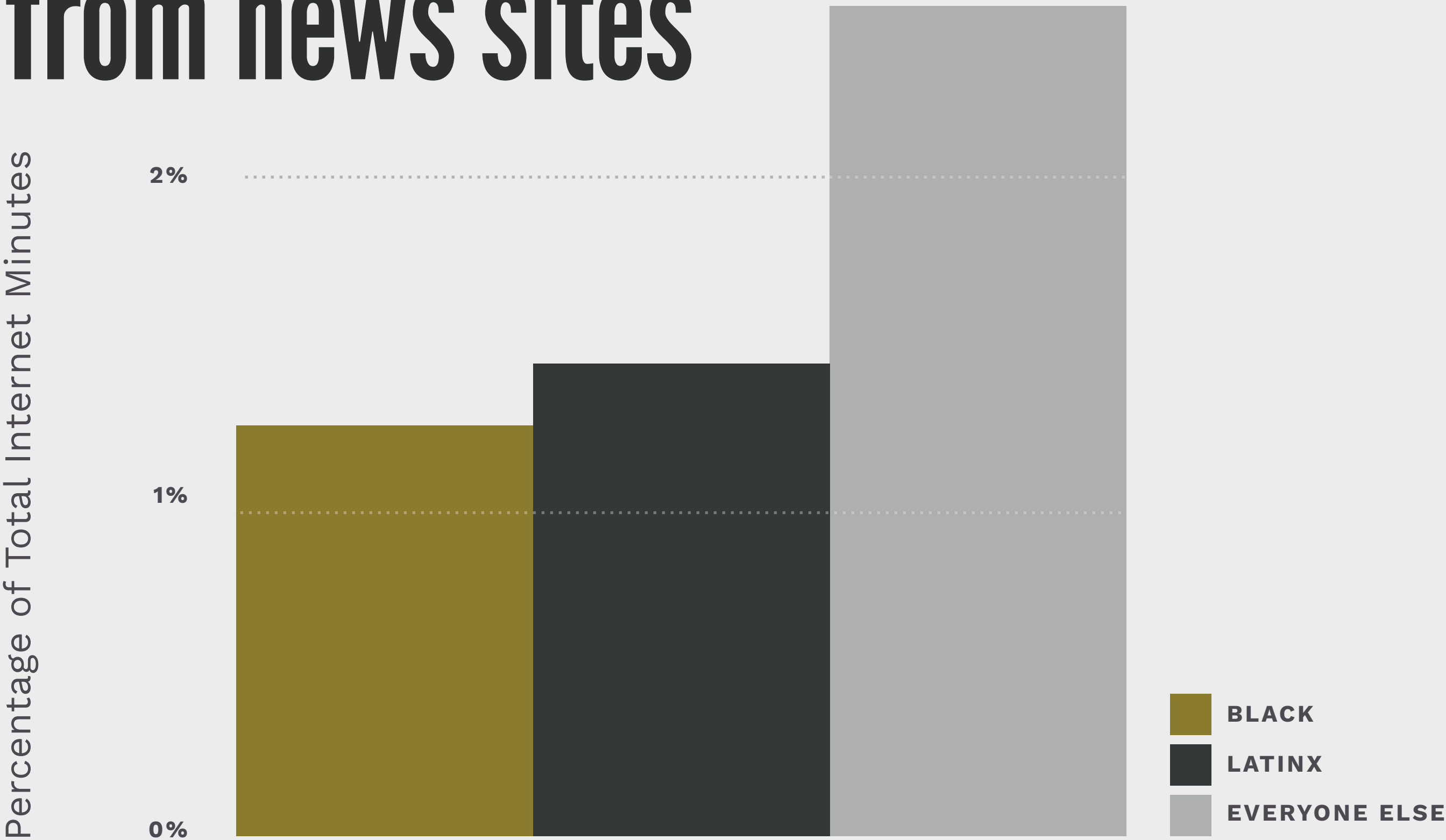
Black audiences spend 23% of their time on these two websites.

While the aggregate time spent on Google, YouTube, and Facebook dominates their time online, the similarities end there.

Black and Latinx audiences spend nearly double the amount of time on YouTube compared to Facebook, whereas for Everyone Else this trend is reversed.

All three of these sites serve as effective digital advertising platforms. However, not every audience is on these platforms equally.

Not consuming news directly from news sites



What is “News”? We classified domains as “news” if they were both classified as news or information by the internet consumption panel *and* they had published articles about key news topics in 2020. This is a conservative estimate that filters out more general information sites like Wikipedia and captures journalism outlets like the New York *Times*, CNN, local news.

Like most Americans, Black audiences spend a small fraction of their online time—just 1%—reading news.

This roughly translates to 10 minutes a month watching news. Comparing with other parts of the population, Latinx audiences spend roughly the same (~10 mins/mo), while everyone else spends just slightly more (~20 mins/mo). As there are exceptions to every rule, certain segments of the Black audience are more “newsy” than others (more on that later).

Clearly, when thinking about “where people get their news,” we need to be thinking beyond traditional news formats, in order to meet people where they are already engaging.

While other parts of the population also use YouTube for music — particularly Latinx audiences—the consumption data is far more pronounced and distinctive for a Black audience, specifically with R&B and Hip Hop.

LATINX

BLACK

EVERYONE ELSE

video oficial
 ozuna reggaeton
 oficial bad bunny
 latino musica trap hop drake hip-hop
 latin pop family friendly kids hip r&b hip hop
 soul gospel
 how to food love rap exclusive
 comedy music black interview
 diy live funny you baby family
 guide nfl hilarious
 satire rock snl comedian funny video
 late night host health news my
 saturday night live metal trump donald trump politics
 rock music country coronavirus president trump cbs
 fox news country music

Position Words that appear close to an axis “belong” to that group. For example, HIP HOP is most watched by the Black audience. Words that appear between axes are shared. For example, Black and Latinx audiences both watch FAMILY FRIENDLY videos.

Black audiences spend 10% of their online time on YouTube, focused on music.

Online media behaviors surface a diversity of online lives

Within the Latinx and Everyone Else audiences, domains often group together, with Latinx audiences spending a lot of time on YouTube, Google, and Netflix, while Everyone Else gravitates towards Facebook and the news. However Black audiences have varied habits spread across a variety of different types of domains.

Black audiences are spending time on everything from finance-related sites like irs.gov to gaming sites like roblox.com to religious sites like biblegateway.com.

Together, those don't seem to tell one coherent story about a single

audience, but rather reveal that there are distinct audience segments that use the internet in ways that uniquely reflect their personalities, interests, and concerns.

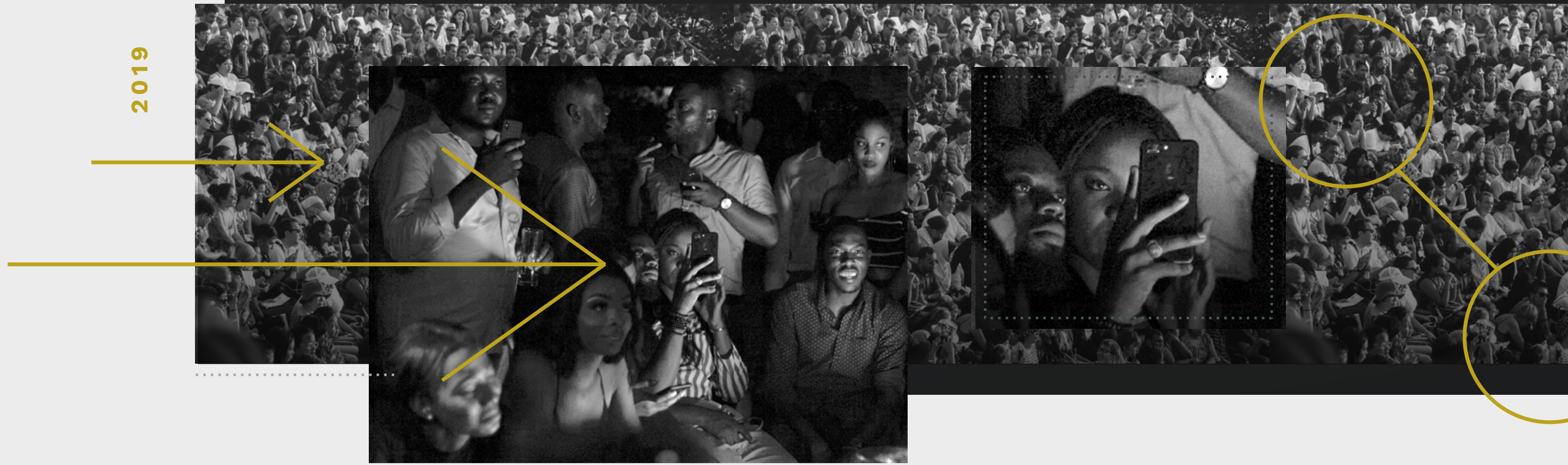
Zooming out to a map of most visited domains yields a more complex picture.



IDENTIFYING DISTINCT AUDIENCE SEGMENTS



Seeing segments through shared behavior



1. Hundreds of thousands of domains

Desktop internet use across 100,000 different domains visited from 2019

2. Machine Learning

We use algorithms that learn which groups of domains people tend to visit together. We use genre information so that Roblox “goes with” Twitch. We also use consumption patterns to tell us, for example, that Twitch users also visit learning sites.

3. Audience Clusters

We use the amount of time people spend in groups of domains to find audiences who routinely visit related sets of sites. These clusters yield audiences—people who are in the same places, consuming the same content.

5 distinct Black audiences

Within the set of all Black internet users, we found 5 distinct segments. While each segment spends time on major sites like Google, YouTube, and Facebook, their online behavior beyond those platforms, and differences depending on their age, reveal different profiles.

1 .

Strivers

are shopping, banking and working.

2 .

Planners

are working, managing money, and doing their taxes.

3 .

Learners

are learning, especially in 2020 with remote school.

4 .

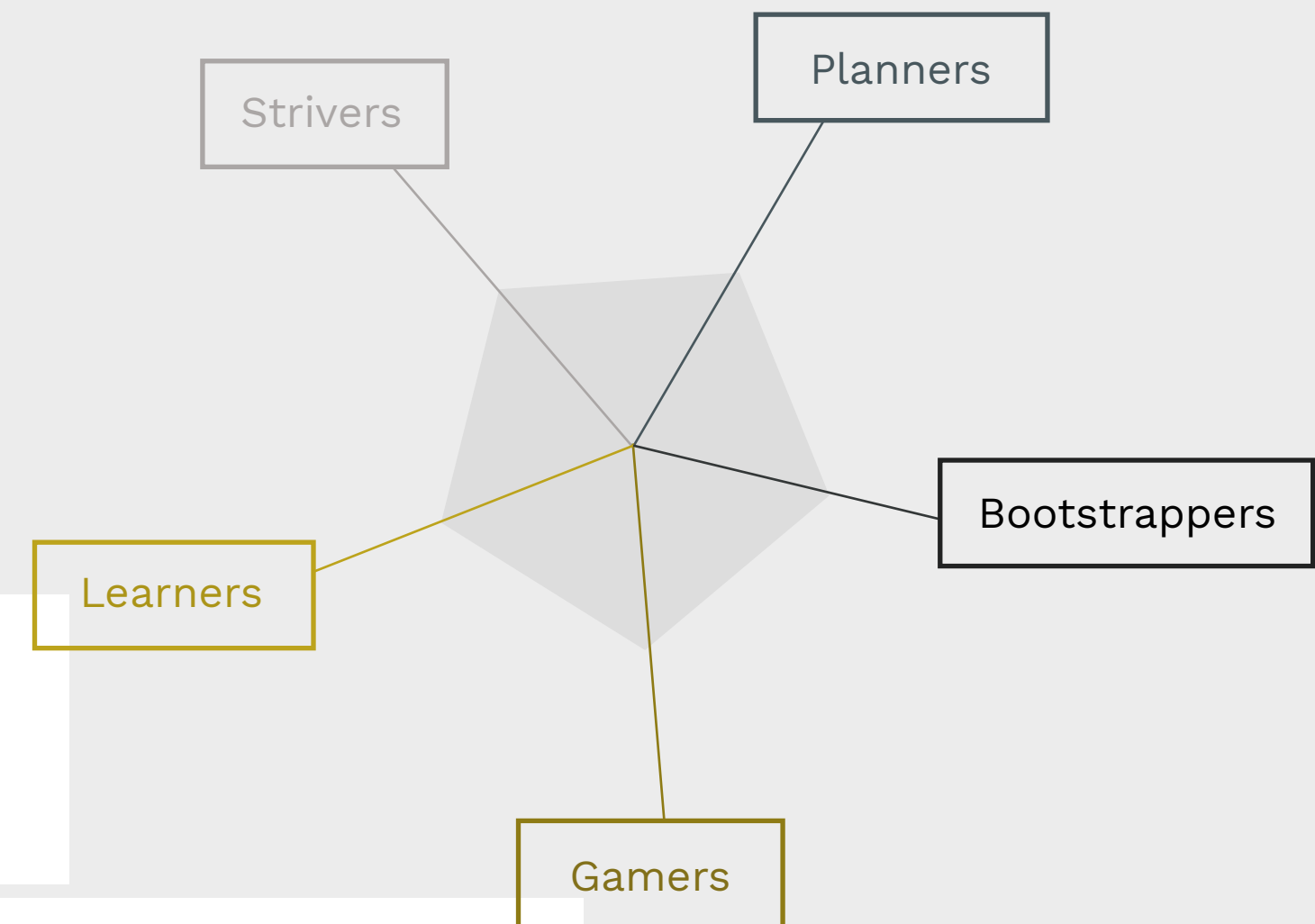
Gamers

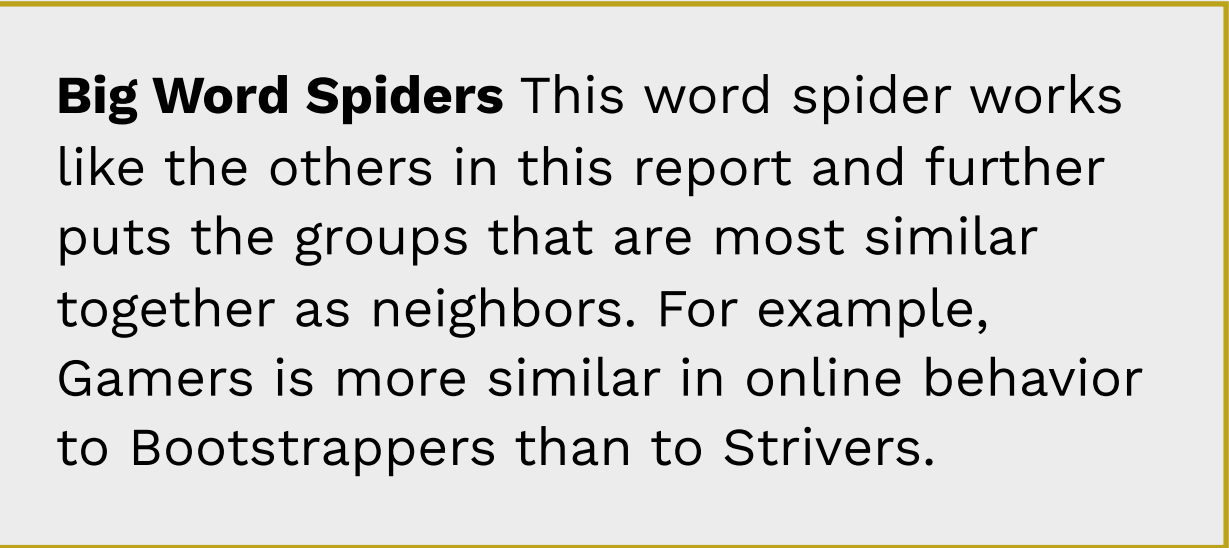
are entertaining themselves through social gameplay.

5 .

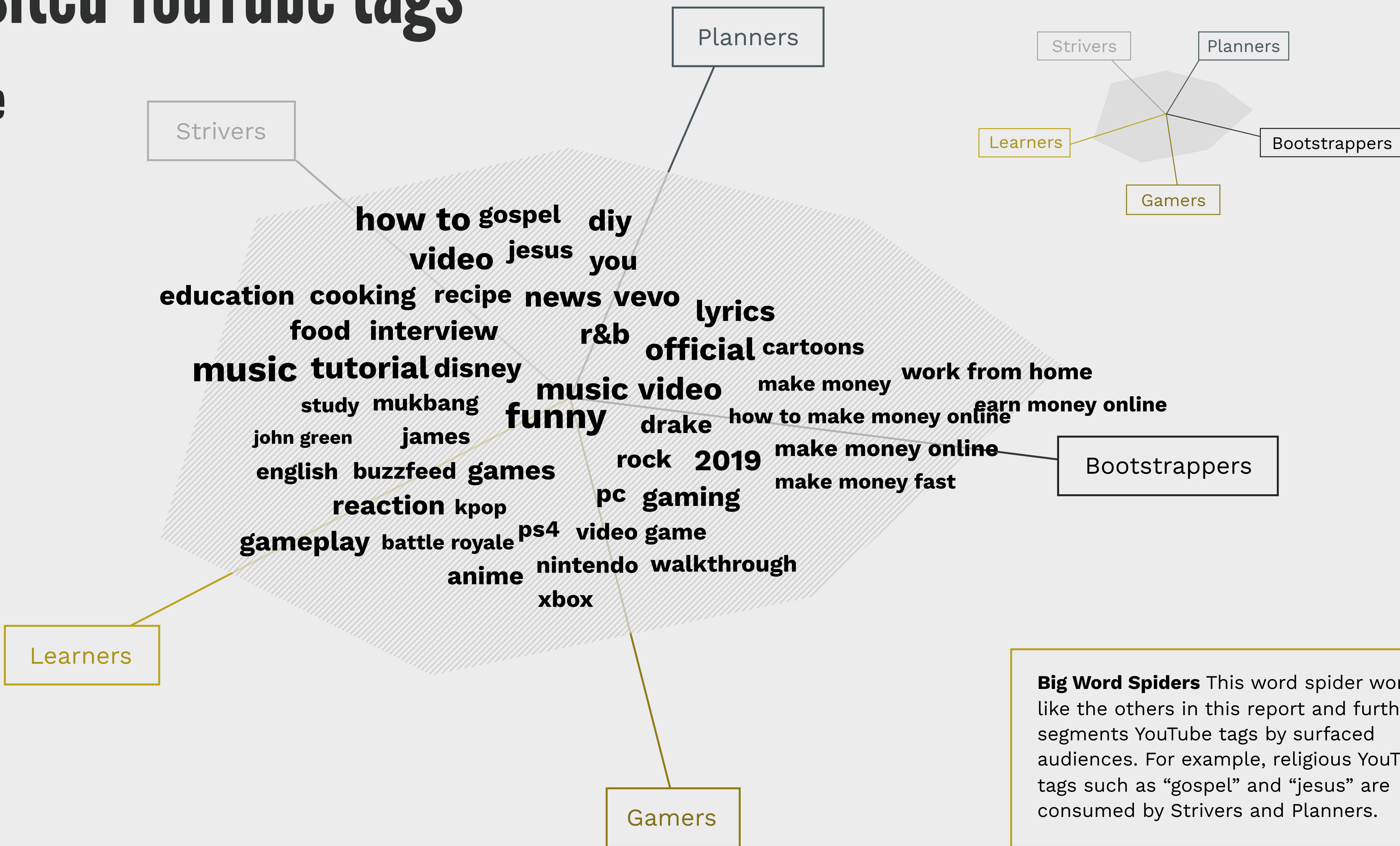
Bootstrappers

are getting deals and making money.





Most visited YouTube tags



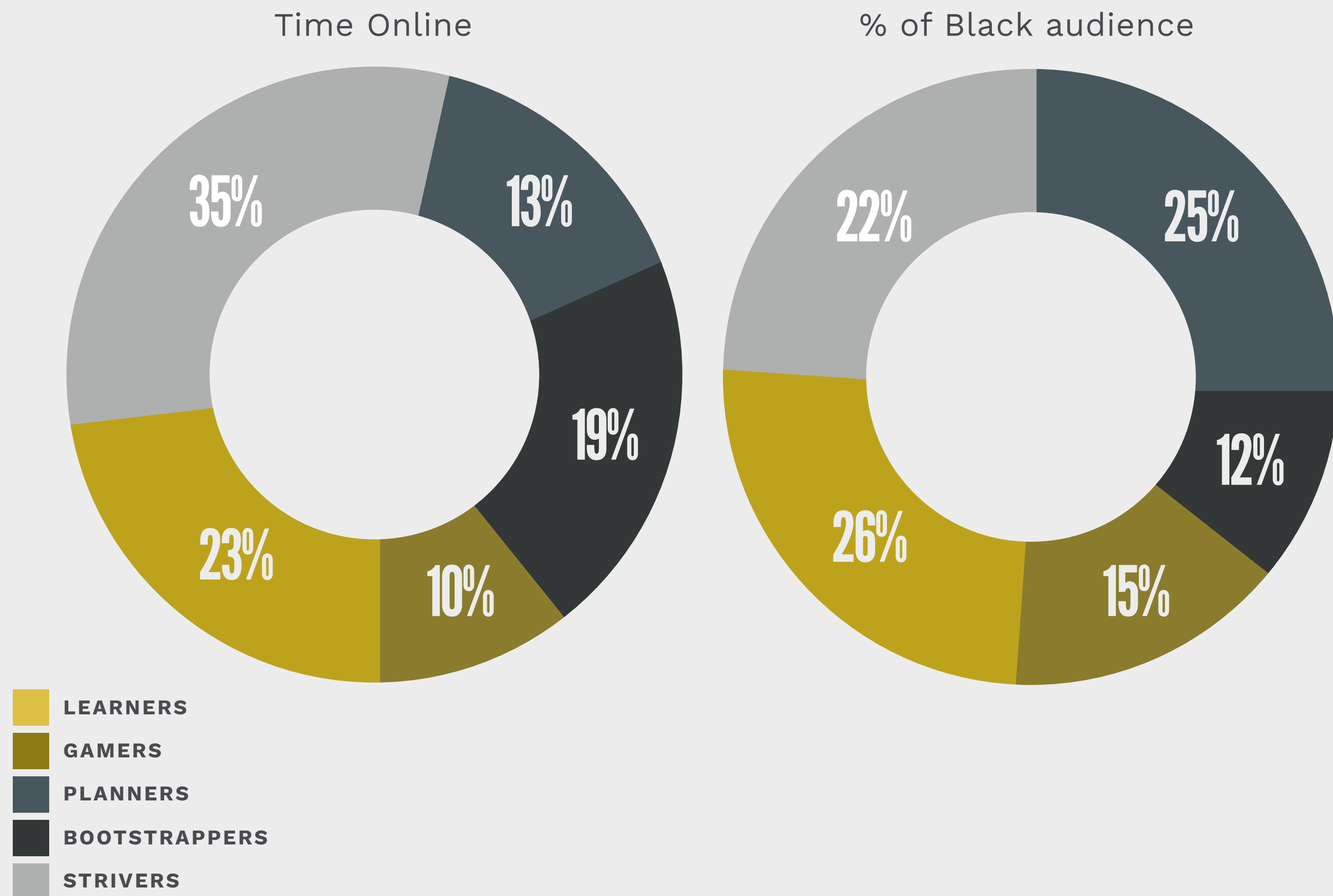
Big Word Spiders This word spider works like the others in this report and further segments YouTube tags by surfaced audiences. For example, religious YouTube tags such as “gospel” and “jesus” are consumed by Strivers and Planners.

Usage is not distributed equally among audiences

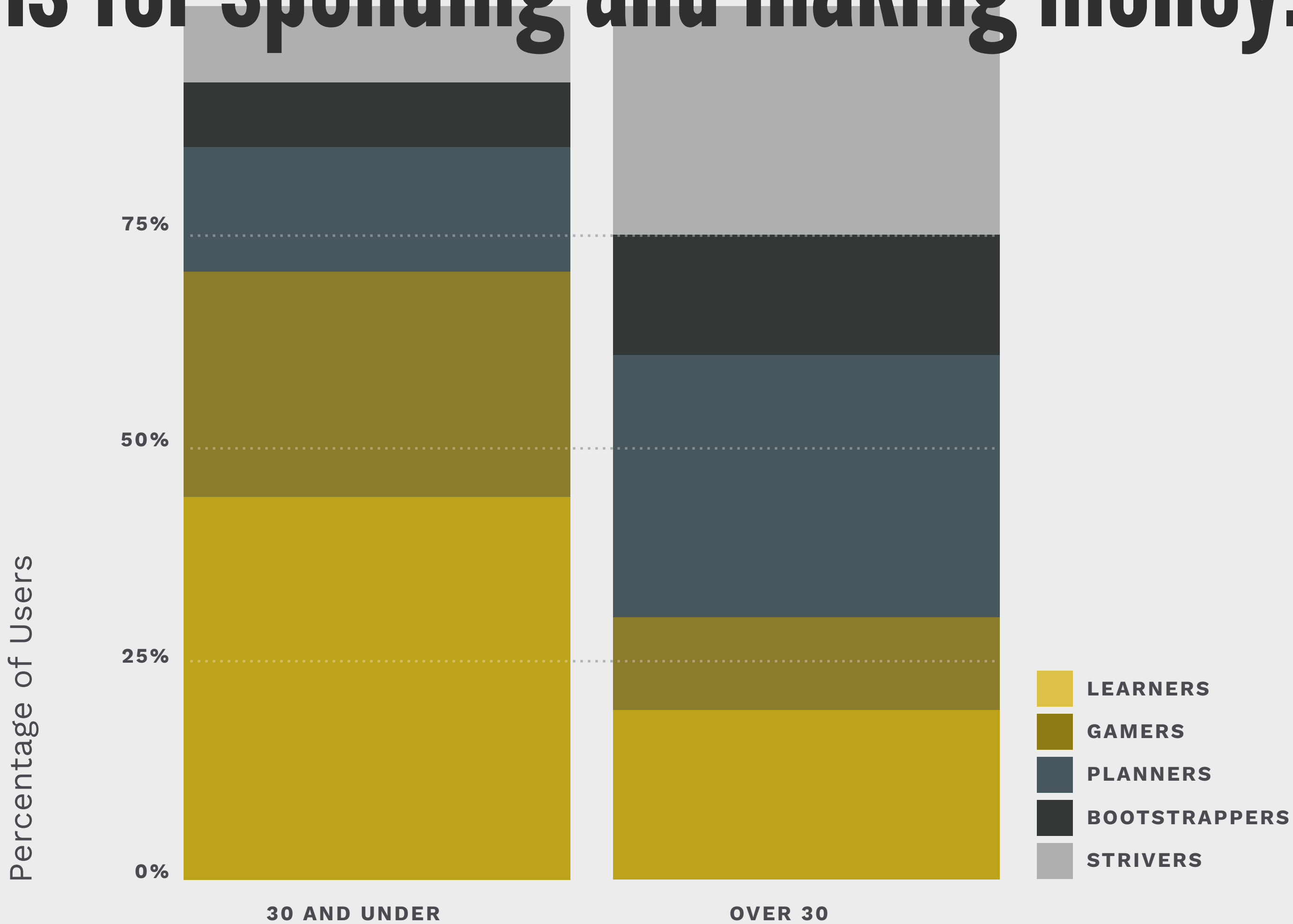
Some segments are online a lot, while others may be harder to reach via the internet.

Strivers and Bootstrappers over-index on their online usage relative to the size of their segments. In particular, Strivers account for the most time online—35%!—while only accounting for 22% of the total audience.

There are definitely audiences that don't spend all day, everyday online, instead, only using the internet for entertainment or specific tasks—like school. Learners, Gamers and Planners all account for a lower percentage of usage relative to the size of their segments.



For older audiences, the internet is for spending and making money.



76% of Black users are over 30, and 68% of those users are in Strivers, Planners, and Bootstrappers

Across these older audiences, experiences with money vary tremendously. From the relatively well-off Strivers, who are shopping, to Bootstrappers, who are gigging on mturk.com and answering surveys for money on qmee.com, the diversity of these audiences reflects the diversity of the Black economic experience.

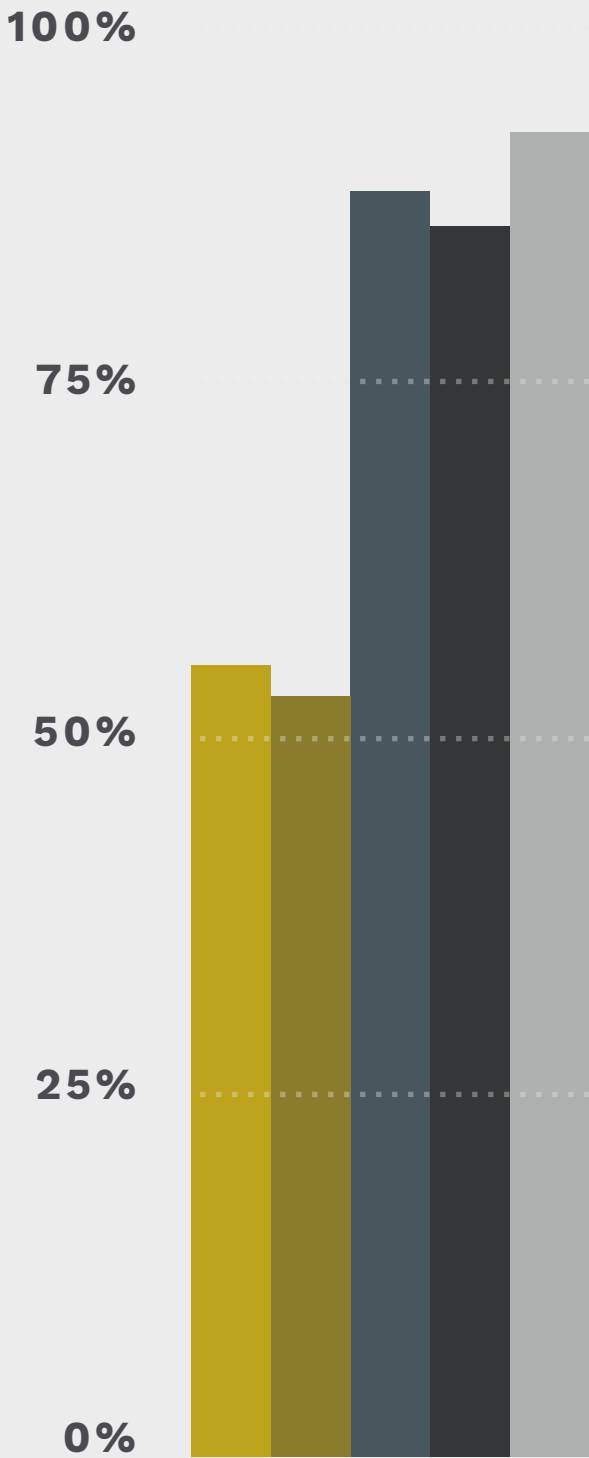
In addition to time dedicated online to work and money, all these audiences spend plenty of time on Facebook, Google, and YouTube.

Demographic distribution

LEARNERS GAMERS PLANNERS BOOTSTRAPPERS STRIVERS

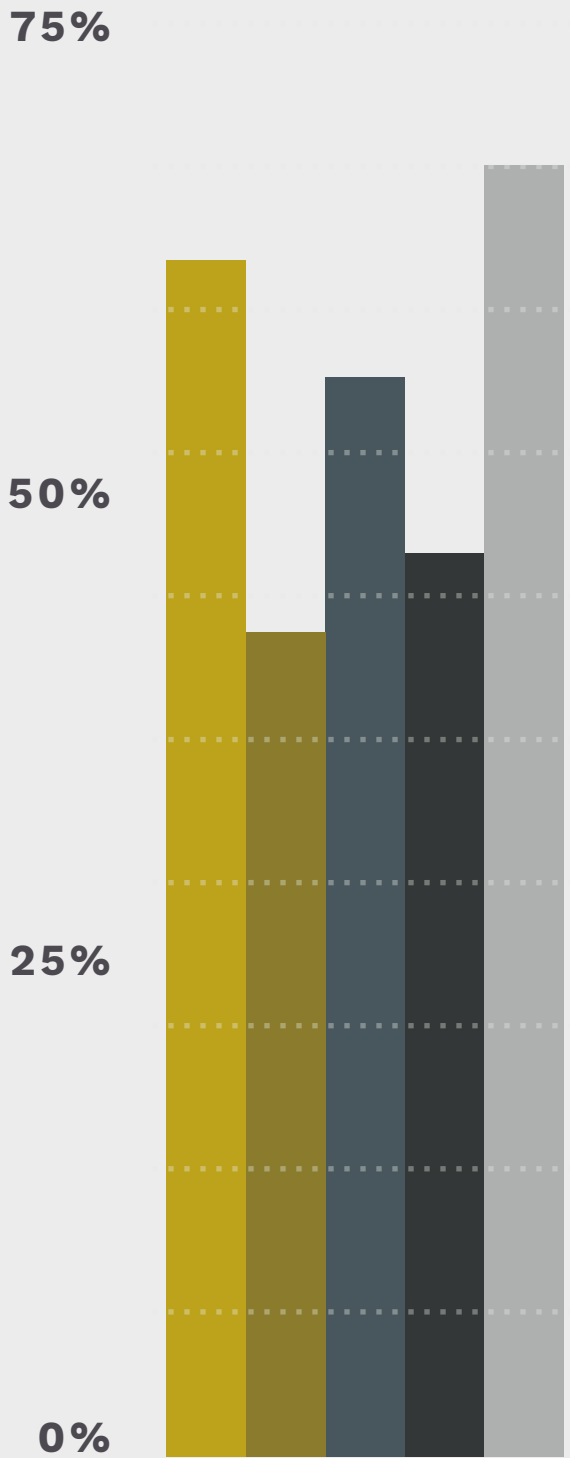
Age

% AGE 30+



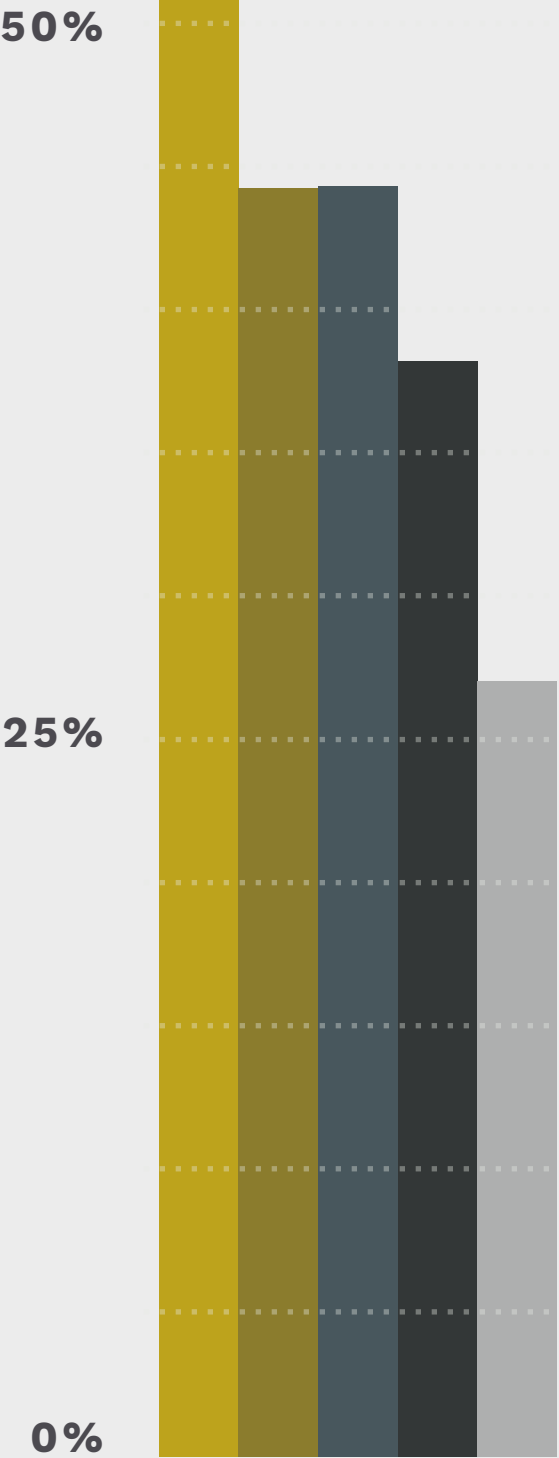
Gender

% FEMALE



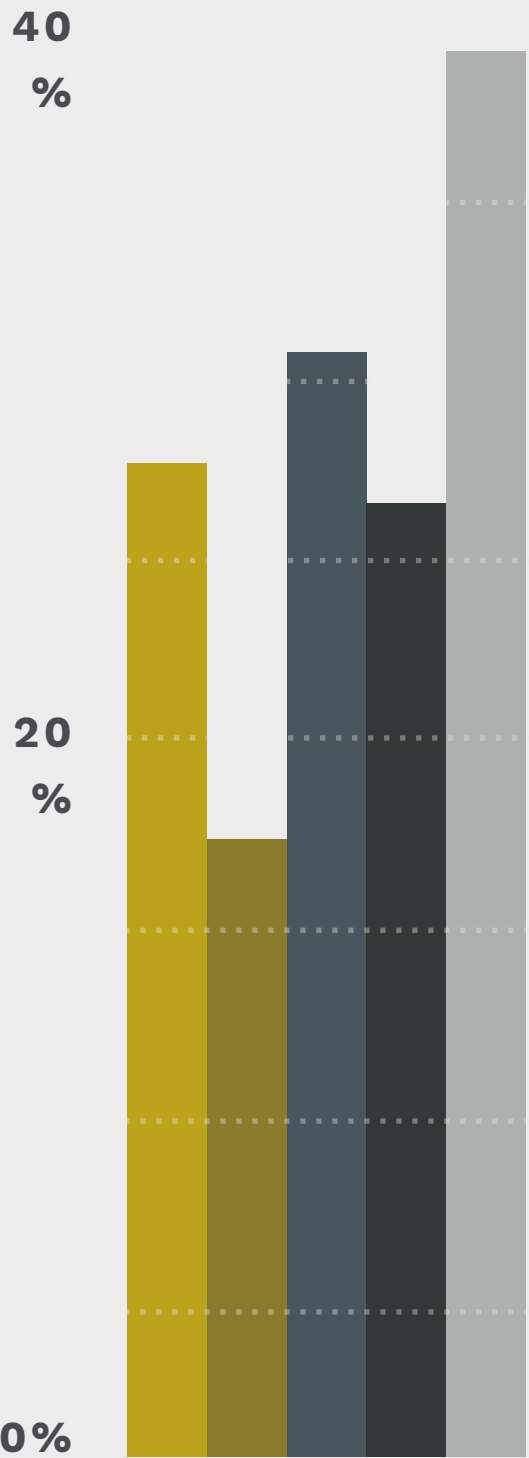
Kids

% W/ UNDER 18



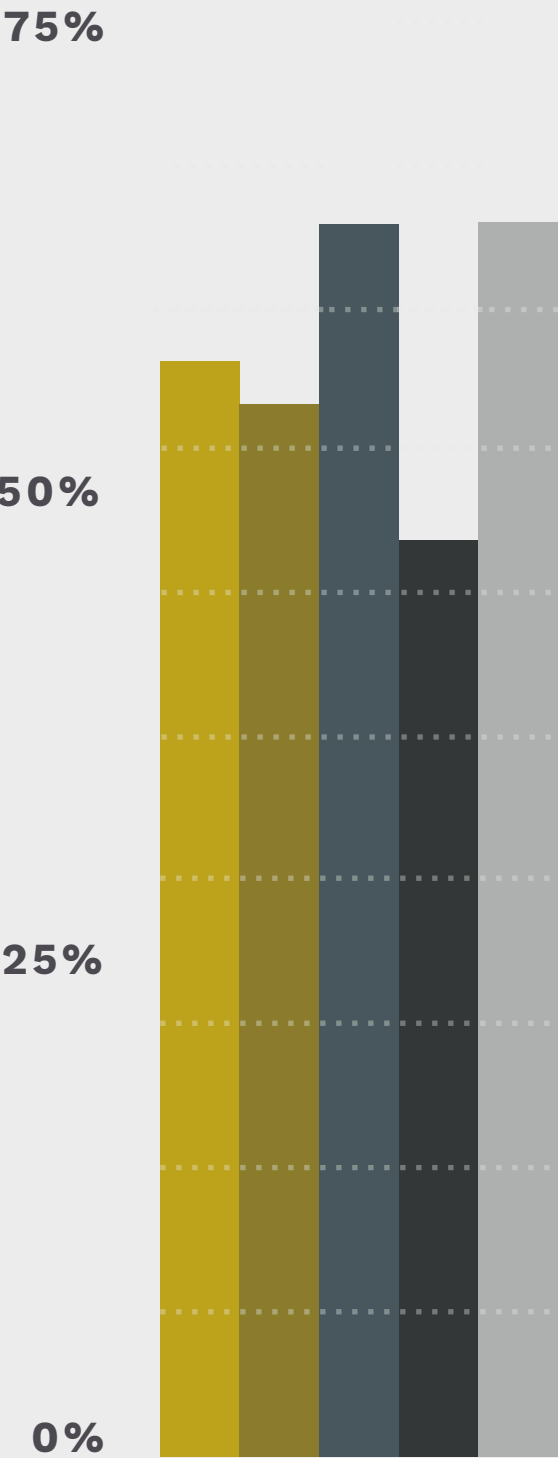
Education

% BACHELORS



Income

% >\$50K



Audience Spotlight

STRIVERS

Strivers are older, educated, and well-off, shopping and exploring hobbies in their downtime.

Demographics

STRIVERS ARE OLDER (JUST 10% ARE UNDER 30 AND 56% AGE 55+), MAJORITY WOMEN (67%).
ONLY 27% LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CHILD UNDER THE AGE OF 18.
23% ARE RETIRED, 12% ARE PROFESSIONALS, AND 12% ARE UNEMPLOYED.
THEY ARE THE MOST EDUCATED GROUP (40% HAVE BACHELOR’S DEGREES OR ABOVE).
THEY HAVE THE HIGHEST INCOMES OF ANY AUDIENCE (63% MAKE MAKE 50K+).

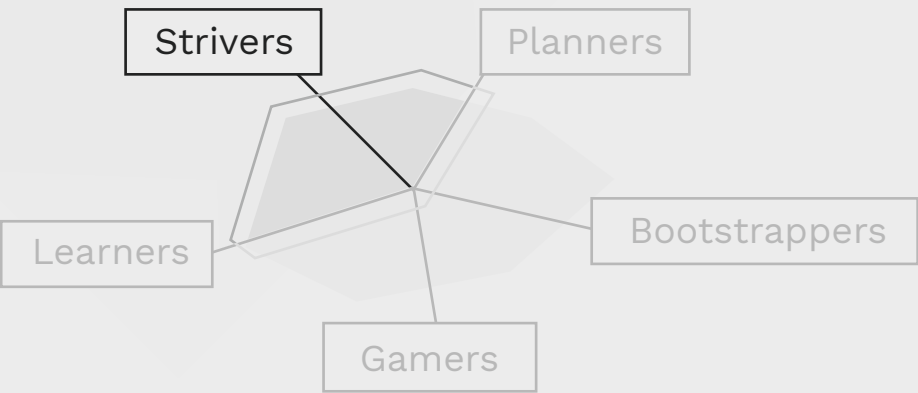
how to gospel diy
video jesus you
education cooking recipe news vevo
food interview r&b of
music tutorial disney
study mukbang music
john green james funny
english buzzfeed games
reaction kpop
gameplay battle royale

Strivers spend more time online than any other group.

They also spend more time with the news: 2% of their overall consumption is news related, double that of other segments.

When turning off the news, Strivers are tuning into YouTube, specifically to learn and explore their hobbies. Tags like “how to”, “interview,” “recipe” and “cooking” are common for Strivers. These

interests are something they share with Learners, in shared tags like “education”, “tutorial”, “disney”, and “mukbang”! Or, they are using the Internet transactionally to shop (ex. hsn.com), bank (ex. wellsfargo.com), and work (ex. office.com and zoom.com)



Audience Spotlight

BOOTSTRAPPERS

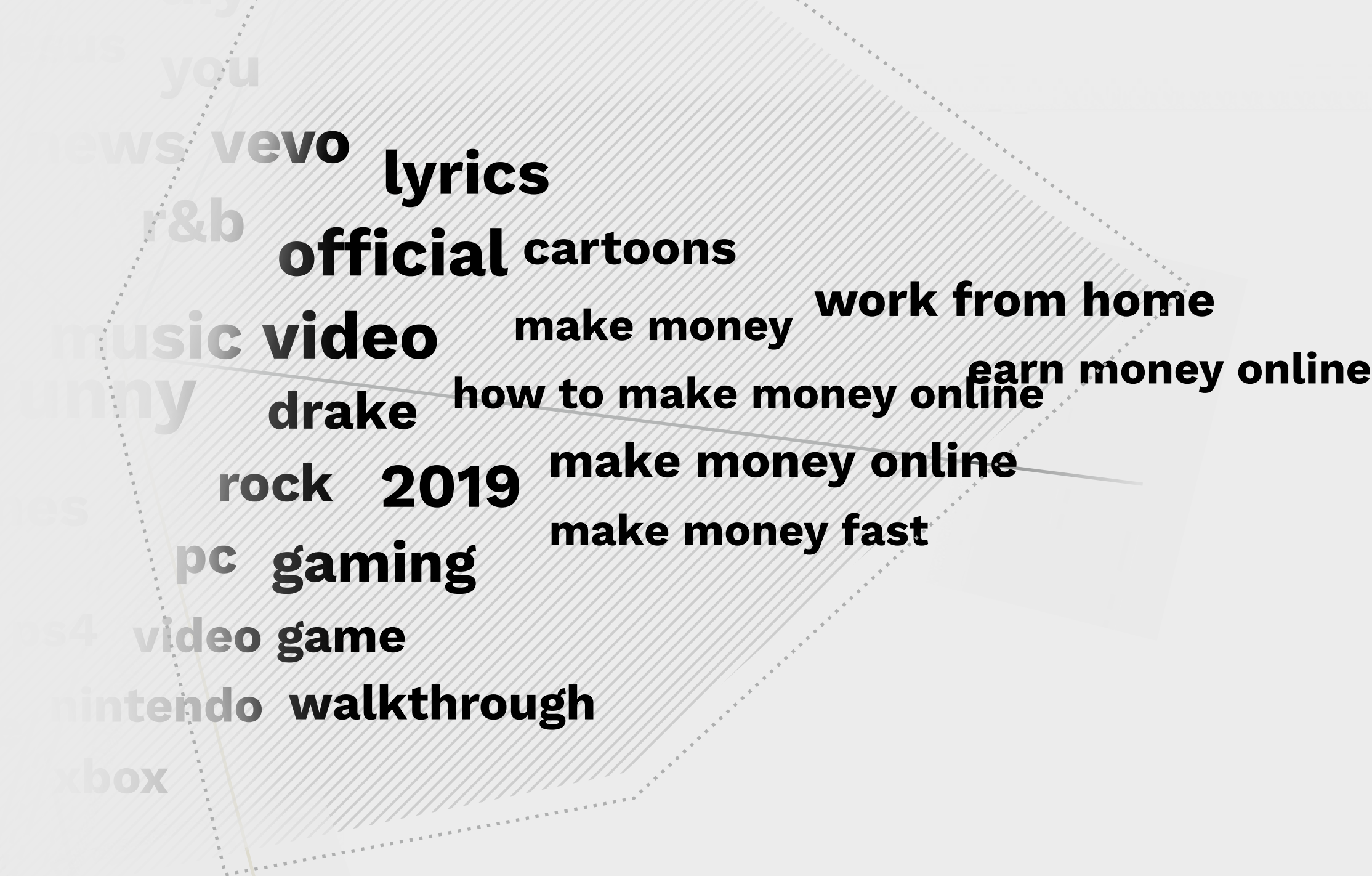
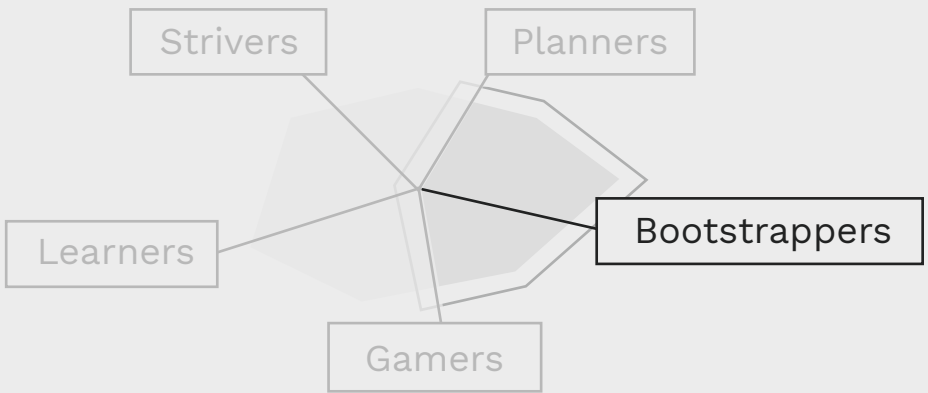
Bootstrappers are online to find work and earn.

Demographics

THE MAJORITY OF BOOTSTRAPPERS ARE MIDDLE AGE (43% ARE BETWEEN 35 AND 54) AND MALE (52%).
38% LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CHILD UNDER 18.
19% ARE UNEMPLOYED, 11% ARE RETIRED, AND 11% IDENTIFY AS OTHER.
27% HAVE BACHELOR’S DEGREES OR ABOVE.
ABOUT HALF (46%) MAKE 50K OR MORE.

Bootstrappers are the second oldest audience segment—both are made up primarily with people over 30—and like Strivers, they spend a lot of time online. Bootstrappers use the internet to seek out work opportunities and are defined by quick survey sites like mturk.com, swagbucks.com, qmee.com, in addition to money sites like patreon.com and coinbase.com.

This entrepreneurship is also reflected in their YouTube videos, with tags like “how to make money online” and “work from home.” They are also watching videos for entertainment with tags like “drake”.



Audience Spotlight

PLANNERS

Planners spend their time online focused on banking, personal finance, and taking care of young children.

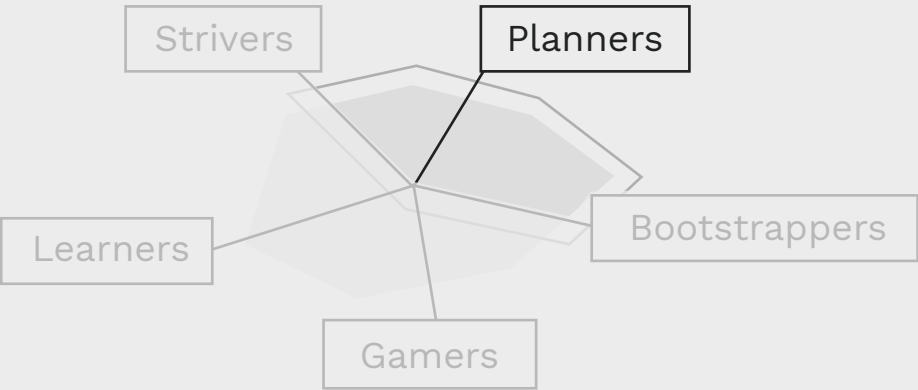


Demographics

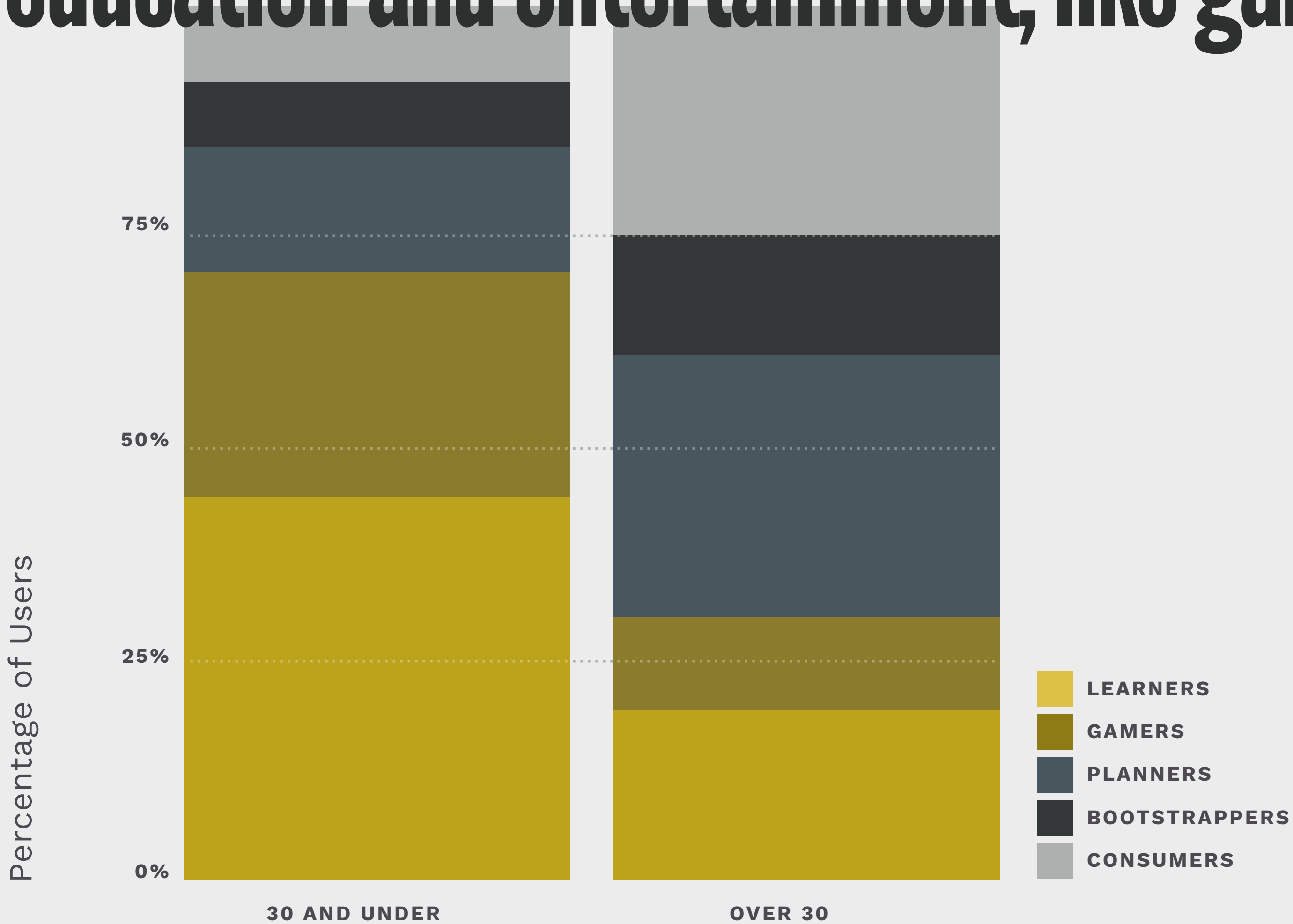
THE MAJORITY ARE MIDDLE AGED (61% BETWEEN 35 AND 54), AND FEMALE (59%).
45% LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CHILD UNDER 18.
13% ARE UNEMPLOYED, 10% ARE RETIRED, 10% ARE PROFESSIONALS, AND 11% IDENTIFY AS OTHER.
31% HAVE BACHELOR’S DEGREES OR ABOVE.
A MAJORITY OF THE GROUP (63%) MAKES 50K OR MORE.

Although Planners makes up 25% of the Black Audience, they make up only 13% of total consumption. When they do go on, they are banking (capitalone.com, bankofamerica.com, chase.com), paying bills or taxes (xfinity.com, irs.gov, intuit.com, freetaxusa.com), and shopping (walmart.com, amazon.com). Their YouTube

consumption is centered around news and entertainment, with tags like “r&b”, “vevo”, and “news”. Interestingly, they share religious tags with Strivers such as “jesus” and “gospel”.



For younger audiences, the internet is for education and entertainment, like gaming.



26% of the Black audience is under 30, and 70% of these users are in Learners or Gamers.

These audiences spend less of their time on traditional news sites, so connecting with them means engaging in a voice that resonates with the values that their online behaviors reflect.

Both groups are drawn to entertainment on sites like netflix.com. Learners, however, spend a lot of time focused on self-enhancement through learning. Gamers spend more time on pleasure and fun on gaming and pornography sites.

Audience Spotlight

LEARNERS

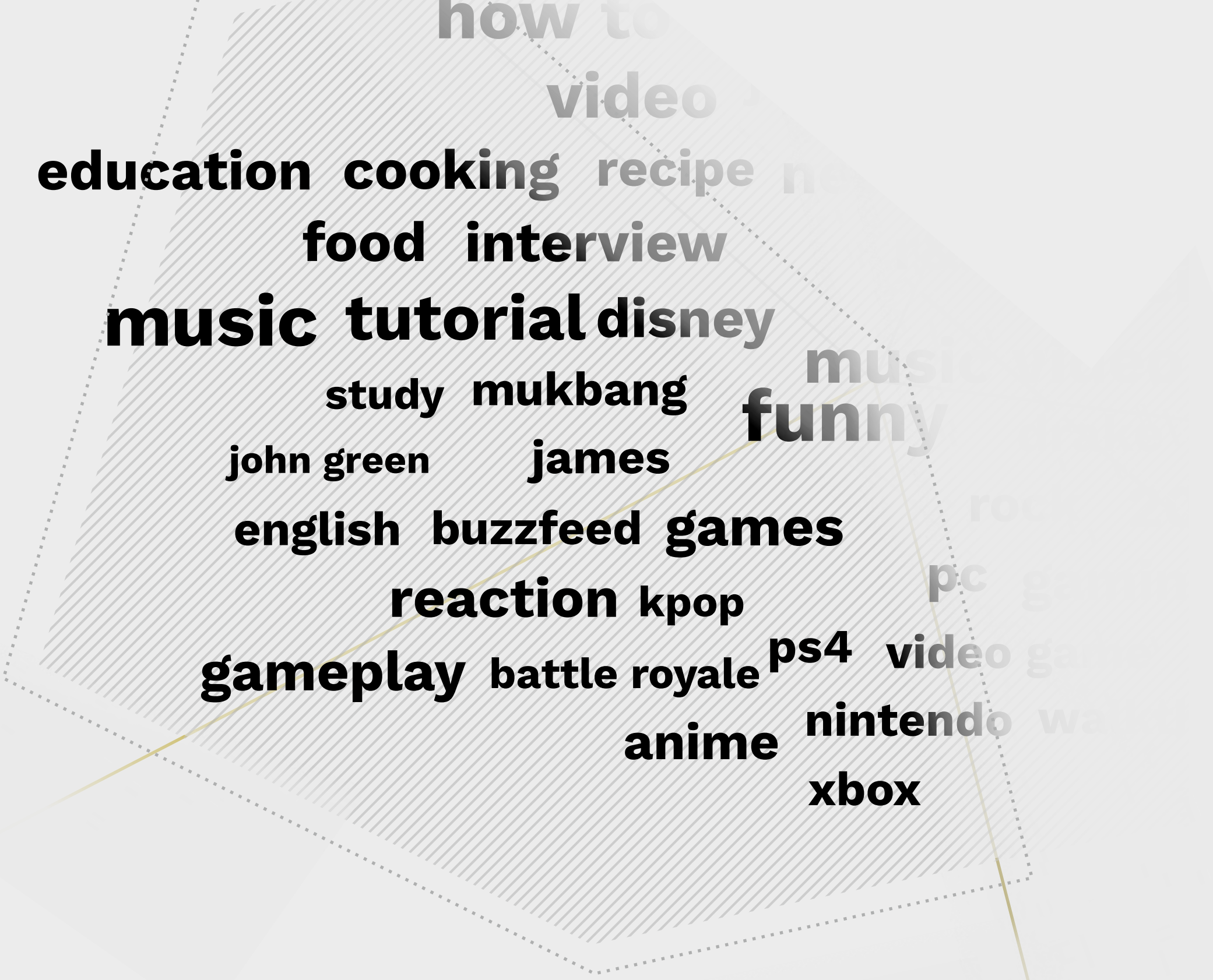
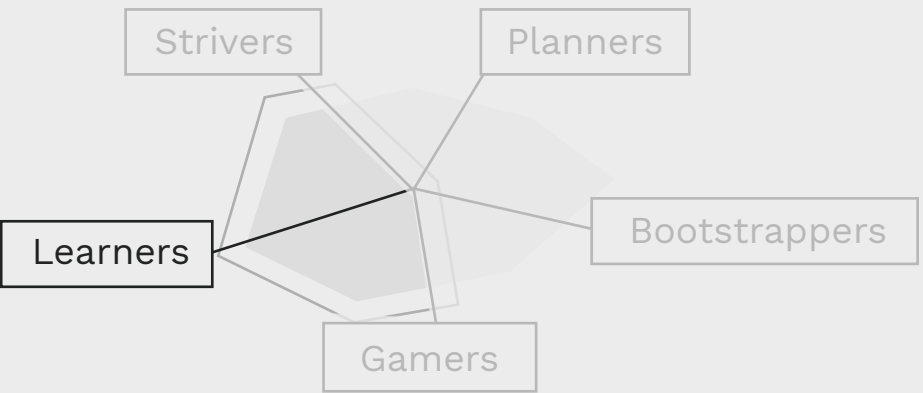
Learners are young, educating themselves and exploring culture online.

Demographics

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT POST-MILLENNIAL INTERNET USE, LEARNERS DEFINITELY REPRESENT ONE MAJOR GROUP, WITH 54% BEING 35 AND UNDER.
THEY ARE ALSO MAJORITY WOMEN (63%), AND 52% LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CHILD UNDER 18.
21% ARE FULL TIME STUDENTS, 15% ARE UNEMPLOYED AND 11% IDENTIFY AS OTHER.
28% HAVE BACHELOR’S DEGREES OR ABOVE.
A LITTLE OVER HALF (55%) MAKE 50K OR MORE.

Learners are defined by their unique use of learning sites such as chegg.com, instructure.com, blackboard.com, quizlet.com and others. However, that doesn’t mean they don’t also use the internet for entertainment. Hulu.com is a top domain for Learners, and they are watching videos on YouTube, with tags like “gameplay”.

They also share a lot of YouTube interests tags with another younger segment, Gamers, including tags such as “games”, “ps4”, and “kpop”, and “anime”.



Audience Spotlight

GAMERS

Gamers are young people gaming and exploring culture.

Demographics

GAMERS REPRESENT THE OTHER FACET OF POST-MILLENNIAL INTERNET USE, WITH 52% BEING 35 AND UNDER.

HOWEVER, THIS GROUP IS MAJORITY MEN (57%) AND 46% LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CHILD UNDER 18.

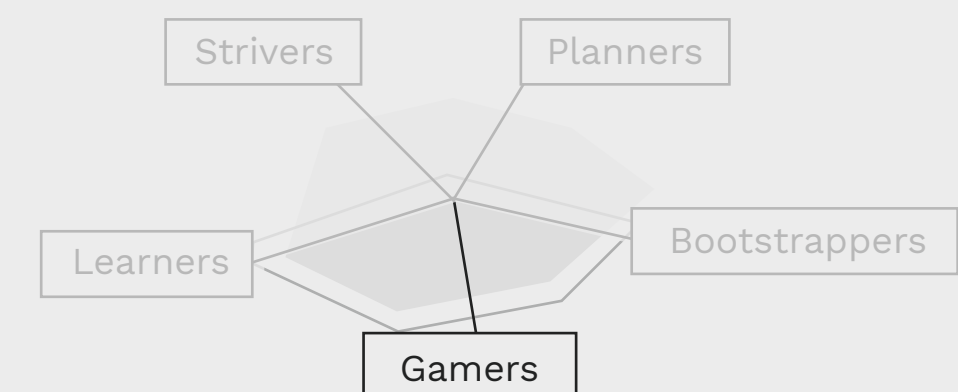
COMPARED TO LEARNERS, A GREATER NUMBER ARE UNEMPLOYED (19%), 12% ARE FULL TIME STUDENTS, AND 11% IDENTIFY AS OTHER.

18% HAVE BACHELORS DEGREES OR ABOVE.

A LITTLE OVER HALF (53%) MAKE 50K OR MORE.

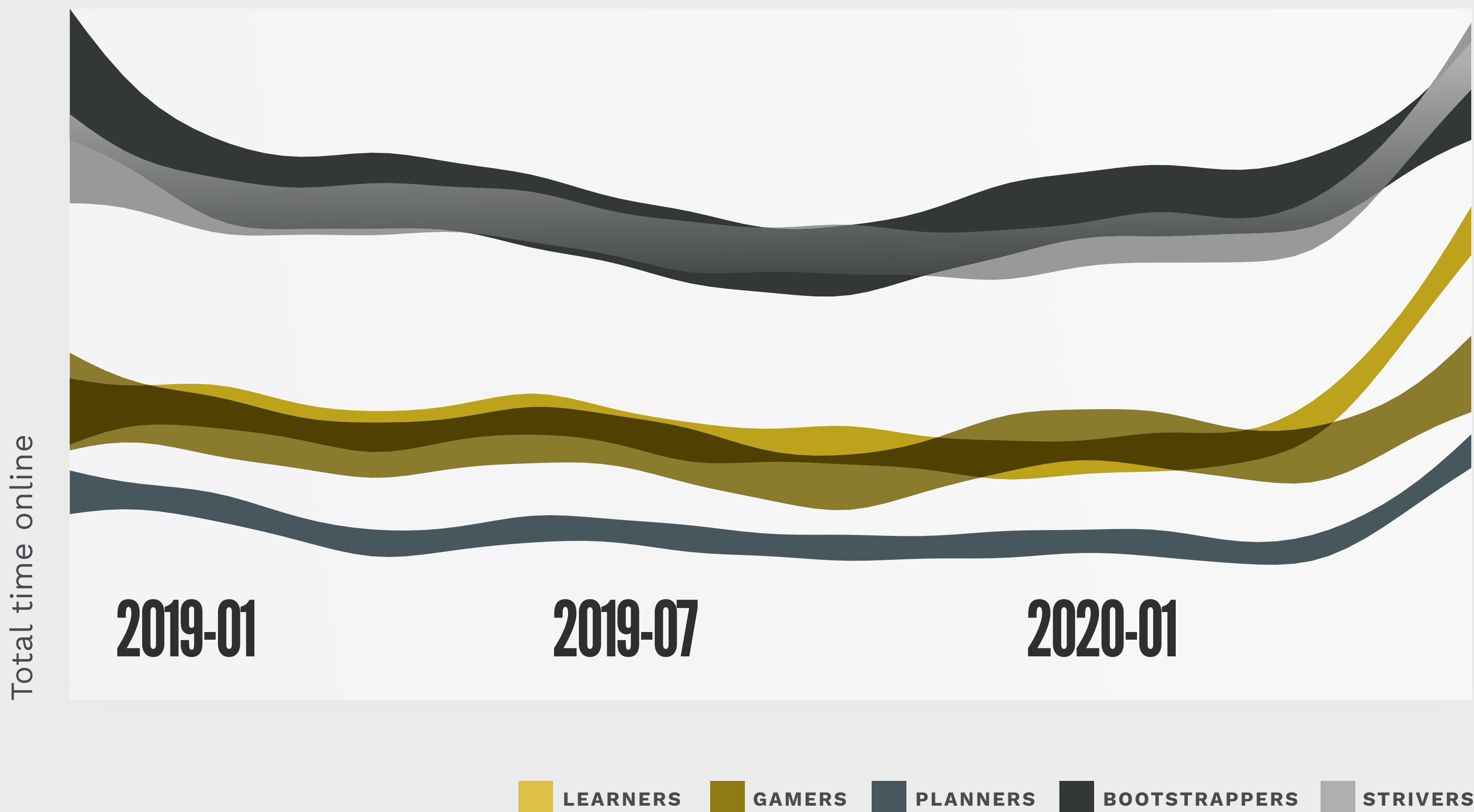
Gamers share many similarities both demographically and behaviorally with Learners. When it comes to YouTube tags, they are both drawn to gaming and manga, with Gamers owning the word “nintendo” and Learners owning “gameplay”. However the other domains they visit are quite distinct, with Gamers spending their time mostly on gaming sites while Learners primarily

search educational websites. Demographically both are young—with the majority of both groups being 30 and under—with men making up the majority of Gamers and women making up the majority of Learners.



THE IMPACT OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

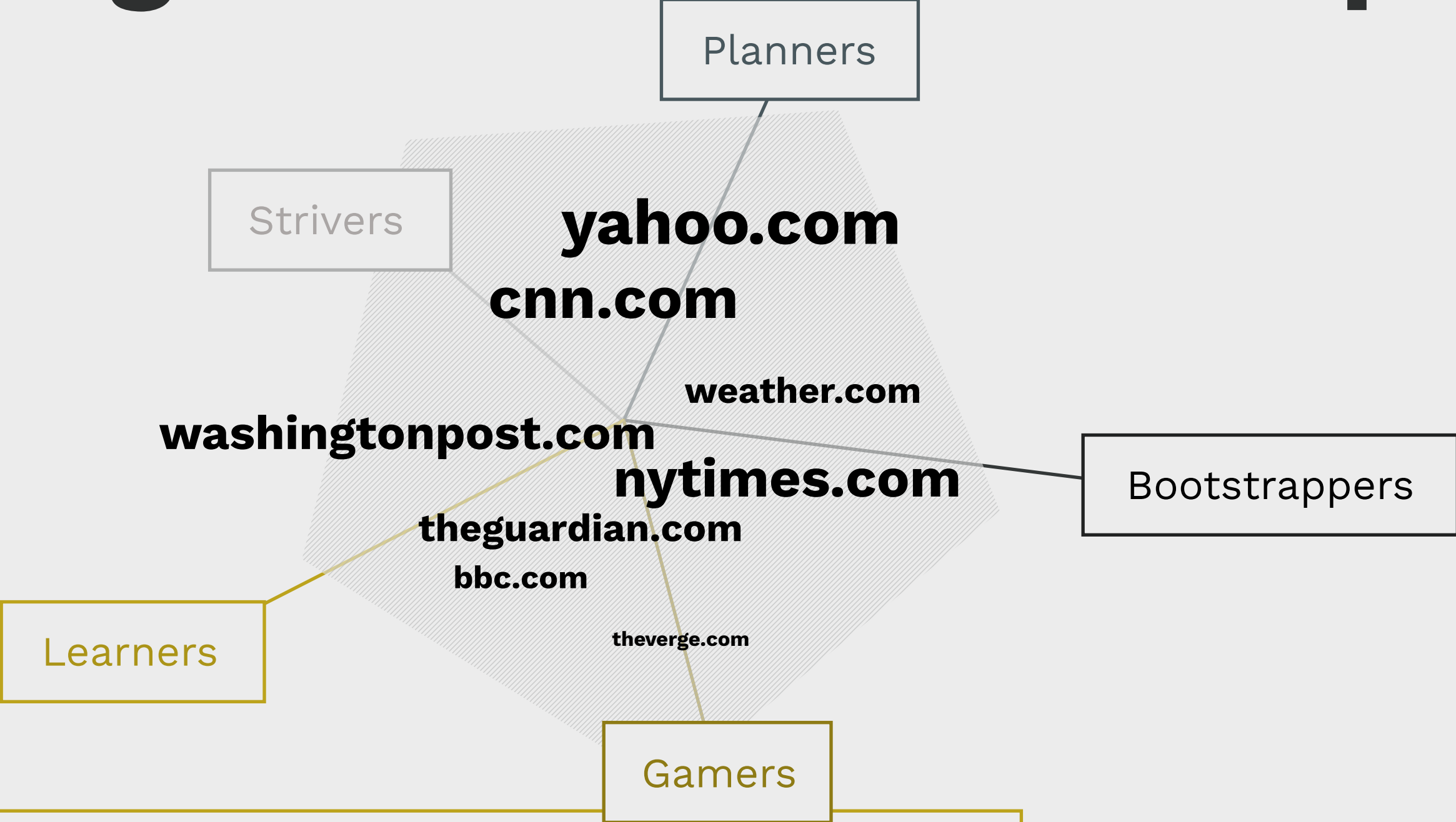
COVID means more time at home and on the desktop, especially for Learners



Most people are spending more time online. Some of the increase is likely displacement—internet use from phone or at work that is now taking place at home where the desktop internet panel detects it—and some is likely increased reliance on the internet for entertainment and to complete tasks while most businesses are closed.

The biggest increase is for Learners, who are doing their school online now, but the pandemic has also substantially increased internet usage for Planners whose usage in 2019 was quite low. Bootstrappers were already spending a lot of time online, and their usage hasn't increased much; they may already have been home before the pandemic.

Black audiences are getting their COVID news from mainstream and left-leaning outlets on their desktops



News Aggregators It is not always possible to tell exactly what a user is doing on a site, but the yahoo.com estimates here do exclude use of that site for e-mail. This is time spent on yahoo.com itself, reading headlines, looking at the weather, etc.

Zooming in on news sites that reached the largest Black audiences in March and April of 2020, during the COVID pandemic, Strivers spent nearly twice as much time reading news as other audiences, and that news is mainstream and left-leaning news. The younger audiences— Learners and Gamers—are reading less news, but it’s markedly left-leaning, from outlets like theguardian.com, washingtonpost.com, and nytimes.com

News aggregator sites like yahoo.com and even weather.com are important sources of headlines for the Black audience overall and especially for Bootstrappers, who spend a lot of time online but very little on news sites.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Effective engagement requires a segment specific approach

LEARNERS

Represent largest proportion of the rising American electorate

Young Black Americans, especially women

Spending hours online studying and learning, especially during COVID lockdowns

Choosing light-hearted entertainment like KPop and fun like gamer videos

GAMERS

A sizeable chunk of the rest of the rising American electorate

Young Black Americans, especially men

Using the internet to play social games and for social media

Choosing entertainment that is related to their social gameplay

STRIVERS

The most politically engaged audience

Older, well-off Black Americans, especially women

Easy to reach on a variety of banking, working, shopping and gaming sites

Choosing entertainment that helps them learn more about their interests, and religious music

BOOTSTRAPPERS

Hardworking, but not necessarily politically engaged

Middle aged, freelance or unemployed Black Americans, especially men

Spending time making money from internet surveys

Choosing entertainment that helps them make more money online

PLANNERS

Hard to reach, but motivated audience

Middle aged, busy Black Americans, especially women

Using the internet to bank, do their taxes and shop

Choosing entertainment that is related to news, religion and music

THANK YOU. ▣

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HARMONYLABS

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Anti-Latinx

Computational Propaganda in the United States

**An analysis of discussions about
Latinxs and politics on Reddit prior
to the 2018 midterm elections**



ABSTRACT

How did social media discussions around the Latinx community evolve during the 2018 US midterm elections? How might this affect the involvement of Latinxs in and around the election?

Given that the Latinx community is the second largest ethnic group in the US, an understanding of how Latinxs are discussed and targeted on social media during US elections is crucial. This paper explores these questions through a data analysis on Reddit, one of the most prominent and popular social media platforms for political discussion. We collected Reddit posts mentioning Latinxs and the US midterm elections from September 24, 2017 to September 24, 2018. We analyzed people's posting patterns over time, and the digital traces of the individuals posting the majority of content and the most popular content. Our research highlights data voids that existed in online discussions surrounding Latinxs prior to the US midterm elections. We observe a lack of neutral actors engaging Latinxs in political topics. It appears that it is the more extremist voices (i.e. individuals operating within subreddits who identify themselves as political trolls) who are creating the most political content about Latinxs. We conclude our report with a discussion of the possible dangers of data voids (especially with regard to their ties to mis- and disinformation) and recommendations to increase the involvement of the Latinx community in future US elections.

Claudia Flores-Saviaga, Saiph Savage

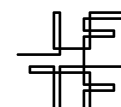
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With help from students

Manjul Shrestha and Ruben Cuadra

ABOUT THESE PAPERS

This case study series explores the social implications of computational propaganda. Each report outlines how tools and tactics, including bots, disinformation and political harassment, were used over social media in attempts to silence social and issue-focused groups prior to the 2018 US midterm elections.



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introduction

In the 2008 and 2012 US presidential campaigns, there was a belief that digital tools could enhance democracy by expanding citizen empowerment and engagement (Tucker et al., 2018). After the 2016 US presidential campaign, however, new concerns arose about how social media can be used to spread “fake news” and undermine election confidence (Persily, 2017). Research has shown that social media was used as a tool to spread computational propaganda and disinformation, causing social disruptions (Woolley & Howard, 2016, 2017).

While most current research has focused on how disinformation is targeting populations, little is known about how online political discussions about the Latinx community are evolving on social media. It is important to understand the dynamics of these online discussions, to ensure that the Latinx community is not being unfairly targeted externally, and has access to fair and accurate information internally. They are an important voting bloc— 27.3 million Latinxs were eligible to vote in 2016, a larger number than any other ethnic group of voters, representing 12% of all eligible voters (Krogstad, 2016).

Online social media networks have enabled people to read and share news, discuss important events, and engage in political discussions (Yaqub et al., 2017). With regard to the 2016 US presidential election, Reddit played a significant role in the dispersion of political news (Roozenbeek & Palau, 2017; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). Therefore, we analyzed one year of Reddit posts (September 24, 2017 to September 24, 2018) to examine mentions of Latinxs in online political discussions surrounding the 2018 US midterm elections.

To characterize the content that people posted about Latinxs during the midterm elections, we used analytic techniques similar to those used to examine discourse between politicians and their audiences (Larsson & Moe, 2012; Flores-Saviaga et al., 2016; 2018). Our aim was to explore the context under which Latinxs and electoral content gained attention over time and to investigate the behavioral patterns of the people pushing such content.

Through our analysis, we uncovered that the conversations on different subreddits came mainly from extremist voices—specifically, pro-Trump political trolls. We call political trolls those participating in the so-called “alt-right” movement that burst onto the national political scene in 2015 (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016). The loose movement includes white nationalists and disillusioned right-wing dissidents who capitalized on the anti-immigration and anti-establishment campaign themes of Donald Trump, and thrust their ideas into the political mainstream. Participants utilized coordinated messaging and memes, and, like Trump, the movement attracted attention and visibility through provocations and sensationalism (Heikkilä, 2017). Reddit has been an important platform for political trolls, enabling them to connect and coordinate in siloed subreddits (Flores-Saviaga et al. 2018; Jamieson, 2018; Merrin, 2019).

Our research finds that political trolls have numerous strategies for engaging people in topics around Latinxs and the elections, including the creation of posts where people can directly talk with politicians (AMAs) and megathreads where people can have extensive discussions about topics they care about (e.g., “Choose a nickname for the Wall!”). Our investigation suggests that extremist voices are dominating conversations about politics and Latinxs on Reddit. Our data analysis examines the extent to which this is happening. While there is general lack of interest from the media in covering political events concerning the Latinx community (Bosquez, 2018), the data analysis in this paper reveals that extremist voices discussing Latinx topics appear to be louder than those of supporters. The analysis also shows that extremist voices filled a data void that existed in online discussions surrounding Latinxs and the 2018 US midterm elections.

background

The literature has defined data voids to be “search terms for which the available relevant data is limited or non-existent” (Golebiewski & boyd, 2018). Usually, data voids emerge because they are related to concepts that people rarely search for or that people generally do not generate content for. Data voids can be problematic because they can be exploited by individuals with ideological, economic, and/or political agendas. In this case, we identified that political trolls appeared to be occupying a data void and using it to push their own content and narratives around Latinxs and the midterm elections. Their seizure of the data void likely increased exposure to their ideas. For instance, if someone interested in the topic searched for information on Reddit, they would be more likely to stumble on the content generated by political trolls and the surrounding stories they were pushing, than content from more neutral sources, which was almost nonexistent.

We finish by discussing the combined implications of our findings, with particular concern for the lack of neutral actors engaging Latinxs in political discussions.

The effects of disinformation on democracy

Social media allows anyone to easily initiate public political debates, but it can also give a platform to extremist voices and actors that seek to manipulate the political conversation in order to further their own financial or political interests (Tucker et al., 2017; Tucker et al., 2018). The increased spread of political disinformation and propaganda, facilitated by social media, is considered to have negative societal outcomes (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Previous research has shown that misinformation can be amplified in communities where people with similar points of view coincide and few dissenting voices exist, creating a *filter bubble* effect (Pariser, 2011). These “information cocoons” can bring about an increase in societal polarization (Sunstein, 2018). Minorities are one of the groups most susceptible to disinformation; and disinformation can lead to distortions in the collective public opinion about minority groups, which can affect policy and election outcomes (Tucker et al., 2018). These distortions may be created, encouraged, and disseminated by political actors who seek to promote their policies, win an election, or avoid accountability for their actions (Fritz, Keefer, & Nyhan, 2004; Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017).

Filling data voids with mis- and disinformation

“Data voids” are created when relevant data is limited, non-existent, or deeply problematic (Golebiewski & boyd, 2018). Data voids can have obvious adverse consequences in other settings relevant to the public’s welfare, such as elections (Galston, 2017). The 2016 presidential campaign exposed the weakness of norms and institutions, including the mainstream media and political party organizations, creating a void that was filled with unmediated populism (Galston, 2017). It has been documented how malicious actors and digital marketers run junk news factories to disseminate misinformation (Woolley & Howard, 2018). This is problematic because false political news can be more viral than any other types of false information (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). If data voids are filled with disinformation created by malicious actors, the information may continue to influence people’s reasoning, even if it later turns out to be incorrect (Ecker et al., 2011).

methods

Our research is centered on one question: What topics related to the Latinx community were discussed before the 2018 US midterm elections? To answer this, we chose to perform a data analysis on Reddit posts, because it played a prominent role in the dissemination of information during the 2016 US presidential election (Roozenbeek & Palau, 2017; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). We conducted a content analysis of Reddit posts related to the midterm elections and Latinxs. We made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Our goal was to understand what Latinx topics were discussed and which types of accounts were mentioning Latinxs.

We collected Reddit posts related to Latinxs and elections from September 24, 2017 to September 24, 2018. Our Reddit sample consists of 1,463 unique posts and 968 unique users. We used the Reddit streaming API, which collects posts across different subreddits (communities on Reddit). The posts were exclusively from six different political subreddits: r/Ask_Politics, r/Politics, r/News, r/True_News, r/Political_Humor, r/The_Donald, r/Democrats, and r/Republicans. It is interesting to note that r/Latinx, r/Mexico and other subreddits dedicated to Latinx topics did not seem to have posts related to the midterm elections.

To identify the Reddit content related to Latinxs and the midterm elections, we followed an existing methodology that has been used to analyze online audiences (Savage & Monroy- Hernández, 2015; Stewart et al. 2017). We manually created a list of keywords related to the Latinx community and the midterm elections. We included a variety of slang terms and derogatory slurs that are used to describe Latinxs in order to collect posts from different social groups (e.g., Latinxs from California sometimes call themselves “Chicanos”; some people use the slur “beaners” to negatively reference Latinxs). To identify keywords related to the midterm elections we referenced news reports and the 2018 US midterm election Wikipedia pages to identify all proper names

(e.g., names of candidates) and the names of major organizations that participated in the election. To minimize sample bias, we collected terms from a broad range of news websites that represented a variety of political views and inclinations. The terms were in both English and Spanish. We then used a combination of terms to narrow our search results (e.g., we queried Reddit with “chicanos” and midterms).

Our sampling method enabled us to explore narratives involving the Latinx community that occurred throughout the year prior to the 2018 midterm elections. However, our sample is not necessarily representative of broader indirect discourses about the Latinx community within the general US political context. Specifically, our sample is towards discussion about Latinxs and the midterm elections. We’ve taken care to report our findings within the limitations of this sample. Our analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics tools, such as the plugin Post Volume Stats, which helped us visualize how information was assembled during the time period studied. We then used the products of the quantitative analysis to inform a qualitative inquiry that involved the sampling of individually distinctive posts to discover discursive patterns and themes.

The evolution of Reddit discussions over time

To understand temporal participation, we conducted quantitative analysis of posts over time. The graph in Figure 1 represents the temporal distribution of the resulting dataset along with captions for the topics in the conversations happening over one year: from September 24, 2017 to September 24, 2018. To achieve this, we plotted the total number of posts per day.

results

Understanding how discussions happen over time

The temporal distribution of the resulting dataset allowed us to detect spikes of activity in the conversations on Reddit, as well as the conversations relating to Latinxs and midterm elections that correlated with those spikes. Figure 1 illustrates the total number of Reddit posts made per day. The x-axis represents the date the post was made, and the y-axis represents the total number of posts shared that particular day.

We observed, as shown in Figure 1, an increase in Reddit posts about Latinxs and elections very early in the year (February 2018). The posts in February 2018 were about the primaries that were happening that month in Texas, a state with a large number of Latinxs (Dep.Com.U.S., 2010).

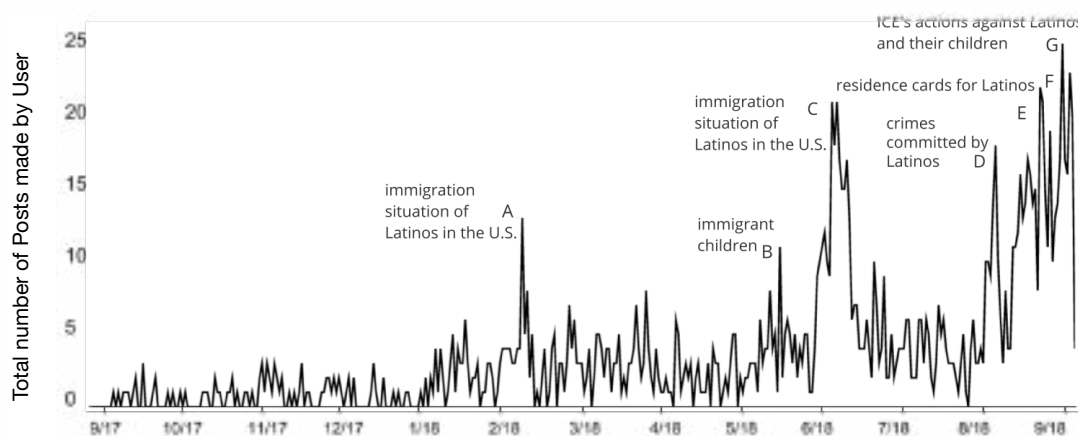
We noted that most of the peaks on Reddit were discussions around immigration issues. For instance, on February 14, 2018 (Figure 1, Point A), there is a spike in posts about immigration. This coincides with the open-ended debate on immigration that started on

the Senate floor the evening before and stalled when Democrats objected to the Republicans' amendment that would punish so-called "sanctuary cities." From February onwards, discussions around political events and Latinxs appeared to occur with greater regularity. Notably, there were few discussions around the voter registration issues that Latinxs experienced.

We also saw evidence of immigration debates happening in the days before and after the February 2018 Senate immigration debate. Reddit users engaged in the debate increased discussions on megathreads and AMAs.¹

On May 29, 2018 (Figure 1, Point B), the conversation revolved around the treatment of children separated from undocumented immigrant parents at the border—a topic that continued to generate extensive debate on the platform. The spike on June 19, 2018 (Figure 1, Point C), was due to discussions about state and federal lawmakers who were denied entry to a shelter in Florida amid uproar over the federal government's break-up of families caught illegally crossing the US (Smiley, 2018).

Figure 1. Overview of people's posting behavior for content related to Latinxs and the 2018 US midterm election on Reddit.



1. Moderators of subreddits will organize megathreads when specific topics have an influx of participants. AMAs (Ask Me Anything sessions) are special threads where users can question celebrities and high-profile individuals. In this case, users from Reddit invited mainly politicians to participate in AMA sessions.

On September 11, 2018 (Figure 1, Point D), there was a peak in debate related to the murder of a teen in New Jersey who was allegedly killed by an undocumented immigrant. A large number of the posts discussed and encouraged support for building a wall at the US-Mexico border. The top posts on September 20 and September 23, 2018 (Figure 1, Points E, F, and G), belonged to discussions about the policies Trump had proposed around immigrants, such as the curtailing of green cards for immigrants on public aid and the transfer of \$260M from cancer research, HIV/AIDS, and other programs to cover the costs of detaining the children of immigrants.

Understanding the people behind the discussions

We were also interested in uncovering the main people driving conversations around Latinxs and the midterm election. For this purpose, we plotted the total number of Reddit posts a particular user generated versus their popularity. The x-axis in Figure 2 represents the total number of Reddit posts made by each user. The y-axis represents the total popularity of the user's posts (combined number of upvotes or favorites). Each point in Figure 2 represents a user on Reddit.

We identified the most active users on Reddit by finding those individuals whose number of posts was

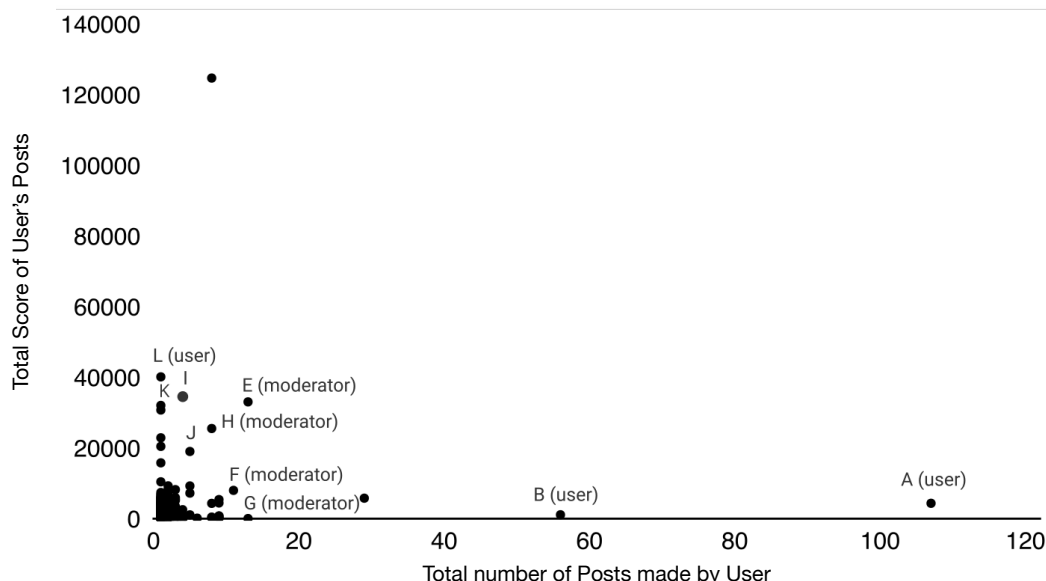
higher than three times the standard deviation (normal procedure to find outliers). We then profiled these highly active users (each labeled in Figure 2 with a letter) and analyzed the type of topics mentioned in their content. Our analysis identified three distinct user types according to behaviors observed: (A) “Latinx Aware + anti-Trump”; (B) “pro-Trump + trolls”; and, (C) “the neutrals.”

User Type A (“Latinx Aware + anti-Trump”): All users in this group (16% of the most active users) discussed the overall migratory situation of Latinxs in the US from the anti-Trump perspective (e.g., President Trump is racist and anti-immigrant). This behavior led us to call this group *Pro-Latinxs + anti-Trump*. On average, 26% of all the Reddit posts of these users discussed how Trump was racist, and cruel and inhumane for separating immigrant children from their parents at the border.

A sample post that people from this group shared:

**“Gratuitous cruelty by Homeland Security:
Separating a 7-year-old from her mother—
WHAT EXACTLY did a 7-year-old Congolese
girl do to the US to deserve the trauma that
has been visited upon her including forcible
separation from her mother by DHS Secretary
Nielsen and her immigration agents.”**

Figure 2: Overview of how much each individual person posted on Reddit and the attention they received from others.



User Type B (“Pro-Trump + trolls”): All authors in this group (41.5% of the most active users) belonged to r/The_Donald, a community known for its political trolling behavior (Flores-Saviaga et al., 2018). Their posts focused on mobilizing people to vote Republican (pro-Trump) in the midterm elections. This led us to call this group *Pro-Trump + trolls*. We noted that 34% of the posts generated by this group were megathreads, signaling deep discussions with others on Reddit. These megathreads occurred at least once per week (Figure 3). These users also organized AMAs with candidates and politicians who were participating in the midterm elections. For instance, one of their posts read:

"If you are a congressional candidate and are interested in holding an AMA (Ask Me Anything) on r/The_Congress, please contact The_Donald moderators by clicking the contact link on our sidebar."

All of these active users posted about the current immigration situation in the US and occasionally posted news about crimes allegedly committed by undocumented immigrants. There was also a tendency to use such news reports to show special favoritism toward Trump and his decisions relating to undocumented immigrants.

“Dad’s grief leads to a quest to count deaths caused by illegal immigrant drivers. In the wake of a 2013 study by the California Department of Motor Vehicles that concluded that unlicensed drivers are almost three times as likely to cause a deadly car accident as a licensed driver.”

The people in this group occasionally posted jokes about undocumented immigrants (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Pro-Trump megathread



Figure 4: Meme from r/The_Donald mocking Latinxs.



These users also tended to post pictures of Latinxs supporting Trump and encouraged Latinxs to vote Republican (Figure 5). We also identified that within this political troll group there was a tendency to organize collective action on other platforms such as Twitter (Robertson, Vatrappu, & Medina, 2010).

These users also tended to post pictures of Latinos supporting Trump and encouraged Latinos to vote Republican (Figure 5). We also identified that within this political troll group there was a tendency to organize collective action on other platforms such as Twitter (Robertson, Vatrappu, & Medina, 2010).

User Type C (“The Neutrals”) This group (41.5% of the most active users) had a more neutral view on the topic of Latinxs and their rights in the US. They primarily posted news reports from websites that are known to have a neutral tone. For this reason, we

called the groups *The Neutrals*. We noted that 35% of the posts of these users were megathreads where they discussed the political ecosystem in general (without supporting Republicans or Democrats). We also noted that people in this group shared posts where fake news stories regarding Latinxs were debunked. However, this was less than 1% of their posts. An example of a debunking post:

“Breitbart fabricated a fake story that illegal immigrant started deadly Sonoma wildfires says Sherriff”

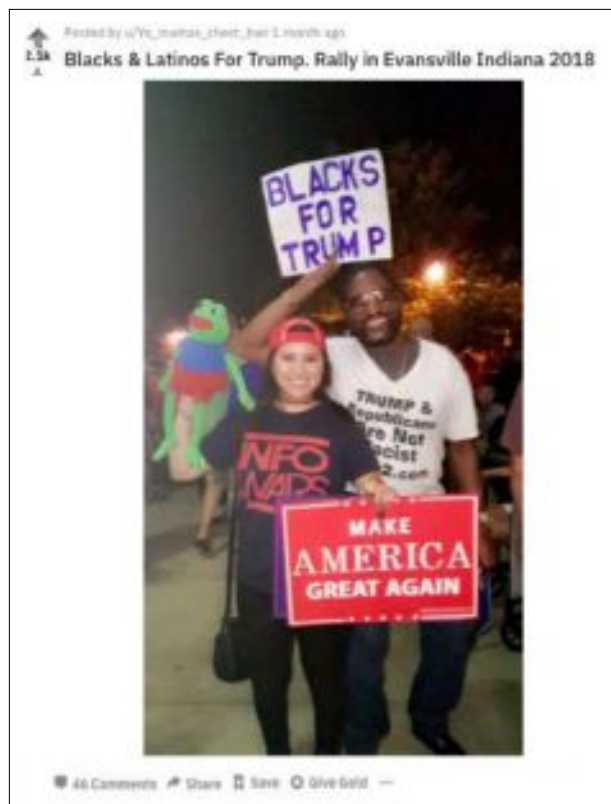
Limitations

The insights this investigation provides are limited by the methodology and population we studied. Our investigation also focused on breadth rather than depth. As a result, we do not know much about the identities of the people participating on Reddit or about their beliefs regarding disinformation targeting the Latinx community in the US. Future research could involve detailed interviews with actors from different organizations who have some relationship to the use of social media and/or a history of engagement in online politics and digital social life.

Methodological challenges

This study confronted methodological challenges that must be understood to interpret our findings correctly. The seed Reddit data we used to generate our graphs is inherently biased because of the Latinx and midterm terms we tracked. As a result, our findings are not intended to be representative of the overall Latinx community political conversation. Rather, we have studied a portion of online discourse that invokes the Latinx community and the US midterm elections directly (e.g., Reddit posts that mention the words “Latinx” and “midterm”). Similarly, due to the incomplete nature of our data, we cannot and do not seek to quantitatively assess the overall conversations happening on social networks regarding the Latinx community and midterm elections. Our goal was to understand a snapshot of how Reddit discussions temporally relate to current events, the topics being discussed, and the main actors shaping the discussions.

Figure 5: Example of a post on r/The_Donald.



conclusion

While substantial research has focused on how political disinformation targets populations at large, we lack knowledge about how social media discussions concerning minorities, particularly Latinxs, evolve and contribute to disinformation. Our research starts to address this gap by investigating how Latinxs were mentioned and discussed on Reddit in the year prior to the 2018 US midterm elections. Through our analysis, we saw spikes in the number of posts early on in the year when people became aware of the Family Separation Policy at the US-Mexico border.

We discovered that the groups that targeted Latinxs and more generally controlled the discussions related to all Latinx-related topics were primarily political trolls (e.g., users on the subreddit *r/The_Donald*, which was identified as a political troll community in previous research). We found evidence that political trolls had some dynamics for turning conversations around Latinxs into something interesting and engaging for everyone, such as introducing megathreads at least once per week on Reddit. Participants on these megathreads appeared to contextualize, explain, and discuss in detail their views of the political ecosystem, especially as it related to all Latinx groups. This type of social interaction where people draw others into what is happening politically is something our prior research had identified as effective for engaging and mobilizing individuals to action (Flores-Saviaga, 2018).

Our analysis also uncovered that political trolls created several AMAs (Ask Me Anything sessions) on Reddit with congressional candidates and political personalities where they discussed political topics regarding Latinxs and the midterm elections. This type of dynamic might also help to turn the topic of Latinxs and politics into something interesting and even be useful in mobilizing people to go to the polls. Future work could investigate how these interactions on social media affect people's voting behavior.

Our research also revealed how political trolls appeared to be covering and appropriating data voids around Latinxs in the 2018 US midterm elections—and that the pattern is likely to continue in future elections. Data voids occur when there is limited or non-existent information about certain topics (Golebiewski, 2018). For instance, there might be vast information in English about Ted Cruz, but there is less information about the topic in Spanish. As a result, if a person who only speaks Spanish searches for Ted Cruz to make a decision prior to the elections, he or she will likely obtain results that informationally lacking.

When there is a lack of high-quality content to cover data voids, new malicious content can easily surface. For instance, if there is no content available in Spanish about Ted Cruz, a malicious actor could fill that void with the information they desire (e.g., fake articles in Spanish that erroneously claim that Ted Cruz has paid the college tuition of many US Latinxs). It is difficult for a person to realize they have come across a harmful data void because there is no other information to refute the claim. Data voids can be exploited by those with ideological, economic, and/or political agendas (Golebiewski, 2018). In our research, we have observed that political trolls overall appear to have much more sophisticated techniques for creating engaging content around Latinxs and US elections; while neutral actors appear to have fewer strategies for engaging their audiences, which contributes to diminished engagement with Latinxs.

We believe our data analysis highlights possible data voids surrounding Latinxs and US politics and indicates how political trolls might be occupying the space. We believe it is important to think strategically about how to address this problem to limit the number of people who encounter harmful data voids. We provide some recommendations given our findings.

Recommendations

Mainstream media, politicians, and political organizations have a great window of opportunity for politically mobilizing Latinxs. Previous research has shown that taking the time to explain the political ecosystem to individuals is particularly important with regard to political mobilization (Flores-Saviaga, 2018). We believe that there should be more strategies for explaining the current political ecosystem to Latinxs—especially the role of the media in covering political events related to Latinxs. Additionally, strategies should be used to facilitate deep discussions with Latinxs (similar to those used by political trolls). Given that Latinxs are the second largest racial or ethnic group behind whites in the US (Flores, 2017), their inclusion in the political conversation could have a large impact on US politics. It is also important to fill the data void that currently exists, as it appears that only extreme groups, such as the political trolls, are the ones covering all the political events regarding Latinxs. While there are motivated biases in what they report, the counter-narratives are currently lacking.

We also believe it is important that institutions take actions to actively debunk misinformation regarding Latinxs, such as fake news reports about crimes allegedly committed by undocumented immigrants. Given what we saw on Reddit where citizens actively debunked fake news, perhaps they could collaborate with regular citizens to have an army of people to help them identify and debunk misinformation. Here we can consider implementing crowdsourcing techniques to create effective collaborations to fight misinformation, or systems that drive better collaborations between citizens, NGOs, and governments (Chiang, 2018).

Our results highlighted that the r/Latinx subreddit and r/Mexico subreddit were not participating in discussions around US political election (although they do have many users who are in the US). Lack of socialization among different Latinx communities from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba comes as a big hindrance when trying to address the Latinx community as a whole in the US. A networking system that tries to bridge the gap between Latinxs of different regions, and also with different seniority in the US, could help to bring their voices together. Future work could explore the design of such systems to facilitate better communication and engagement between Latinx communities around politics.

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DIGITAL INTELLIGENCE LAB

The **Digital Intelligence Lab** at Institute for the Future is a social scientific research entity conducting work on the most pressing issues at the intersection of technology and society. We examine how new technologies and media can be used to both benefit and challenge democratic communication.

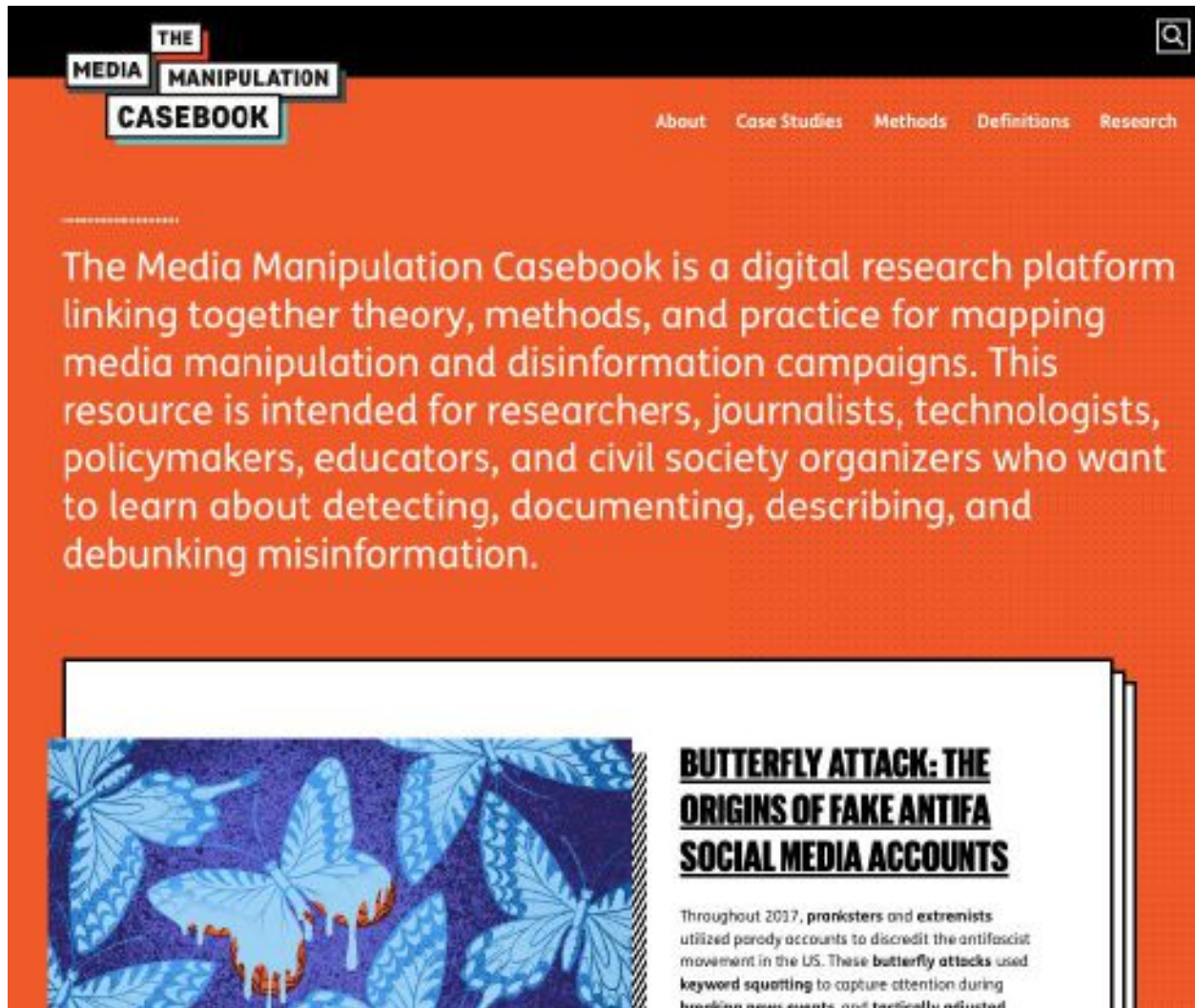


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[THE MEDIA MANIPULATION CASEBOOK](https://mediamanipulation.org/)

Check out this incredible research platform for mapping media manipulation and disinformation campaigns, brought to you by Dr. Joan Donovan and a team of [interdisciplinary researchers](#). Use it for your campaigns, political education, media literacy trainings and more!

<https://mediamanipulation.org/>



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Media Manipulation Casebook website. The header features the title 'THE MEDIA MANIPULATION CASEBOOK' in a stylized, blocky font. To the right of the title is a search icon. Below the title is a navigation menu with links: 'About', 'Case Studies', 'Methods', 'Definitions', and 'Research'. The main content area has an orange background. A large paragraph describes the platform as a digital research tool for mapping media manipulation and disinformation campaigns, intended for researchers, journalists, technologists, policymakers, educators, and civil society organizers. Below this paragraph is a featured case study titled 'BUTTERFLY ATTACK: THE ORIGINS OF FAKE ANTIFA SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS'. The case study includes a graphic of blue butterflies on a dark background and a text excerpt stating that throughout 2017, pranksters and extremists used parody accounts to discredit the antifascist movement in the US, using 'butterfly attacks' and 'keyword squatting'.

THE MEDIA MANIPULATION CASEBOOK

About Case Studies Methods Definitions Research

The Media Manipulation Casebook is a digital research platform linking together theory, methods, and practice for mapping media manipulation and disinformation campaigns. This resource is intended for researchers, journalists, technologists, policymakers, educators, and civil society organizers who want to learn about detecting, documenting, describing, and debunking misinformation.

BUTTERFLY ATTACK: THE ORIGINS OF FAKE ANTIFA SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Throughout 2017, pranksters and extremists utilized parody accounts to discredit the antifascist movement in the US. These **butterfly attacks** used **keyword squatting** to capture attention during breaking news events, and tactically adjusted

INOCULATION & RESPONSE

"[T]he power of fraudulent news lies ultimately in the minds of the beholders ... The inhabitants of a democracy must be empowered agents who consume information in intentional and sophisticated ways."

- PEN America *Faking News: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth*, October 2017

Movement Framework for Disinfo Inoculation & Response



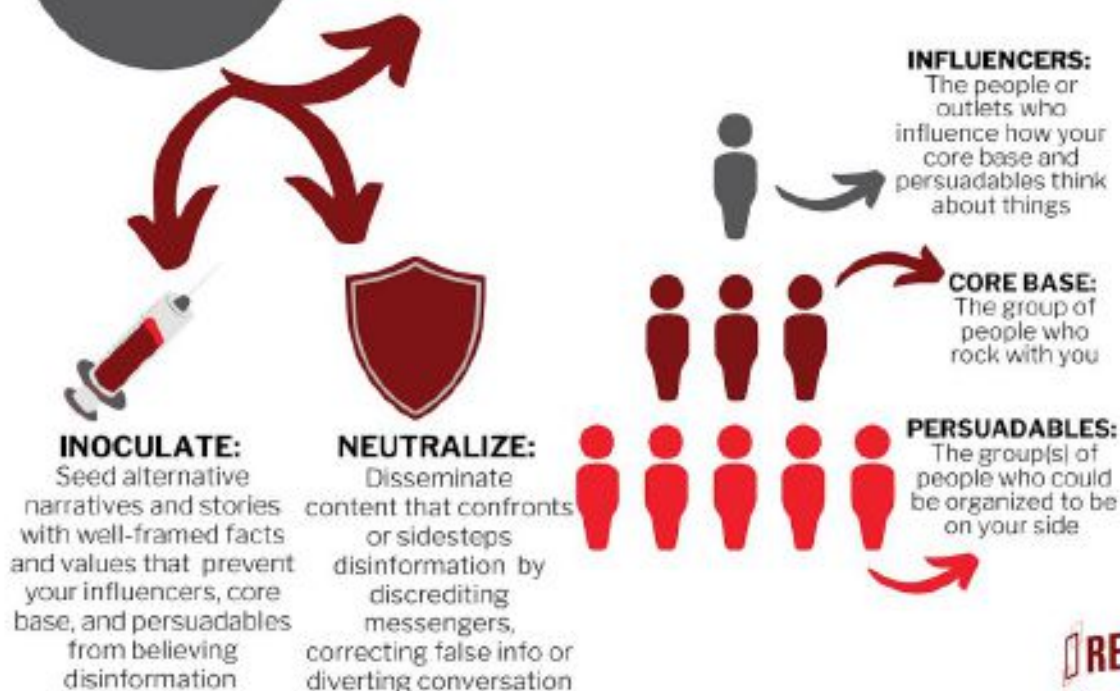
Integrating Disinfo Inoculation into Campaigns

Use the ReFrame Disinformation Threat Analysis Tool, and after identifying your campaign goal & who your audiences are:

- 1** Identify the top disinfo trends that could sway audiences and threaten your campaign
- 2** Set up disinfo listening systems to see if disinformation messages are being repeated by your audiences
- 3** If audience conversation is tending more toward disinfo messages than your campaign messages, plan a strategic, network-based response to intervene
- 4** Continue listening until conversations have swayed away from the disinfo and back toward your campaign messages or related messages

Rapid Response Content Interventions

Strategically distribute content to inoculate, neutralize, and minimize the impact of disinformation within influencers, core base, and persuadables





SHORT TERM:

Organize and encourage journalists to take **Fact/Fallacy/Fact Approach** in their writing to debunk disinformation when it has already reached wide audiences and must be confronted.



LONG TERM:

Organize journalists to recognize disinfo and avoid spreading it unless it requires confrontation. Work with editors to assign stories that cover a diversity of issues facing our communities.



DEMAND:



STRONGER CONTENT MODERATION

Flag disinfo content and demand that platforms take it down based on violations of terms of service



SYSTEMATIC DEPLATFORMING

Demand that platforms terminate the accounts of bad actors whenever they violate terms of service and/or explicitly call for harmful offline behavior



ADOPTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS STANDARDS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

**JOIN PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY CAMPAIGNS
FOR STRONGER REGULATION OF
FACEBOOK, TWITTER & INSTAGRAM**



Created in collaboration with Kairos



**Building
Trusted
Messenger
Networks**

Build networks of messengers trusted by your audiences and train them on narrative power building and disinfo intervention

Organize trusted messengers to share campaign content both online and offline

Organize trusted messengers to seed new narratives

Organize trusted messengers to flood platforms with campaign content + diversion content to train algorithm to boost this content and de-rank harmful content

**Long-Term
Interventions
and
Disruptions**

**The digital realm
is a terrain
we need to
actively organize!**



We must develop long-term strategies for tech accountability, and long-term plans for seeding justice narratives, while actively disrupting harmful narratives that rely on disinfo for new life.

Content-based approaches include:



INFILTRATE - intervene in opposition spaces at the sources of disinfo and misinfo, not to persuade but to disrupt



EXPAND BASE - intervene in persuadable spaces to inoculate against disinfo and misinfo, combat opposition organizing, and organize persuadables to our side

REFRAME

[**CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD & SHARE THESE GRAPHICS**](#)

HOW TO **NOT** AMPLIFY DISINFO



Don't Feed the Algorithm

When you see something that makes you mad:

1. **DON'T** repost on social media
2. **DON'T** comment trying to outsmart them, this attracts more attention to the post
3. **ONLY IF** the post is already popular, **DO** comment with vetted debunking info
4. **DO** take a screenshot if you must share and share only through email, messenger etc.
5. **DO** Educate your community to exercise the same discipline

DON'T Share Disinfo to Debunk Disinfo

Don't repost disinformation on social media, even if it's outrageous and you want to call out how wrong it is. This ends up amplifying the disinformation.

INOCULATE, DON'T SPREAD DISINFO!

Hold a strategy session with your team to decide if and how to publicly respond

Intervene directly - over text, DM or phone - when you see friends unintentionally amplifying disinformation. Share facts that debunk the disinfo and ask them to take down the post

Share "side-step" messages that inoculate against the disinfo without repeating it eg: "Viruses don't discriminate and neither should we"



REFRAME

HOW TO **NOT** AMPLIFY DISINFO

Research What You Read

Before sharing,
do these quick research checks:

1. If you don't know the source, do a **Google search** to see if the same information is being shared by a source you do know and trust.
If not, don't share it.
2. Do a **reverse image search** to see if photos are being taken out of context
>right-click on the image
>choose Search Google for Image
3. Check **PolitiFact** and **Snores** to see if the information has already been debunked.



Intervene

When you do intervene, use the **Fact-Fallacy-Fact** sandwich by leading with the facts, then debunking the fallacy, and close with the facts. Call out the political agenda served by the disinformation as part of naming the facts.

LIES



REFRAME

HOW TO **NOT** AMPLIFY DISINFO

Be strategic:

Track the disinformation

Use ReFrame's Disinfo Threat Analysis tool to track and analyze disinfo and gauge when and how to intervene

Seed new narratives

Often, the most powerful defense against disinformation is an offensive strategy.

This includes well-researched content that discredits opposition, and emotional stories that lift up your irresistible values, visions and solutions.



REFRAME



TIP SHEET

PEN AMERICA'S GUIDE ON COVID-19 AND DISINFORMATION

Building Media Literacy Skills During a Pandemic

As the coronavirus pandemic heightens nerves, disinformation—defined as information being spread with the intention to mislead—has found fertile ground. In the United States, text messages encouraged people to stock up on food and supplies in advance of a national quarantine. In Europe and China, a video circulated on WhatsApp and TikTok that appeared to show shoppers mobbing a Dutch supermarket. Both warnings were false, and yet both landed in countless inboxes and feeds.

While those messages may have been intended to cause panic, there's also been earnest confusion (what we at PEN America define as misinformation, rather than disinformation). One rumor said a salt water rinse could stop the virus. Another Facebook post claimed scientists had already found a vaccine. People may have shared them out of benevolence or a desire for hopeful news, but both turned out to be inaccurate.

Whether out of malice or genuine alarm, false stories are continuing to circulate. Here are a few steps you can take to evaluate news stories that are blowing up your feed or finding their way into your DMs.

1. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN NEWS AND OPINION.

Some stories look like news but are actually opinion pieces. Is it news? Is it an opinion piece? Before hitting share or forward, consider the type of content first.

2. CHECK THE CREDIBILITY OF THE SOURCE.

“Daily Buzz Live” may sound like a legit news site, but there are countless examples of bad actors creating fake news outlets that sound real. Check to see if the source of a story is credible before passing it along to others.

3. FOR HEALTH INFORMATION, GO TO CDC.GOV OR WHO.INT

If you’re looking to find factual information about public health, check first with trusted institutions, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the World Health Organization.

4. QUESTION YOUR REACTIONS TO THINGS YOU SEE ONLINE.

Disinformation outlets thrive on engagements—likes and shares—on social media platforms. They’re writing headlines designed to encourage you to disseminate their posts, even if they’re false or misleading. Before taking the bait, question the credibility of everything you see, especially if you get the sense it might spark a sense of alarm in others. That might be the whole point.

5. FACT-CHECK WHAT YOU’RE READING.

Not sure how true a story is? Run it through Google or another search engine alongside the terms “true,” “false,” or “hoax.” Fact-checking websites like [Snopes.com](https://snopes.com) and those from trusted news outlets will often surface. You can also check out Annenberg’s [FactCheck.org](https://factcheck.org) or Duke University’s [Reporters’ Lab](https://reporterslab.org) for more resources.

6. REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH.

Go pro. If you see an image, try a reverse image search on Google. That photo of panicked grocery shoppers could be real. Or just a scene from a zombie movie.



TIP SHEET

PEN AMERICA'S GUIDE FOR COMBATING PROTEST DISINFORMATION

Amid mass demonstrations against police violence, misinformation and disinformation **about the protests** are spreading fast online. False, **misleading**, and misattributed stories and images can polarize communities, unfairly damage reputations, and obscure the truth. By sharing and amplifying this content we often further the goals of those who aim to discredit and divide.

PEN America offers three simple tips to minimize the spread of misleading information:

1. VERIFY IMAGES AND VIDEOS. PHOTOS AND VIDEOS MIGHT BE DISTORTED OR TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT.

Not all videos and images that are shared on social media platforms as depicting the current protests are legitimate. Some are miscaptioned, misidentified, Photoshopped, or drawn from different protests elsewhere in the world and even years prior. Before sharing or validating these images, consider the source, run a Google image search to learn more about the image's origin, or see if the image or video is available from someone who was an eyewitness or can confirm it has been misattributed. Reputable news organizations and even fact-checking organizations have sophisticated tools to authenticate video so their feeds can be a useful guide. Look at First Draft's **pocket guide** on how to verify videos.

2. VERIFY ACCOUNTS. A GMAIL ACCOUNT INVITING YOU TO ATTEND A PROTEST MIGHT BE BOGUS.

Bad actors are using bogus email accounts to invite people to protests, and unverified social media accounts and bots are purporting to be organizing demonstrations. Whether you are getting an email from BLM@gmail.com or seeing an accusatory or mobilizing message in your Twitter feed, think carefully about the source. Do you know who actually sent the email or wrote

the post? Does the fact that a certain name, slogan or hashtag is used necessarily mean that that organization or movement is behind the message? Watch out for accounts that very recently joined Twitter or Facebook, including those with a lot of recent activity or posts with low engagement. These can be warning signs of fake accounts.

3. VERIFY SOURCES. KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR UNVERIFIED SITES THAT PROMOTE FALSE HEADLINES.

One common disinformation tactic is the creation of false news sites, which often have believable names and masquerade as reputable local papers. Maybe it's called The Local Gazette or Chesapeake Bay Times; you might come across these stories and take them as credible. But bad actors intentionally invoke the trappings of bogus news outlets to elevate conspiracies and falsehoods. Whether it is a site pretending to be a real outlet or a blog that seems to be sharing credible information, verify the sources of your news before you share them. Fact-checking sites like **PolitiFact** by Poynter and **NewsGuard's** tracking center can help. Misleading news may identify specific people as agitators: These claims are often false and can lead to the trolling of individuals who are misidentified in images and videos as violent perpetrators.



TIP SHEET

#WhatToExpect2020

HOW TO TALK TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO SHARE MISINFORMATION

You might know the feeling: You see your aunt, cousin, or friend share something on Facebook, but you doubt the information is true. And if that information is about a critical issue like COVID-19, an election, or a political candidate, you may feel compelled to respond. But what is the best way to do so? While some people create and spread *disinformation*—false information shared with the intent to deceive others—your friends and family may well spread *misinformation*, which is shared by people who may not know the information is false. They probably think the content is true, and they may feel they’re sharing something important. That can make it tough to know how to confront them. Here are a few suggestions.

1. TRY TO VERIFY THAT THE CONTENT IS MISLEADING OR FALSE BEFORE YOU ENGAGE.

Suspecting that content is misleading or false is different from having confirmed it. Before you attempt to correct someone who has shared what you believe to be misinformation, try to fact-check the story yourself. You can Google keywords from the headline and confirm if the story is being reported by more than one credible outlet. In that case, it’s more likely to be true. Or you can see if the story has been verified on a fact-checking website, like Politifact, Snopes, or Factcheck.org.

2. TO COMMENT OR NOT TO COMMENT?

Once you’ve confirmed that the content your friend or family member shared is actually misleading or false, your first reaction might be to comment publicly on their post. This can be helpful, especially if you can link to a widely credible source; **research suggests** that seeing a public correction can reduce the likelihood others are swayed by the misinformation. However, your engagement with the post may also give the false content greater visibility, since social

media algorithms boost any content that elicits a response. If something was just posted, you might try sending a private note politely pointing out that it's incorrect. The person behind the post might also be more receptive if they don't feel they've been called out publicly. But if a post is getting a lot of likes and comments already, a public correction could make a big difference in reducing the harm it can do.

3. CONSIDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PERSON WHO SHARED THE STORY.

It can be embarrassing, shameful, even anger-inducing when someone calls us out for sharing false stories. We've probably all accidentally shared "fake news" at some point. So when you message someone about their post, take care to use a supportive and positive tone. Otherwise, you risk alienating the person, making them less receptive to the information you're trying to share. ([Learn more about the psychology](#) of why it can be so hard to correct people.) You might say something like, "I was curious about the thing you posted, so I did some Googling and here's what I found. . ." Providing a personal story of a time you shared false information is also a great entry point to talking with others about misinformation. However you choose to engage, do so with **empathy**.

4. AVOID ESCALATION.

Sometimes, the conversation may not go well. Your friend or family member may get defensive, and you may feel the conversation is no longer constructive, or that the person is only becoming more resistant to hearing your message. If it seems like the conversation is moving in that direction, just remember that it can be hard for people to accept corrections, and it is tough to change attitudes—no matter how well-grounded your comments are. Offer them the tools to fact-check what they see, and take it upon yourself to proactively share factual information and resources (such as information from credible sources like the World Health Organization or your state or local Board of Elections) on your own feed. That way, you're helping to keep all your friends and family accurately informed.

5. BE A RESOURCE FOR OTHERS.

It's important to correct misleading or false information, whether publicly or privately. But what can you do to help *proactively*? Give your friends and family resources on misinformation and easy tools to conduct their own fact-checks going forward. You can share PEN America's tip sheets, such as [our guide to verifying images and sources](#), or [our guide on COVID-19 misinformation](#). You can also share information about trusted fact-checking websites and encourage others to [attend a training](#) on these subjects.

TRUSTED SOURCES: FACT-CHECKING, VOTER INFORMATION, AND BEYOND:

- [Politifact.com](https://www.politifact.com) by the Poynter Institute or Washington Post's [Factchecker](https://www.washingtonpost.com/factchecker/) both fact-check political content.
- [RevEye Reverse Image Search](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/reveye-reverse-image-search) is a Chrome extension to perform an inverse image search.
- [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org) is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and is non-partisan and monitors for political accuracy.
- [All Sides](https://www.allsides.com) offers perspectives on topical news stories from the left, center, and from the right, plus a 'media bias rating.'
- [Snopes.com](https://www.snopes.com) has been around since 1994 and fact-checks internet content.
- [Duke Reporters' Lab](https://www.duke.edu/reporterslab) is a database of both national and global fact-checking resources.
- [NewsGuard Coronavirus Misinformation Tracker](https://www.newsguard.org/covid19/misinformation-tracker) for COVID-19-specific tracking.
- [866-OUR-VOTE.org](https://866-our-vote.org), the national Election Protection hotline and website of resources from The Lawyers' Committee For Civil Rights Under Law.
- [Voting Tools](https://www.votingtools.org) online resource from Common Cause

ReFrame Disinfo Threat Analysis and Intervention Tool

Developed in collaboration with Joan Donovan, this is a campaign-based tool that can help sharpen your strategy, and help you decide whether or not to use strategic communications to intervene in disinfo as one of the barriers to winning your campaign. This tool is designed for micro-landscape, campaign-based intervention with targeted audiences. This is distinct from larger narrative intervention among broad audiences.

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Campaign Goal(s)

Audiences

(Describe as specifically as possible ie. Base: Our membership of 1500 community members in the region; Persuadables: Black and Latinx voters 18-35 who are not yet registered to vote or who are registered as independents or with not party affiliation in District 13; Influencers: Local elected officials specifically___, religious leaders specifically___, social media influencers specifically___)

BASE The group of people you have already organized or are actively organizing, the people who are directly impacted by the issues you are working on	
PERSUADABLES The people who are outside your immediate base whom you need to sway to your side to win your campaign. Choose 1-3 priority persuadable audiences.	
INFLUENCERS The people or outlets who your base and persuadables listen to the most on the topic of your campaign.	67

Top Disinfo Trends

Name the top disinfo trends that you think may affect your ability to win your campaign. You can fill these out based on your own listening or draw the trends from third party research. Name the top disinfo trends that you think may affect your ability to win your campaign. You can fill these out based on your own listening or draw the trends from third party research. You can also identify trends by scanning this website for some of the latest disinfo on your issue: <https://www.factcheck.org/>

Trend #1	
Trend #2	
Trend #3	

Potential Impact Mapping: What's At Stake?

This is a space to map out what impact these disinformation trends could have on your base, your persuadables, and your influencers. How could the disinfo influence their behavior in ways that threaten your campaign? Who does it benefit when your audiences share and believe these disinfo trends?

	BASE	PERSUADABLES	INFLUENCERS
Trend #1			
Trend #2			
Trend #3			

Setting Up Disinfo Listening

Whether or not to intervene in these disinfo trends depends on how much these trends are affecting conversation on your campaign issue *in your audiences*. Begin monitoring how far disinfo trends are affecting conversations in your audiences, based on where your audiences are having conversations and sharing information. Once you've identified where they are sharing information, set up listening systems to monitor those platforms and conversations for disinfo.

For example:

- Create a canvasser tracking tool that includes sections for: what is the misinfo, who shared it, where did they hear it?
- Set up a WhatsApp group where member leaders can report back on disinfo appearing in

membership and community conversations

- Set up a report back method and information collection for organizers and canvassers
- Create twitter lists (list of members, persuadables, influencers) - every morning scroll through and scan for both disinfo and campaign issue key words
- Use TweetDeck - build weekly dashboards with keywords and phrases and scan daily
- Create a Google alert roundup using influencers names and both disinfo and campaign issue key words
- Follow instagram hashtags of disinfo trends you are worried about, and monitor to see if any base, persuadables or influencers are sharing these hashtags
- Identify Facebook groups of base members and persuadables and scan for both disinfo and campaign issue key words as well as disinfo memes

	Where and how are they sharing information?	What systems can you set up to listen to these conversations?
BASE		
PERSUADABLES		
INFLUENCERS		

Disinfo Tracking

Based on what you find through your small listening research, track how your audiences are discussing your campaign issue. What messages are they repeating? What hashtags are they using? What memes and articles are they sharing? Then analyze how closely the messages, hashtags, memes and articles you are tracking through small listening match your campaign messages vs. disinfo trend messages.

	YOUR MESSAGES	BASE CONVERSATION	PERSUADABLES CONVERSATION	INFLUENCERS CONVERSATION	DISINFO MESSAGES
Trend #1					
Trend #2					
Trend #3					

Intervention and Response

If base and/or persuadable conversation is tending more toward disinfo messages than your campaign messages, plan a strategic, network-based response to intervene in the disinfo spread among your audiences.

We have a few scenarios to help you think about your response. The objective is to remove the obstacle of the disinfo messages, which means reducing their influence and presence in your audiences' conversations, and to allow your campaign-messages to clearly guide your audiences' conversations (and

therefore hopefully behaviors) on the issue.

Scenario 1: Keep it contained, inoculate through “sidestep messaging”

Your base sees a post with disinfo about an electoral opponent that is on an issue that is near and dear to your base’s heart, removing police school resource (SRO) officers from schools. An organizer reaches out to you alerting you to this and you notice that it is not spreading beyond a small set of audiences of people committed to being on the other side of this issue, but is not resonating with your persuadables or base, with only a few shares. What do you do?

Response: **DON’T** share the post on social media, screenshot and share through email or messenger if necessary. Continue to monitor and incorporate this information into your campaign messaging to inoculate against the disinfo without repeating it. Use “side-step” messaging that addresses the issue without naming it head-on, for example “We are proud to endorse candidates who plan to ensure the safety of Black students in schools”.

Scenario 2: Disinfo is spreading, manage the burn

Your persuadable audiences are repeating messages about how important it is to have security in schools and a particular meme around school resource officers is spreading with thousands of likes and shares. People are commenting on the post and engaging with it.

Response: **DO** use the “Fact Sandwich”, fact-fallacy-fact, to confront the disinfo. For example: Fact: Kids learn better when they are supported, not when threatened with punishment. School resource officers contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline and do not make schools safer. We need more counselors and teachers aides who can help kids learn, not school resource officers. Turn the Fact Sandwich into memes, messages for posts, comments, videos etc. with a strong emotional pull, and interject this content into the same platforms where the disinfo is spreading through your base and persuadables.

Scenario 3: It’s a disinfo five-alarm fire, organize to extinguish

A friendly reporter calls to get your comment on a piece of disinformation that is already trending in the news, in part because members of your own base in addition to your persuadables are liking, sharing, and reposting this piece of disinformation.

Response: **DO** use fact-fallacy-fact to work with the reporter on a piece that debunks the disinfo **AND** encourage the reporter to do follow-up stories that divert from the disinformation and focus on real issues. For example, give the reporter working-class sources who can tell stories about how much more they have paid in taxes than the current president. Pivots like this can serve as counter-attack diversions from disinfo attacks, and can refocus the debate on abuse of power. Meanwhile continue to advance your campaign communications through emotionally compelling stories that lift up your values and visions.

Identify which scenario most fits your situation, and then develop your strategy for response. [Use Joan Donovan’s list of strategies as a guide.](#)

Get clear on the platforms your base, persuadables, and influencers are using to share disinformation.

Ideally these are the platforms you are monitoring through disinfo listening and tracking, but also consider wherever you are canvassing and organizing for example, WhatsApp, Facebook, Groups or in Person. If you are hearing disinfo in these venues, then use these platforms to intervene.

Create the content you’ll use to move your strategy. What’s the message? Are you side-stepping or directly confronting through fact-fallacy-fact? How will you make it more agitational and compelling than the disinformation? How will you continue to advance your values, vision and campaign goals through your content? What content format is best for the platform?

Identify the messengers you need to deliver your content. Who is most likely to influence your audiences? What volunteers and allies can you mobilize to share your messages and content?

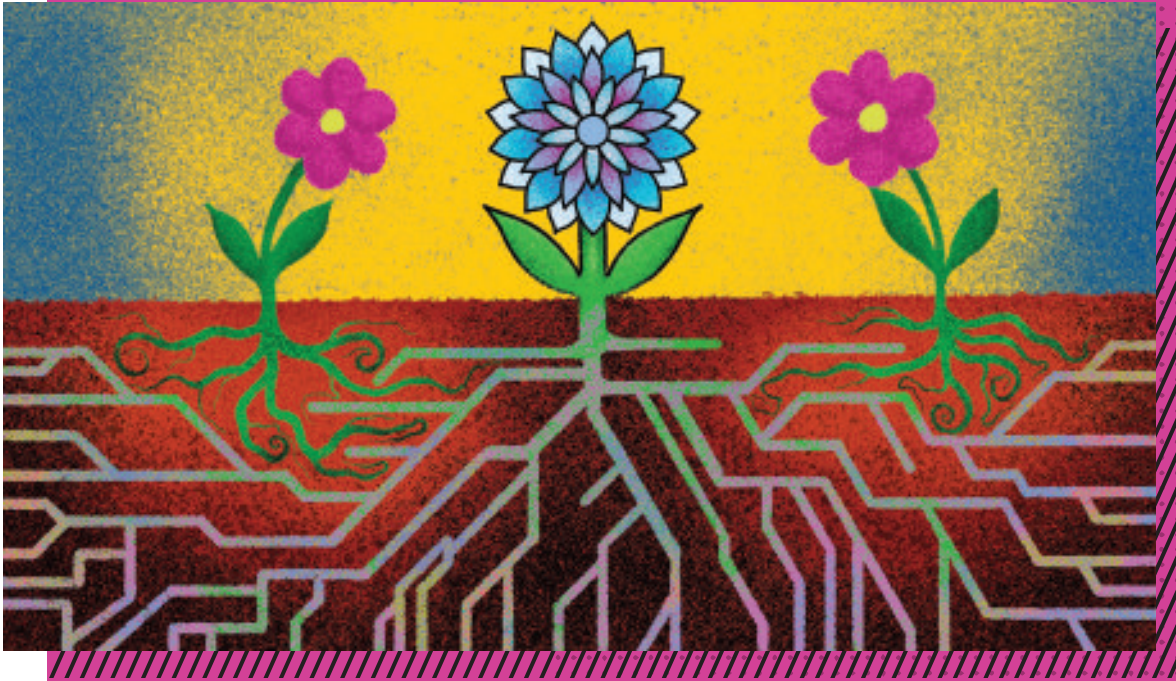
Intervention Plan

What Strategy or Strategies?	What Platforms Will We Use to Intervene?	What Content?	What Messengers?

Exit Plan

Continue your listening and monitoring until you see that conversations have swayed away from the disinfo and back toward your campaign messages or related messages. Then you can pivot back to your ongoing campaign communications, which should include inoculation against disinformation by continuing to use facts framed by story and emotion, along with moving your values, successes, and solutions in compelling ways.

[Click here to download the ReFrame Threat Analysis Tool](#)



HOW CIVIL SOCIETY CAN COMBAT MISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH WITHOUT MAKING IT WORSE

By Dr. Joan Donovan

**THE
MEDIA
MANIPULATION
CASEBOOK**

HOW CIVIL SOCIETY CAN COMBAT MISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH WITHOUT MAKING IT WORSE

The 3Ds of Disinformation: Detect, Document, and Debunk

In the battle to combat misinformation, researchers have offered clear advice for how journalists should cover and debunk it, but we have very provided little guidance for how civil society should counter media manipulation and disinformation campaigns. The lack of attention to civil society responses is a major gap in the research and it's becoming increasingly clear that the guidance for journalists does not translate easily to civil society. At this time, we need all hands on deck to ensure a free and fair election. In this document, I explore a set of potential strategies to be used specifically by civil society organizations (CSOs) to mitigate the harms of misinformation.

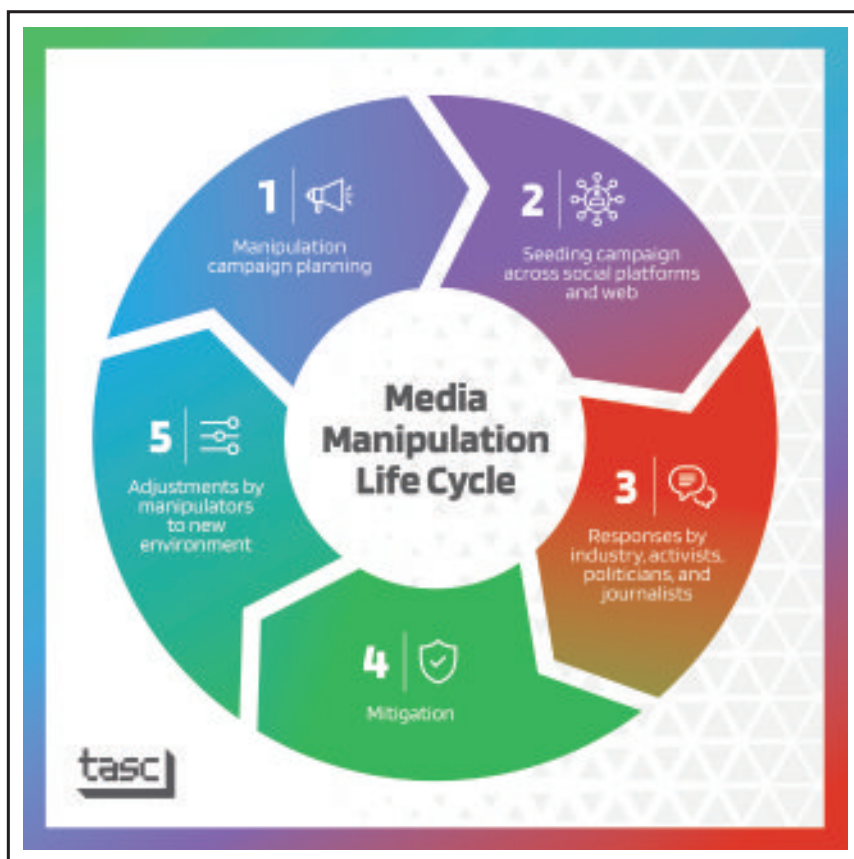
The following recommendations are based on the mixed-methods investigative work of the Technology and Social Change (TaSC) research team at Harvard's Shorenstein Center. Before delving into the specifics of the recommendations, it's important to note how the research that informs them is conducted. At TaSC, we use the methods of digital ethnography to detect, document, and debunk media manipulation disinformation campaigns. In the detection phase, we begin by looking closely for the suspected misinformation across different websites and social media platforms. If we suspect a website, post, or video contains misinformation, we then investigate if the account or website is legitimate and representing itself accurately. We use various open-source investigation tools available on the web to document signs of imposters, including assessing the history of the accounts in question, the degree of automation on a specific topic, and the networks of actors sharing the suspicious materials.

Once we have documented a pattern of malicious behavior, we create a timeline of events for deeper analysis. During our investigation, we gather evidence by taking screenshots or a screen recording of everything we encounter. If it is misinformation, there is a chance that tech companies may delete content without notifying anyone. The more evidence we have, the better we can make our case.

**The more evidence
we have, the
better we can
make our case.**

Debunking does not happen during the investigation process. It happens after we piece together the evidence and make inferences about what happened. Following the framework of the [Media Manipulation Life Cycle](#), we draw together collected materials to analyze timelines, behavioral patterns, and the broader context of the disinformation, including how it attaches to hot-button wedge issues, which are contested political issues that often have to do with the redistribution of rights, resources, or representation. Only after we have established a timeline and corroborating evidence are we able to assess the impact of misinformation on specific issues and communities and strategically debunk disinformation, either in concert with journalists and civil society, or directly through our research reports.

While this long process makes sense for research, like journalists, CSOs often do not have the luxury of time. Confronting misinformation while working with partial knowledge is difficult, but not impossible. CSOs and activists will often know more about the local and specific context where misinformation is having a negative impact. In some situations, organizers may see a disinformation trend in small online communities, or they may be the target of attacks. Frequently we see communities of color impacted by racialized disinformation campaigns, which employ the strategic use of falsified racial or ethnic identities and/or focus on race as a wedge issue. These tactics were used against communities of color in 2016 to suppress their votes and electoral power. Responding to disinformation can be complicated, because it can amplify misinformation and further the agenda of media manipulators.



Therefore, we are developing research on several case studies where CSOs and/or small groups employed different strategies to counter misinformation. It is often difficult to get important information to rise above the cacophony of misinformation.

Civil Society Response: Six Strategies for Countering Misinformation and Hate Speech

1 Connected Communities

Before taking up any kind of strategic response to disinformation, social networks should be thought of as connected communities and not as audiences. Telling people what to think, as if they were merely receptacles or passive audiences, leads to disengagement. In some instances, organizing a response to disinformation can take on the look and feel of a campaign, but this is not an effective approach to disinformation, as it undercuts the possibility for communities to collectively learn, counter, and adapt to disinformation targeted at the community.

The rationale for any response to disinformation should be grounded in facts about the impact and harms of particular trends in disinformation.

Begin by assessing what types of disinformation are present and determine what kind of actions to take. Reactions could be as simple as replying to an online post to say, “This conversation doesn’t belong in this group” or to link to a reputable source that disputes the disinformation. Flagging posts is an underutilized tool available on most platforms.

[Brandi Collins-Dexter](#), a Senior Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center, researches how Black online communities create and maintain norms of engagement across social networks. For each online community, participation and trust is negotiated in terms of safety and protection from harassers, trolls, and even well-meaning journalists. Maintenance of internal norms of discussion is an important factor when addressing misinformation. In places where there are no community moderation rules, misinformation thrives. When dealing with communities that may be spreading misinformation out of concern and fear, approaching individuals with an ethic of care can quickly dissipate growing tensions. If that does not work, moderators should consider removing posts or accounts.

When dealing with online communities designed to spread misinformation, other strategies are needed. In 2020, [Reddit deleted a number of subreddits](#) that were used to plan coordinated harassment campaigns and were a safe haven for hate speech. This did not happen solely because the company assessed the risk and made a decision, but because groups like [Change the Terms](#) and many others applied public pressure by noting that misinformation hives, like Reddit’s the_donald, do damage to other communities. As content moderation has become a crucial aspect of maintaining an online community, the safety,

When dealing with communities that may be spreading misinformation out of concern and fear, approaching individuals with an ethic of care can quickly dissipate growing tensions.

integrity, and protection of well-functioning connected communities is a paramount concern for CSOs.

2 Fact/Fallacy/Fact or “The Truth Sandwich”

Rhetorically, how you say something is just as important as what you say.

Often disinformation is delivered memetically, i.e. in the form of short, memorable, and pithy slogans. An untrue statement, such as, “Vaccines cause autism,” is particularly difficult to disrupt [once it’s been repeated](#). Refuting a statement like this requires breaking up the psychological impulse to remember something so sticky and then replacing it with what is true. A rebuttal should take the form of a truth sandwich, such as: “Vaccines don’t cause autism. While the myth persists that vaccines cause this condition, doctors across the globe have proven that vaccines do not cause autism and are a benefit the whole of society.”

Another way of constructing the truth sandwich can include highlighting the political agenda of the group pushing lies. In that way, a message dispelling myths about vaccines could read: “Vaccines don’t cause autism. This myth is perpetuated by anti-vaccine activists and does not line up with scientific facts about public health. Doctors across the globe have proven that vaccines do not cause autism and are a benefit the whole society.”

The truth sandwich can be used in any number of situations and is best employed to counter broad thematic trends in misinformation.

3 Prebunking

In some cases, disinformation is predictable. In order for a lie to take hold in public discussion, audiences usually have to encounter it numerous times. Prebunking is an offensive strategy that refers to anticipating what disinformation is likely to be repeated by politicians, pundits, and provocateurs during key events and having already prepared a response based on past fact-checks.

Across every wedge issue, there are different kinds of disinformation that continue to pollute our information ecosystem. For example, the upcoming presidential debate will be rife with misinformation, as Trump and Biden do not align on any issue. As a result, the truth will be contorted to fit partisan talking points, especially as it relates to pandemic response, immigration, religion, racism, and white supremacy. Knowing the most common misperceptions of each candidate and potential rebuttals with links to truthful and authoritative information can stop disinformation from spreading, especially if the prebunk is published closely following the misinformation.

For example, Daniel Acosta Ramos at First Draft News was a fact-checker during the controversial 2018 election in Venezuela, where Nicolás Maduro claimed victory and is now considered a contested ruler. In anticipation of election disinformation, Daniel, along with other fact-checkers, prepared a list of myths and prebunks, so journalists could quickly counter any misinformation about voting or candidate's platforms. As the situation with the election evolved, fact-checkers were ready with easy-to-share rebuttals for common disinformation trends.

Prebunking efforts require a keen eye for details. Because successful disinformation campaigns tend to have a kernel of truth that anchors the narrative, **disinformation parasitically attaches itself to the details of a particular issue**. Disinformation does the most damage to public discourse when it has leached on to a complex topic, which a nuanced rebuttal is needed. Prebunking is an effort to get ahead of misinformation and establish credibility and trust before the disinformation narrative can take hold. Being aware that certain themes are likely to come up provides an added advantage to communities who may otherwise get bogged down by debating disinformation.

Because successful disinformation campaigns tend to have a kernel of truth that anchors the narrative, disinformation parasitically attaches itself to the details of a particular issue.

Doing prebunks is traditionally in the domain of journalists, but truth needs as many advocates as possible right now. In order to effectively prebunk misinformation, CSOs should follow this 5-step process:

1. Take a look at [fact checking websites](#) and [databases](#) to get a sense of the trends in misinformation.
2. Map out which misinformation trends are popular in politicians' stump speeches.
3. Find additional source material with the facts about the misinformation likely to be repeated and create some content that dispels these themes.
4. Prepare your social networks for the high potential for misinformation on particular themes by sharing select prebunks.
*Repeating misinformation can have unintended negative effects. It is best to utilize the truth sandwich model, cite reliable evidence, link to fact-checks, and state the truth upfront.
5. Prebunks can also be reused as debunks. During an event like a debate, election night, or other major breaking news, when false claims are made, posting the correct information alongside the misinformation quickly can make a difference. Speed matters as misinformation narratives can take hold quickly on social media when little factual information is available.

CSOs can issue prebunks as press releases or social media content ahead of events, but this might get tricky if a certain topic does not come up. Be cautious because prebunks that do not come to fruition could inadvertently seed misinformation.

4

Distributed Debunking

In many situations where disinformation starts to trend on social media, it is because those who are pushing the disinformation are battling it out with those who are debunking it. Engaging with disinformation often makes it gain more traction within search and trending algorithms, because these technologies cannot tell the difference between truth and lies. It is, therefore, usually not worth the time and resources to counter disinformation, because those efforts serve to amplify the lies. However, in situations where disinformation has scaled from the depths of message boards and blogs to mainstream media and triggered responses from law enforcement, politicians, and other newsworthy groups, it has then reached a point where a response may be needed.

For civil society, response should be separated from reaction. Reactions, like retweeting a journalists' debunk, can sometimes be enough to show awareness and correct the issue. Responses, though, take more time and should be thought about strategically. Often, we see lies go viral because people are participating in a collective process of distributed debunking, where it is more important to circulate the truth than to ignore the disinformation. In most cases, activists and CSOs know more about the context and impact of disinformation, and their responses are crucial for documenting the truth.

In most cases, activists and CSOs know more about the context and impact of disinformation, and their responses are crucial for documenting the truth.

For example, [#AntifaFires](#) began trending on Twitter as wildfires displaced many people in Oregon and Northern California. The disinformation is possibly attributed to a misunderstanding on a police scanner that was reporting on controlled burns by "BLM," Bureau of Land Management, where BLM was confused with Black Lives Matter. Then a series of right-wing blogs and social media accounts began to circulate rumors that Antifa and Black Lives Matter protesters were arsonists. [A significant source for this disinformation](#) came from the right-wing publication Law Enforcement Today, which published a story with the headline, "Sources: Series of wildfires on the West Coast may be 'coordinated and planned' attack," which gained nearly 400,000 interactions on Facebook. The publication has since changed the title to "Arson arrests made across the west coast as fires rage on," in reaction to fact-checks debunking their unsubstantiated claims. Nevertheless, disinformation proliferated across all social media platforms, leading local police, sheriffs, and even the FBI to issue statements saying that Antifa did not set the fires. All the while, activists, organizers, and civil society groups stepped up to further debunk these false claims.

Because the damage had already been done to seed the disinformation into the media ecosystem, distributed debunking as a strategic response became a way to show solidarity, while also providing a moral counterweight to disinformation. One important caveat, though: simply

posting that you don't think this is true will only add to the cacophony of noise that boosts the disinformation. Distributed debunking needs to be organized to be effective. In order to become a powerful tool to collectively shut down lies, debunks should include a link to a reputable source and follow the models of the "truth sandwich" or "humor over rumor" (described below in Section 6).

5 Localize the Context

All disinformation is local. CSOs are often on the ground in communities and therefore in the best possible position to provide this context. When directly debunking information, bear the local community in mind, and if possible, share your local knowledge with journalists and other CSOs for whom the information may be crucial.

Knowing how a disinformation campaign impacts and causes harm in communities, both online and off, is critical information for journalists covering particular beats. Keeping track and monitoring disinformation is hard work, but diligent and sustained documentation of disinformation does yield patterns, from which successful counter strategies can be developed. Media manipulators and disinformation agents are not as numerous as once thought. However, manipulators are having an outsized impact on the news media because they employ a diverse set of tactics and do whatever it takes to keep their campaign alive.

For example, if we look at the patterns of disinformation related to the overblown claims that Antifa are flying from town to town wreaking havoc and weaponizing cans of soup and tuna, then the allegation that Antifa were setting wildfires makes perfect sense as a disinformation campaign. In the days before this rumor kicked off, the US was rapt by images of the orange skies over the West Coast. Stories about the wildfires were rapidly gaining popularity, where attention to the causes and consequences of climate change were taking up oxygen in an already suffocating media ecosystem. In order to regain control of the news media narrative, falsely associating the wildfires with Antifa and Black Lives Matter was a political opportunity to shift attention, parry blame, and then step back and watch the chaos unfold. If the breaking news was not about the wildfires, perhaps a rumor like this would never have taken hold.

Crucially, over the summer, it was protesters in Portland who first called attention to [unmarked Federal agents](#) arresting people at protests. While protesters posted several suspicious videos to social media, they could not prove what they knew was happening. This local knowledge from protesters was then amplified by CSOs through their social media networks to keep the attention on the issue. Reporters then picked up the story, filed FOIA requests, and sought corroborating evidence

from local businesses and others. All the while, government agents dodged questions about their operations in Portland, which allowed misinformation to proliferate. The combined efforts of journalists, CSOs, and protesters to force accountability and transparency are integral for calling out those in power for their actions.

The combined efforts of journalists, CSOs, and protesters to force accountability and transparency are integral for calling out those in power for their actions.

6 Humor Over Rumor

The psychology of misinformation is complex, but tends to begin by triggering emotional reactions and confirmation bias. Misinformation thrives in environments that are charged up by outrage, fear, and anger. It is especially salient when the group sharing the misinformation hold similar political and cultural points of view, largely because [they will offer few challenges](#) or criticisms of the misinformation. Additionally, people are inclined to share information if they feel that it is somehow being suppressed or is not going to be covered by the media. When these set-up conditions are reflected in online communities, especially Facebook groups or message boards, misinformation can be difficult to fight. Like a rising tide headed to the shore, some damage is inevitable, but there are actions that can be taken to guard against this.

[Humor over rumor](#) is a community strategy employed by the digital ministry of Taiwan to respond to misinformation quickly and memorably. For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, a rumor began to spread on social media that toilet paper was made of the same material as masks. Anticipating a run on toilet paper, the digital ministry kicked into gear and created some funny memes dispelling the rumor and showing that the original misinformation came from the producers of toilet paper.

Audrey Tang, the Digital Minister of Taiwan, and I [discussed](#) the role memes play countering heightened emotional reactions to misinformation.

In particular, the pandemic has produced a toxic mix of outrage and isolation that has driven some to ponder conspiracy theories. The use of memes to check coronavirus misinformation in Taiwan has been successful for two reasons: humor and speed. Using a dog named Zongchai as a spokesperson, the digital ministry employs comedians and other artists to quickly respond to emerging rumors. The speediness of the response is crucial to overtaking the misinformation or rumor before it becomes too widespread. When done right, the humorous rebuttal attaches itself



"We only have one pair of buttocks" meme from Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang.

to the misinformation, and is found everywhere the rumor is spreading. By making these fact-checks funny, it encourages organic distribution. This is crucial, as meme distribution cannot be top-down; ordinary citizens spearhead the meme war.

Experiments like this have yet to be tried in the US. In order to quell dangerous misinformation about the pandemic, humor can be a strong mechanism for delivering the truth. In the run up to the 2020 election, humor and irony can also be used to help get out the vote, particularly as misinformation attacking election integrity seeks to bring about voter apathy.



The "spokesdog" for Taiwan's Ministry of Health & Welfare.

Conclusion

[Now is the time for experiments and action.](#) Rather than wait for tech companies to mitigate the damage caused by their products, civil society must try new strategies for fighting media manipulation and disinformation. Our current information ecosystem was not designed to serve the interests of the broader public, nor was it designed to protect communities caught in the crosshairs of a disinformation campaign.

Truth needs an advocate.

About the Author

Joan Donovan, PhD, is the Research Director of Harvard Kennedy's Shorenstein Center and the Director of the Technology and Social Change (TaSC) Research project. Dr. Donovan leads the field in examining media manipulation and disinformation campaigns. Her research specializes in Critical Internet Studies, Science and Technology Studies, and the Sociology of Social Movements.

This tip sheet was developed in collaboration with Journalist's Resource at the Shorenstein Center with funding support from The MacArthur Foundation.

The Canary Collective, a subreddit for people of color and other marginalized groups to organize against racialized disinformation and share resources, curated by MediaJustice and United We Dream Action.

The screenshot shows the subreddit page for r/CanaryCollective. At the top, there's a yellow header with the subreddit name, a 'JOIN' button, and the subreddit icon. Below the header, there's a navigation bar with 'Hot', 'New', 'Top', and a menu icon. The main content area displays a list of posts. The first post is a pinned message from a moderator: '**Non-Partisan Reminder**' (Mod Post). The second post is titled 'Tumblr Content Hub' and mentions a content hub for United We Dream Action. The third post is titled 'CDT Research Workshop: First Steps in Developing a Research Agenda to Address Disinformation, Race, and Gender - Center for Democracy and Technology' and includes a 'Research' flair. The fourth post is titled 'White Paper: Disinformation and Hate Speech Harm BIPOC - National Hispanic Media Coalition' and includes a 'Research' flair. To the right of the main content area, there's a sidebar with 'About Community' (describing the subreddit's purpose and providing a Tumblr link), 'Flair' (listing flairs like Research, Active Disinformation Campaign, Take Action, News, and Support), and 'Non-Partisan Rule' (stating the subreddit's non-partisan nature).

Canary Collective [JOIN](#)
r/CanaryCollective

Hot **New** **Top**

PINNED BY MODERATORS

Posted by u/erinshields_CMD 8 days ago
****Non-Partisan Reminder**** **Mod Post**
0 Comments Share Save

Posted by u/megh_undie 2 hours ago
1
Tumblr Content Hub
Alright y'all, I'm giving up on Reddit's photo format, and decided to leverage tumblr to create a content hub! I'll keep sharing all my favorites here directly, but for a full content hub of United We Dream Action's disinformation defense content, check out
0 Comments Share Save

Posted by u/erinshields_CMD 2 days ago
2
CDT Research Workshop: First Steps in Developing a Research Agenda to Address Disinformation, Race, and Gender - Center for Democracy and Technology **Research**
cdt.org/insigh...
0 Comments Share Save

Posted by u/erinshields_CMD 2 days ago
0
White Paper: Disinformation and Hate Speech Harm BIPOC - National Hispanic Media Coalition **Research**
nhmc.org/WP920
0 Comments Share Save

About Community
A place for people of color and other marginalized groups to organize against radicalized disinformation and share resources. Curated by MediaJustice and United We Dream Action.

Content hub:
<https://canarycollective.tumblr.com/>
8 Members 5 Online
Created Sep 25, 2020

Flair
Research
Active Disinformation Campaign
Take Action News Support

Non-Partisan Rule
r/CanaryCollective is a non-partisan subreddit. This subreddit provides non-partisan information and resources on racialized disinformation. We encourage the sharing and use of information for nonpartisan purposes. This is not a space for advocating for or against the election of candidates for office. This space also should

TOOLS FOR WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

"[A] key role of journalism is to challenge the powerful...exposing public corruption, analyzing political interests and motives, and spotlighting hypocrisy, dishonesty, and other forms of...malfeasance. The ability of journalists to perform this vital set of roles hinges on public trust."

- PEN America *Faking News: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth*, October 2017

REPORTING IN AN

ERA OF DISINFORMATION:

Fairness Guide for Covering Women and
People of Color in Politics

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INTRODUCTION

Online attacks aimed at delegitimizing, depersonalizing, and ultimately dissuading women and people of color from being politically active are **common occurrences**, often perpetrated by **trolls and bots** with total impunity.

A **recent survey** of women in elected office from all over the world found that 41.8 percent of them had seen extremely humiliating or sexually charged images of them spread through social media. Women politicians of color, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized people are at even greater risk of becoming targets of disinformation campaigns.

Media representation plays a critical role in how candidates of color and women are perceived by voters. Headlines, photos, social media previews, and article content can be used to spread racist and sexist ideas and encourage or legitimize disinformation. Online attacks and disinformation work to undermine women and people of color in politics.

The 2020 Democratic primary has already shown us the amount of vitriol, hate, and disinformation hurled at women candidates, and particularly women of color candidates. It has also shown that we have made little progress since 2016 in understanding how to counter those lies and harassment in a clear and effective way.

Sexist and racist language about, questions for, and descriptions of political candidates feed into negative stereotypes and disinformation. They decrease voter confidence in diverse candidates and discourage women and people of color from entering politics.

Despite a recent increase in the number of political leaders who are women and/or people of color, there's still a long way to go until our nation's elected officials truly represent the population. Women make up only 25 percent of the Senate and 23 percent of the House, despite being 51 percent of the U.S. population.¹ People of color comprise 39 percent of the population but only 22 percent of Congress.²

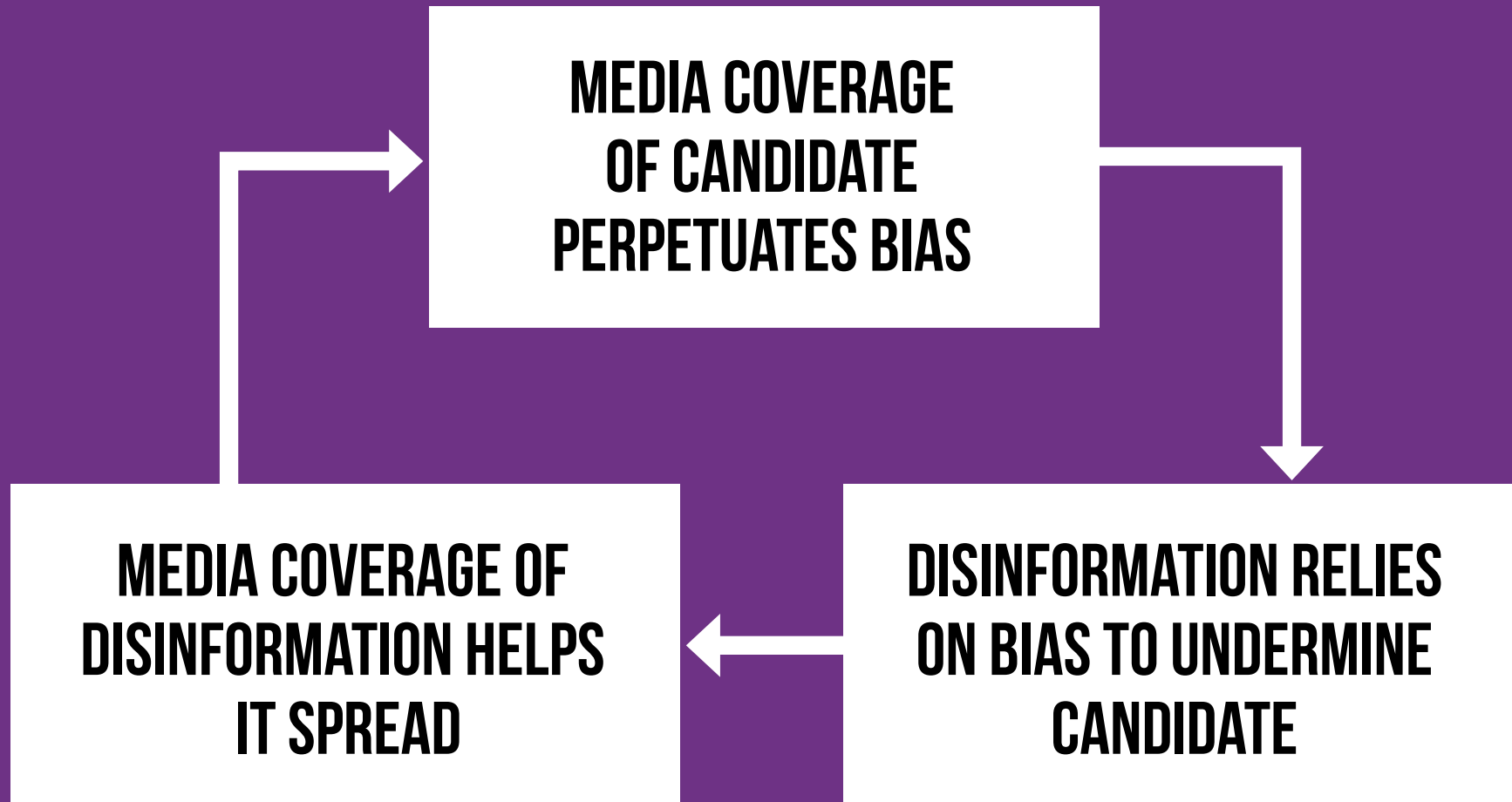
The media must play a role in ensuring that women and people of color running for or holding office are represented fairly. This guide will help journalists and platforms identify and avoid unintentional sexist and racist bias or disinformation when interviewing, writing about, or moderating content about women and people of color running for or holding political office.

“The media plays a very significant role in shaping public perceptions about women and men, therefore it is important that reporting avoids any form of gender stereotypes, which often limit and trivialize women and men, as well as presenting an inaccurate view of the world and its possibilities.

Furthermore, the use of stereotypes reflects a mental block not only in terms of what society may expect from women and men, but also—more seriously—in terms of what women and men may expect from themselves.”

UNESCO, 2012

TIPS TO AVOID ENCOURAGING AND LEGITIMIZING DISINFORMATION AND BIAS



TIPS TO AVOID MIS-REPORTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

- Consider biases that are at play when it comes to race, gender, ability, orientation, and other protected classes—question and debunk stories and language that perpetuate bias.
- Reporting on disinformation rather than **debunking it** can help spread it. Name disinformation as unfounded, a conspiracy theory, debunked, dubious, unlikely, misleading, a lie, false, etc. in the headline if you must write about disinformation.
- Do not share links to sources of disinformation, which can drive traffic to those spaces. It is better to share screenshots with no link.
- Avoid covering “trending” topics on Twitter as reflective of broad support, even when total volume is still very low. Twitter “trends” are based on many factors, and do not necessarily mean a large number of users are participating in a conversation.
- Avoid referring to Twitter trends or data as reflective of “social media”—only 22 percent of Americans are on Twitter.

Ask yourself how this strand of disinformation is targeting Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, disabled, LGBTQ people, women, and other marginalized groups.

TIPS TO AVOID MIS-REPORTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

- Don't write articles about "movements" or "viral" content online that are only moving among a few users on Facebook or Twitter.
- Avoid overemphasizing the role of foreign actors, which can undermine the reality that a lot of disinformation is spread by domestic actors.
- Avoid overemphasizing the role of bots, rather than the reality that many things that gain traction do so as a result of both artificial and organic sentiment.
- Bad actors have sought out and do seek out opponents offline. Do not report personal information that bad actors could use to identify people who may be targets.
- Be on the lookout for signs that a photo or video has been manipulated: to impersonate, change context, or play into racist, sexist, and anti-Semitic tropes.



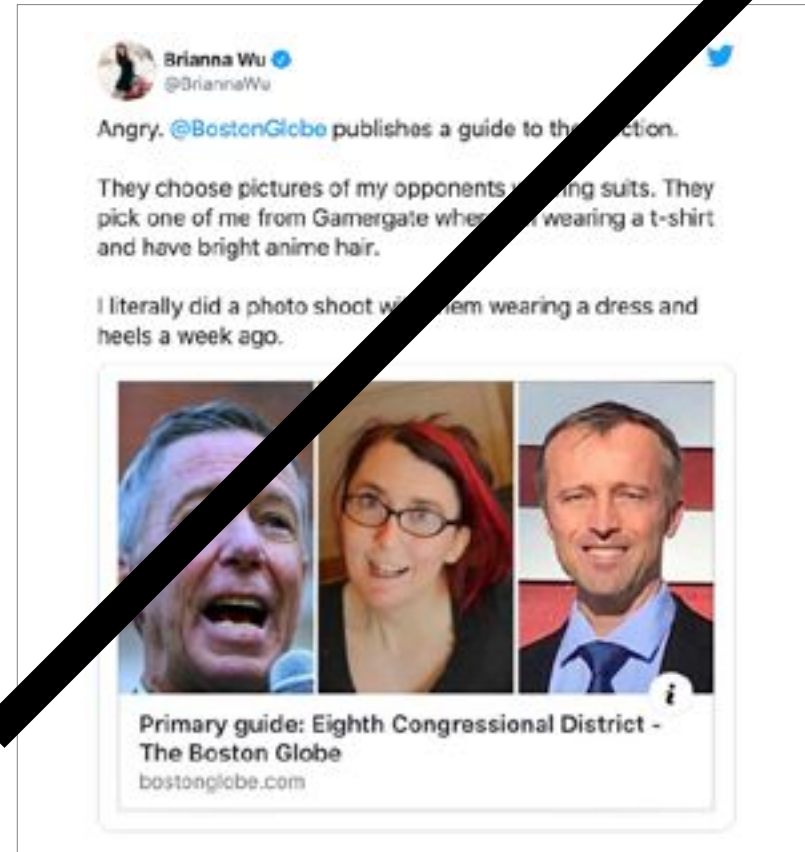
[Resource for covering and combatting disinformation](#)



This article states that the story had "begun to emerge on social media." In reality, the story came from a far-right news source and had received only limited attention on Twitter.

BIAS AND DISINFORMATION IN HEADLINES, PHOTOS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- As content is shared on social media, the headline, photo, and preview text that users see can encourage and unintentionally spread disinformation and biases that harm women, people of color, and other marginalized groups.
- Write headlines and social media posts as if it is the only thing people will read. Headlines that sensationalize disinformation and racist or sexist attacks help to spread it when it circulates on social media and news feeds.
- When choosing a candidate photo ensure that it looks professional and doesn't play into any negative stereotypes based on race, gender, or other protected class.
- If you must cover disinformation make it clear in the headline and social media preview that the information is false.



The Boston Globe published a photo of male candidates in suits next to a woman candidate, Brianna Wu, in a t-shirt.



[Resource for headlines and social media](#)

BIAS AND DISINFO IN HEADLINES, PHOTOS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

"Trump haters are paedophiles": inside QAnon, the conspiracy aiming to put Hollywood behind bars

First Tom Hanks, then Lady Gaga and now Chrissy Teigen. Who believes Hollywood is involved in a paedophile ring linked to Epstein? Why?

By Mark Pope
20 July 2020 - 15:00



This headline paired with a featured photo of Chrissy Teigen reinforces the false narrative that she is part of a politically-linked trafficking ring.

Wayfair denies internet rumors of child trafficking, CEO resignation

A company spokesman said "there are so many more important issues that matter to our employees and customers."

This headline helps spread and legitimize this QAnon conspiracy theory; it should be identified as unfounded.



VANITYFAIR.COM
Terrified Women Say Senator Klobuchar Is Just Like Trump

This social media preview of an article about Amy Klobuchar intentionally plays into the sexist trope of a tyrannical, mean woman boss or a "nasty woman."

CHECKING FOR BIAS

Prevent actively spreading or perpetuating disinformation and stereotypes that harm candidates

CHECKING FOR BIAS

Disinformation campaigns often target marginalized people—women, people of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants, Muslims, disabled people, etc.—to undermine their success and sow hate. Accordingly, it's critical to examine the impacts of systemic racism, sexism, and other forms of implicit bias in conjunction with disinformation.

Disinformation campaigns draw on negative stereotypes about marginalized people to lend a sense of credibility while attacking the intended target. The Pizzagate conspiracy that spread across social media relied on the narrative that Hillary Clinton was unlikeable and untrustworthy—insults that are frequently lobbed at women running for office. The birther conspiracy theory used to discredit President Obama relied on both racist and Islamophobic ideas. Conversely, disinformation can be fueled by a sensationalized headline, a debate question with sexist undertones, or a photo that plays into stereotypes.

It's critical that journalists understand the ways that implicit bias can show up in politics, to both avoid perpetuating personal biases and debunk and question disinformation meant to harm diverse candidates and political leaders.

**SEXIST TROPES AND
STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD
BE QUESTIONED AND
DEBUNKED**

SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Associating a woman candidate with men as a means of legitimizing

Historically, women required permission from their husband or father before most actions. Today, women are still often identified by their relationship to or comparison with men as a means of lending them legitimacy, but this implies that the woman cannot stand on her own experiences and accomplishments.

- Wife of, mother of, female version of, etc.
- Don't qualify gender when it's not necessary ex. A woman doctor, a woman attorney, a woman senator.
- Asking questions like "What does your husband think of you running?"



SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Too much emphasis on family roles

Men are more frequently depicted in mainstream media as professionals while women are more often shown in the context of their private lives. During elections, the media tends to cover men as thought and opinion leaders over women, preferring to focus on women's roles as wives and mothers. Such coverage takes women politicians to task if they are perceived as shirking their home responsibilities.

- Asking who is taking care of the kids or how they balance work and family
- “Now she’s a mother of two. And a US Senator. In between, she’s been ‘every size between a six and a sixteen.’ ” (See article on right.)



The article de-emphasized Senator Gillibrand's role as senator as an aside between mentioning the number of children she has and her dress size.

SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Treating women as if ambition is a negative trait

Any candidate seeking the second highest office of the land is showing ambition, but this is only seen as negative for women: Men running for office have ambition while women running for office are ambitious. It creates a double standard that punishes women while celebrating men for doing the same.

- When Romney chose Paul Ryan as his running mate, the press called Ryan “a young, ambitious beltway insider, with a camera-ready presence” while Kamala Harris was recently labeled “too ambitious” to be vice president.

Ambition for women candidates should not be treated in a different light.

SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Too much emphasis on appearance or voice

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from studies is that women candidates receive far more attention to appearance compared to men, which diminishes their perceived qualifications among voters.

- Analyzing or focusing on clothing
- Focusing on weight loss or gain
- Focusing on makeup and hair
- Telling a candidate to smile or talking about whether she smiles
- Hypersexualizing a candidate or politician
- Commenting on attractiveness
- Focusing on tone of voice rather than substance

SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

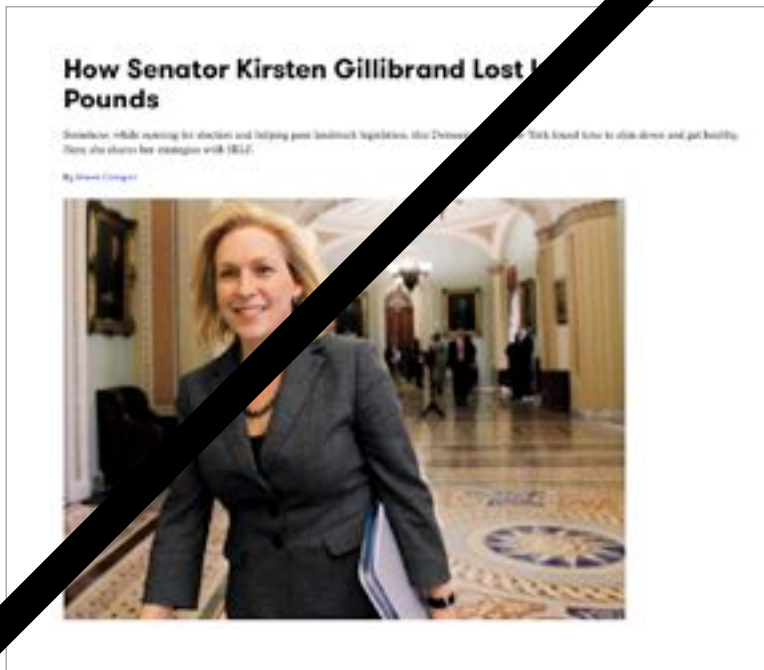
Analyzing or focusing on clothing



SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Focusing on weight loss or gain

- Describing a woman's body/size



Focusing on makeup and hair

- Describing or focusing on makeup or lack thereof
- Following and criticizing changes in hairstyle

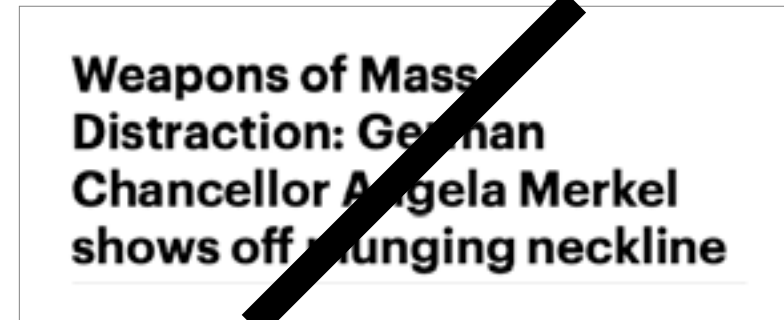


SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Telling a candidate to smile or talking about whether she smiles

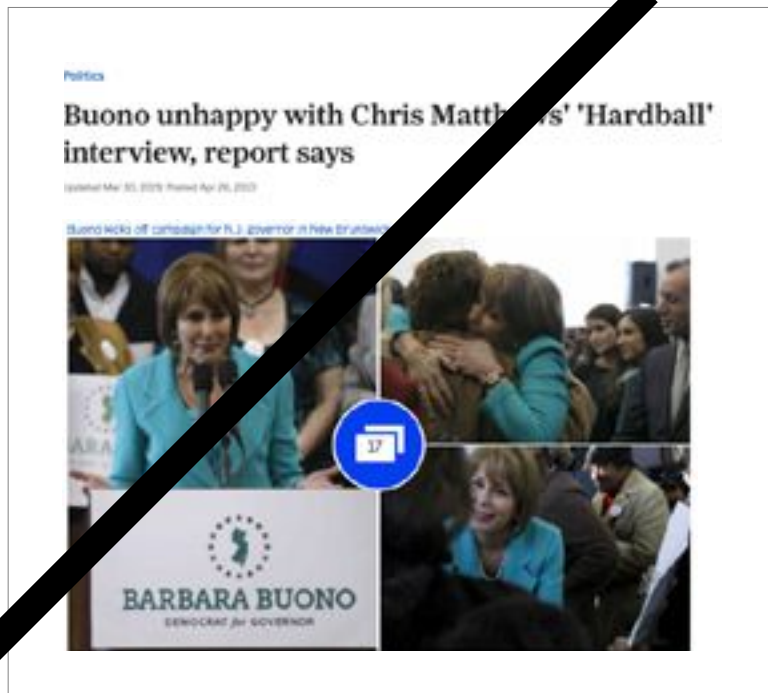


Hypersexualizing a candidate or politician



SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Commenting on attractiveness



Chris Matthews asks NJ candidate if he can call her attractive

Focusing on tone of voice rather than substance

- Shrill, bitter, angry, etc.



SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Avoid using terms that equate emotion with weakness or being “crazy” and stoicism with being cold

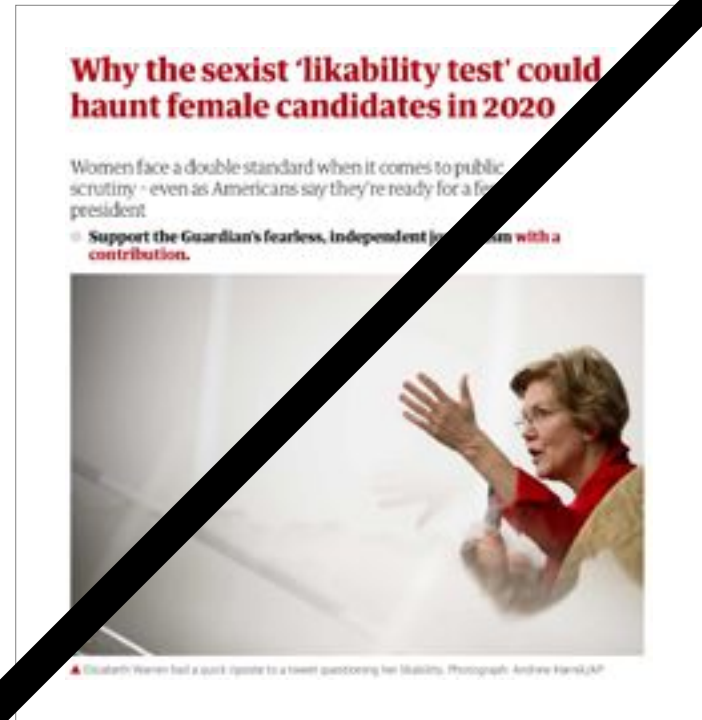
Women are often penalized as being too emotional and seen as cold if they fail to show emotion, creating a double bind that doesn't apply to men.

- Mean girl
- Ice queen
- Bossy
- Feisty
- Unlikeable
- Abrasive
- Aggressive
- Irrational
- Emotional

SEXIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Be cautious of using “unlikeable” or “unelectable”

Research has shown that voters are more likely to vote for a man candidate they don't like than a woman they don't like so discussions of likeability only help to harm women.



USE GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE TO HELP STOP GENDER BIAS

- Businessperson, chairperson, first-year (rather than freshman), congressperson
- Avoid using Mrs. unless it's preferred by the candidate; use Ms. because it doesn't designate marital status. Single women have historically been seen as undesirable or unworthy.
- Use the proper title such as Honorable, Senator, Secretary
- Use the they/them pronoun as a gender neutral pronoun.
 - Ex. An independent voter in Florida said they would...

Question and debunk infantilizing and patronizing language such as calling adult women girls and calling Black men boys.

BE MINDFUL OF INTERSECTIONALITY

- These issues are compounded for candidates who hold more than one marginalized identity such as women of color, disabled women, and LGBTQ women. People may hold multiple racial or ethnic identities as well, such as Afro-Latinx.
- Indigenous women often face a Catch 22 of either being erased as a relic of pre-colonial United States or being stereotyped and objectified.
- Avoid framing candidates as masculine or feminine, especially when writing about members of the LGBTQ community.
- Using the word “minority” implies inferiority or fringe. Use more accurate, descriptive terms like LGBTQ, Black, Indigenous, people of color, underrepresented, etc.
- In general, treat candidates as the multi-dimensional people that they are and avoid essentializing them due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- Focus on a candidate’s policy without typecasting: Avoid focusing gender and civil rights questions solely on women and candidates of color.
- Ask: would you say or write this about a white man candidate?

**RACIST TROPES AND
STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD
BE QUESTIONED AND
DEBUNKED**

RACIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Questioning someone's "origins," "heritage," and "loyalty."

- Questioning commitment to the United States based on racism/nativism
- Implying a connection between an Arab American and/or Muslim candidate and terrorism
- Assuming Latinx people are immigrants or using the term "illegal immigrant" or "illegal alien."



RACIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, who lost her legs serving in Iraq, hits back after Tucker Carlson suggests she hates America



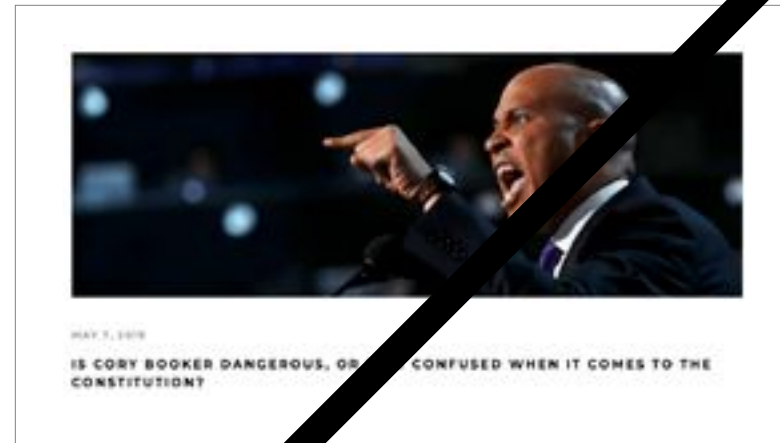
by STEVE GUTEN, CNN Business
Published 9:55 AM ET, Tue, July 1, 2020



RACIST TROPES AND STEREOTYPES THAT SHOULD BE QUESTIONED AND DEBUNKED

Equating emotions with anger and threats, cause for fear

- “Angry Black woman” trope
- Calling Black men dangerous
- Using “uppity” to describe Black people
- Associating the Coronavirus with Asian people
- Associating Latinx people with drugs and crime



CODED RACIST TERMS TO QUESTION AND DEBUNK

- Using “urban” as code for Black.
- Describing a mixed-race person as “half,” as in half Black
- Colorist stereotyping rooted in the idea that someone with lighter skin is “better”
- Reinforcing the white supremacist idea of inferiority: Using terms like articulate, well-educated, and hardworking to describe a person of color implies a level of surprise, as in “you’re articulate for a Black person.” It implies that people of color are expected to be inferior and that this person is an exception. Most political candidates are leaders and public servants who are obviously well-educated, well-spoken, and hardworking.
- Avoid using “non-white”; it normalizes whiteness as a standard



RESOURCES

- [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#)
- [National Center on Disability and Journalism Resource Guide](#)
- [Native American Journalist Association Reporting Guide](#)
- [NiemanLab guide to investigating disinformation](#)
- [Media Matters resource on headlines and tweets](#)
- [First Draft - Essential Guide to Responsible Reporting in an Age of Information Disorder](#)
- [The NLGJA Stylebook](#)
- [NABJ Styleguide](#)
- [The National Association of Hispanic Journalists \(NAHJ\)](#)
- [Asian American Journalist Association](#)
- [The Debunking Handbook](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTERS

- UltraViolet
- Color of Change PAC
- SumOfUs
- EMILY's List WOMEN VOTE!
- Supermajority
- ACRONYM
- NARAL Pro-choice America
- Women's March
- Planned Parenthood Votes
- Strategic Victory Fund
- GQR Digital
- #ShePersisted
- Disinfo Defense League

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

1. [The Reporters' Guide to Covering the 2020 Elections](#) from PEN America.
2. [Providing nuanced information to voters to address voting disparities and difficulties](#) from the American Press Institute.
3. [JMR's Participatory Journalism Playbook!](#) A Field Guide to Listening and Reporting with Communities from jesikah maria ross
4. [Responsible Reporting Toolkit: Covering misinformation and disinformation](#) from University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Watch, and First Draft

MESSAGING AND CONTENT GUIDES

HOW TO **NOT** AMPLIFY DISINFO

Be strategic:

Track the disinformation

Use ReFrame's Disinfo Threat Analysis tool to track and analyze disinfo and gauge when and how to intervene

Seed new narratives

Often, the most powerful defense against disinformation is an offensive strategy. This includes well-researched content that discredits opposition, and emotional stories that lift up your irresistible values visions and solutions.



[Click Here to Download These How to NOT Graphics](#)

Greatest Hits Guide: Voting Disinfo Messaging

*Below is suggested messaging written by and for the OVS and EP working groups to address ongoing mis- and disinformation related to voting and the election. We suggest pushing out these messages via your organizations' channels on a regular basis ahead of the election. Please tailor this messaging for your audiences as needed (e.g., adding state-specific rules or translating it into other languages). **We will continue to add messaging to this guide, as needed. We will also share additional rapid response messaging by email, as needed.** If you have any questions, please contact voterdisinfo@spitfirestrategies.com.*

Remember these best practices whenever communicating about online disinformation:

- **Avoid amplification:** Social media algorithms feed on engagement, whether negative or positive. Even reacting with “angry” on a Facebook post boosts it and creates the possibility for more people to see the piece of disinformation. Only comment on disinformation that is a high-level threat to debunk false information.
- **Report:** If you encounter a piece of disinformation, flag it for removal from the social network or submit to the tip line for further evaluation.
- **Avoid cross-pollination:** If you see a post on Facebook, avoid posting on Twitter about it, even to remark that it is incorrect. That only helps the disinfo spread and makes it more likely that it will become viral on other platforms.
- **Inoculate:** Prime your audience to distrust disinformation when they see it by naming bad actor's motivations and sharing factual information from trusted sources that encourages people to make a plan for voting.

Questions to ask yourself before responding to disinformation (and refer to the [threat matrix](#)):

- Will our audience fall for this disinformation? (e.g., a Trump tweet probably not, but a fake image maybe.)
- What is the motive of the bad actor (person spreading disinfo)?
- How can we discredit them?
- What are the real facts?
- What can we link to give credence to those real facts?
- What's the least amount of the disinfo we can share so people recognize it, but it doesn't amplify the disinfo?

Inoculation Messaging

Use this with audiences to combat disinformation before they have encountered the false information. The objective is to proactively inoculate against anticipated problematic content before it spreads.

Inoculation messages must 1) discredit the falsehood/name the motivations, 2) state the falsehood and 3) state the facts. It's important to include all these elements in order in any inoculation messaging you share.

Safety and security of vote-by-mail:

- Politically motivated operatives are falsely claiming that mail-in voting increases electoral manipulation. Don't be fooled by blatant attempts to suppress the vote. Here's the truth: much of the country already votes by mail. This process has been functioning well for years and is deeply embedded in the American electoral system. Local and state election officials use rigorous checks and balances to ensure mail-in ballots are secure and counted accurately, including registration and identity verification. In most states, voters can track their ballot online and confirm it was counted by visiting their Secretary of State's website. To learn more about the mail-in ballot verification process in your state visit:
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>.
- Trump and his supporters want you to think #VoteByMail will lead to ballot manipulation. The truth is they don't want people to vote-by-mail because they think it will hurt Republicans' chances at the polls. In the states that have transitioned to all mail-in ballots, there has been no evidence of a partisan advantage for either side. Having the option to vote-by-mail is critical to ensuring the health and safety of every eligible voter.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/us/politics/vote-by-mail.html>
- Politically motivated operatives are taking advantage of the fact that many voters will be voting by mail for the first time in the #2020Election. In an attempt to suppress the vote they're sharing false claims that mail-in voting is less secure and leads to increased ballot manipulation. This is false. Here's the truth: mail-in voting is a tried and true way to make our voices heard in our democracy. Local and state election officials use rigorous checks and balances to ensure mail-in ballots are secure and counted accurately, including registration and identity verification. In most states, voters can track their ballot online and confirm it was counted by visiting their Secretary of State's website. To learn more about the mail-in ballot verification process in your state visit:
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>.

Double voting:

- A certain politician dangerously suggested that people should vote twice to "test the system." Don't be fooled: his goal is to create confusion and breed mistrust in our voting systems. Voters MUST choose one way to vote. States have rigorous processes for checking that a voter only casts one ballot. Any efforts to cast an additional ballot will not be counted and unnecessarily

burdens election officials. Voters can track their ballot on their state election board's website to ensure their voice is heard.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/us/politics/trump-people-vote-twice.html>

- A certain politician dangerously suggested people should vote twice to create confusion and breed mistrust in our voting systems. Don't be fooled: you can only vote once. Period. If you decide to #VBM and you show up at a polling place, you will increase confusion and unnecessary congestion at polling places on Election Day. Voters can track their ballot on their state election board's website to ensure your vote is counted.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/us/politics/trump-people-vote-twice.html>

Ballot collection:

- Politically motivated operatives are falsely claiming that ballot collection is illegal and leads to ballot manipulation. Here's the truth: ballot collection is a safe and secure way to ensure every eligible voter can participate in our democracy. In many states, community organizations, family members and/or friends are allowed to collect and deliver sealed ballots on behalf of others by request. This program helps voters who do not have easy access to reliable outgoing mail or who need extra help getting their ballots delivered, including people who live in rural communities, low-income folks, people with disabilities, older voters and Native Americans. This is especially important during the pandemic when vulnerable folks have been asked to stay home for their health. Ballot collections programs have checks and balances built into them to ensure they are secure. Restricting these programs is undemocratic. Period.

Administrative errors:

- Politically motivated operatives want you to believe that administrative errors that are quickly corrected by election officials are proof of widespread voting issues. This is false. They are using these examples to breed mistrust in our democratic system. We all care about the security and integrity of our elections, and election officials are trained to respond to incidents when and if they arise to ensure every voter's voice is heard in our election. It is important to note that folks are trying to make us feel like our elections are not secure and our votes won't count. We cannot let those efforts affect our confidence in our system or our willingness to vote. Every vote matters. Massive participation is the surest way to inoculate our democracy against threats. Make a plan to vote today.

Foreign interference in vote-by-mail:

- Politically motivated operatives are falsely claiming that there will be foreign interference in our mail-in voting process this November. Don't be fooled by blatant attempts to discourage you from voting. Much of the country already votes by mail. Local and state election officials use rigorous checks and balances to ensure mail-in ballots are secure and counted accurately,

including ballot verification. In most states, voters can track their ballot online and confirm it was counted by visiting their Secretary of State's website. To learn more about the mail-in ballot verification process in your state visit:

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>

Poll watching and voter intimidation:

- Trump is dangerously calling on his supporters and law enforcement to “watch the polls” under the guise of protecting the integrity of our elections. Don't be fooled. This isn't to ensure a safe and fair election -- it's voter intimidation and it's illegal. There are strict limits on what the military, law enforcement and poll watchers can do at the polls. Civil rights groups have dealt with these types of thinly veiled efforts to disenfranchise communities, especially Black and Brown communities, for decades. Democracy will prevail. Start making your voting plan, and don't let your voice be silenced. Whether you decide to vote in person or #VoteByMail, your vote is your voice.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voters-should-not-be-intimidated>

Balance Messaging

Use this for in-channel messaging to discredit mis- and disinformation. The objective is to minimize the amplification of problematic content.

Safety and security of vote-by-mail:

- Vote-by-mail is secure and confidential. States have a long history of safeguarding mail-in ballots by using strategies like identity verification, tracking barcodes, setting clear chains of custody for all ballots and more. You can track your vote in most states by visiting your Secretary of State's website. Learn more about how your state protects your vote here [\[LINK to resource\]](#).
- Vote-by-mail is as American as apple pie – we've been using some form of it since the Civil War. The evidence shows that #VBM is secure and confidential. States use strategies like identity verification, tracking barcodes, setting clear chains of custody for all ballots and more. You can track your vote in most states by visiting your Secretary of State's website. Make your voting plan today, whether that means #VBM or voting in-person at the polls, so your voice is heard in our democracy.
- Vote by mail is safe and secure and has been used for years in American elections. Local and state election officials use rigorous checks and balances to ensure mail-in ballots are secure and counted accurately, including registration and identity verification. To learn more about the mail-in ballot verification process in your state visit:

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>

- Vote by mail is safe and secure. Local and state election officials use rigorous checks and balances to ensure mail-in ballots are secure and counted accurately. Here's the process in most states: voters receive their mail-in ballot or absentee ballot in the mail. Once they fill it out they must sign the outside of their ballot to certify their vote and seal it in a security envelope that keeps their ballot private. Upon receipt of ballots, local election officials certify that the name and address on the outside of the ballot match voter rolls. The officials then remove the sealed ballot from the outside security envelope containing the voter's signature so that the voter's preference remains confidential. On Election Day they unseal the ballots and count them along with ballots received in-person at the polls. To learn more about the mail-in ballot verification process in your state visit:
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>
- Absentee/vote-by-mail is a safe and secure method of voting. It is one way to cast a ballot, along with robust in-person and early voting, to ensure all eligible voters can vote without jeopardizing their health. Your ballot is as unique as you are. Every voter gets a ballot with barcodes corresponding to the voter, the voter's address, the ballot itself, the election, precinct style and other variables by state. Plus, ballots are printed on a special weight of paper, so it's probably easier to forge money than a ballot. Learn more and find state-specific information at the Election Protection Hotline, which now has a chat option available: <https://866ourvote.org/>
- Ensuring our elections are safe, secure, & accessible is critical to our democracy. #VoteByMail has been tried & tested in states across the country. The evidence shows it provides a secure way for every eligible voter to participate and make their voices heard in a safe way.
- Our democracy works best when everyone participates and when everyone's vote is secure. As an American, Trump gets to securely #VoteByMail -- so should the millions of other Americans who want to safely participate in our democracy.
- We do not have to choose between public health and a functioning democracy. And, according to many recent polls, Americans understand this. Let's focus on providing states with the resources they need to get ready for safe, secure, & accessible elections, including #VoteByMail.
- #VoteByMail is not only safe, it is secure. States safeguard mail-in ballots by using signature verification, tracking barcodes, 24-hour surveillance of ballot dropboxes, setting clear chains of custody for all ballots and more.

Double voting:

- Voters must choose one way to vote. States have rigorous processes to ensure that each eligible voter only casts one ballot. Any additional efforts to cast a ballot will not be counted and will

create unnecessary burdens on election officials. Voters can track their ballot on their state election board's website to ensure your voice is heard.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/us/politics/trump-people-vote-twice.html>

- You can only vote once. Period. If you decide to #VBM and you show up at a polling place, you will increase confusion and increase the possibility of #COVID19 exposure on Election Day. Voters can track their ballot on their state election board's website to ensure your vote is counted. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/us/politics/trump-people-vote-twice.html>

Ballot collection:

- This is an explicit mischaracterization of a program that helps ensure every eligible voter can participate in our democracy. In many states, community organizations, family members and/or friends are allowed to collect and deliver sealed ballots on behalf of others. This program helps voters who do not have easy access to reliable outgoing mail or who need extra help submitting their ballots, including people who live in rural communities, low-income folks, people with disabilities, older voters and Native Americans. This is especially important during the pandemic when vulnerable folks have been asked to stay home. Ballot collections programs have checks and balances built into them to ensure they are secure. Restricting these programs is undemocratic. Period.
- Restricting ballot collection programs is misguided and undemocratic. Ballot collection helps ensure every eligible voter can participate in our democracy. It is a safe and secure way for community organizations, family members and/or friends are allowed to collect and deliver sealed ballots for those who have limited access to outgoing mail or need extra help getting their ballots submitted. This is especially important during the pandemic when vulnerable folks have been asked to stay home.

Administrative errors:

- We all care about the security and integrity of our elections and we're encouraged by the quick work of election officials to address errors, when and if they arise. What is really important to note here is that people are trying to use these errors to make us feel insecure about the election and that our votes won't count. We cannot let these efforts affect our confidence in our system or our willingness to vote. Every vote matters. Massive participation is the surest way to inoculate our democracy against threats. Make a plan to vote today.

Poll watching and voter intimidation:

- Trump is encouraging his supporters to show up at the polls and "watch" to ensure the integrity of the election. Let's get this straight: this is not poll watching. It is voter intimidation and it is illegal. Real poll watchers are tasked with making sure the polling place follows proper

procedures, not harassing or intimidating eligible voters and poll workers. Many states have safeguards such as poll watcher certification, training, or limits on interacting with voters to make sure that happens. All eligible voters should be able to have their voice heard in our democracy without fear or interference. If you see someone at a polling place harassing or intimidating voters, call 866-OUR-VOTE.

- There are strict limits on what the military, law enforcement and poll watchers can do at the polls. Civil rights groups have dealt with these types of thinly veiled efforts to disenfranchise communities, especially Black and Brown communities, for decades. Democracy will prevail. Start making your voting plan, and don't let your voice be silenced. Whether you decide to vote in person or #VoteByMail, your vote is your voice.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voters-should-not-be-intimidated>

Foreign interference in vote-by-mail:

- It is impossible for a foreign government to “hack” the #VoteByMail process. Local and state election officials use rigorous checks and balances to ensure mail-in ballots are secure and counted accurately, including ballot verification. In most states, voters can track their ballot online and confirm it was counted by visiting their Secretary of State's website. To learn more about the mail-in ballot verification process in your state visit:

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>

Stray marks on ballots

- Treat your absentee ballot just like you would in a voting booth. Do NOT include any commentary, stars or initials on your ballot, and avoid making stray marks. In some states, this could disqualify your ballot. If you do make a mistake or accidentally make notes or write on your ballot, you can absolutely get another one. Call your county election official to find out how to discard your spoiled ballot and get a new one. You can contact your Secretary of State's office to learn more about the rules in your state or visit <https://canivote.org/>. If you have any questions, call the nonpartisan Election Protection line at 866-OUR-VOTE.



C3 NORTH STAR MESSAGING GUIDE:

Disrupt Disinfo & Advance Your Narratives

Nov-Dec 2020

In our approach to building narrative power we are always asking the question, "What is the opportunity to advance our narrative?" When it comes to disinformation, the question is the same: *how **do we advance our narrative in this moment of focused attention on disinformation?***

This is a messaging guide to help us disrupt disinformation while leaning into opportunity, and to help us avoid falling into the many rabbit holes of disinfo chaos.

Using and adapting these messages in our content can help us keep our heads up and the conversations focused on the north stars of our larger goals:

- Voter turnout among communities of color
- Protection of rights: the right to vote and the right to protest and dissent
- Election integrity and supporting election workers
- De-escalation of division and violence
- Increased civic engagement toward a multi-racial democracy
- Cultivating the belief that we can make government work for us

OVERALL APPROACH

- Use the terms "chaos agents" and "bad actors" as blanket terms for people who spread conspiracy theories and launch disinfo attacks.
 - This keeps us from amplifying the profiles of groups like the Proud Boys and QAnon, and keeps us out of the weeds of "who did what and why".
 - It also allows us to create a very easy to identify bad guy that can help audiences then pivot back to what's better and good, ie. our proactive messaging
 - It also helps us move away from xenophobic and racist tropes that quickly start to emerge when countries like China and Iran are (allegedly) involved.
 - It starts to create a cognitive framework that can contain the various agents of disinfo and can help people quickly associate disinfo with "bad guys" and therefore discredit the info coming from chaos agents, without getting into the weeds of who said or did what and why (which is often a rabbit hole of speculation in which we are often led to spread misinfo ourselves).
 - We can then cast these chaos agents as a fringe "them" of "bad guys" trying to cause confusion to make things worse for families/communities/nation, and all of

us and our target audiences and communities as a very large “us” of “good guys” trying to stay true to what’s real, and make things better for our families/communities/nation.

- Use words like “hoaxes” “tricks” and “traps” to describe the disinfo attempts.

CORE MESSAGE

- Some people are worried about [*threatening emails to voters/the supposed deep state pedophilia ring/ballots supposedly getting tampered with and stolen/lies that the election is rigged*].
 - This is disinformation spread by chaos agents, people who just want things to get worse. From now to the elections and beyond, we’re going to see a lot more of this. Let’s not fall into their traps.
- Instead, let’s stay focused:
 - Vote! It’s safe, secure and private. We have the power to decide our own future and the power to elect the government we deserve.
 - Wait for the real results. It will take at least 7 days to count every vote, let’s support election workers in doing their job and look to election officials for the real results.
 - Protect our right to mobilize. We have the right to protest and dissent, especially in the face of authoritarianism.
 - Dissent and de-escalate: Right-wing vigilantes have been the main source of violence at mobilizations over the past year, not the majority of us who believe in and take steps toward racial justice every day.
 - Their goal is chaos, our goal is safety and stability, especially for those hardest hit by the pandemic. We need to stay focused on what brings real safety and stability: economic relief for workers and small businesses, a safe vaccine, immigration reform, affordable health care, and real solutions to climate change.

TALKING POINTS

- C3 GOTV Example:
 - **Potential voter:** I’m not going to vote because I heard they can find out who you voted for and that there’s been threats that people will come after you, and I don’t want to deal with any of that.
 - **Response:** I hear your concern. But that was actually a hoax spread by chaos agents, people who just want to confuse us. We don’t have to fall for their traps. The fact is, voting is private and secure and there are a lot of people working very hard to protect your right to vote. We can help - what other concerns do you have? And would you like to vote in person or by mail?
- Election Integrity Example:
 - **Someone says:** This election is totally rigged. There’s no way that whoever wins can be the legitimate president.

- **Response:** There are a lot of people working to ensure the legitimacy of the election. It takes time to count every vote, especially during a pandemic when there are a lot of absentee ballots. Let's support election workers and not give in to the chaos agents who want to undermine the process.
- **Response adapted from PA Stands Up (see their [c4 Count Every Vote Guide here](#)):** Don't believe the chaos agents who want to disrupt the election. Millions of Americans across the country have been casting their votes—for the past few weeks, by mail, and today in-person. We're excited to see the results after every vote is counted.
- **Protest and Dissent Example:**
 - **Someone says:** It's gonna be civil war in the streets and they're going to blame it all on people of color
 - **Response:** The majority of people in this country want things to get better, not worse. It's our right to protest and this doesn't mean civil war, it means democratic dissent. We will continue to raise our voices for what we deserve, and to de-escalate the violence that chaos agents and vigilantes are trying to stir up. Our communities' rights and our safety depend on it.
 - **C3 Response from PA Stands Up:** Time and again, we've seen that when working people of all races and creeds have stood up for what's right, we've won. We must stand together, peacefully but resolutely, to defend our democracy against those who would seek to use violence and chaos to keep us from having our voices heard.
- **Multi-Racial Democracy Example:**
 - **Someone says:** This whole mess is just proof that government will never work
 - **Response:** Chaos agents, from vigilantes to conspiracy theorists to cults, all want us to believe that government will never work. But abandoning government means abandoning social safety nets, civil rights and environmental protections, and regulation for affordable access to health care, internet, and other basic needs. We can and must protest the government we have while continuing to demand the government we deserve, and what we deserve is a true multi-racial democracy that works for all.

-end-

DISINFO DEFENSE LEAGUE CORE MESSAGING

Introduction

The following core messaging guide aims to support the Disinfo Defense League (DDL)'s rapid response efforts to counter disinformation and voter suppression campaigns deliberately targeting Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities. The core messaging focuses on DDL's primary issue areas: **COVID-19 and public health disinformation; racist and anti-immigrant disinformation; misogynistic and sexist disinformation; and faith-based disinformation.** The messaging guide is informed by a number of DDL partners and racial justice, civil rights and disinfo experts.

This election season, our messaging strategy seeks to ensure that we provide communities of color targeted by disinformation with persuasive and credible reasons to continue voting and engage in our democratic process. DDL members will be able to adapt this high-level messaging for their rapid response efforts to combat specific instances of disinformation targeting their communities. This messaging is not final nor is it exhaustive. **The final messaging DDL members share with their communities needs to be tailored to reflect the specific incident and community to effectively inoculate against that disinformation threat.**





Messaging Guidance

As you work in your communities to help build power for Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities, you can **use inoculation messaging to combat disinformation**, while discrediting the source, by delivering the facts to an audience before they have encountered any false information. The objective is to proactively prepare audiences against anticipated problematic content before it spreads.

Inoculation theory teaches us that facts alone are not enough to counter disinformation. While we don't want to amplify disinformation by commenting directly on a post or sharing it across platforms, we can “pre-bunk” false content through values-based messaging to equip our audiences with the tools and accurate information they need to recognize the disinfo when they see it in the real world.

In any inoculation messaging you share, it's important to include all of the following elements in the order outlined below.

- **Step 1:** Lead with shared values to connect with your audience.
- **Step 2:** Discredit the falsehood by naming the motivations driving the disinformation.
- **Step 3:** State the falsehood you intend to inoculate against.
- **Step 4:** Deliver factual information to combat the falsehood.

Remember these best practices whenever communicating about online disinformation:

- **Do connect through values:** Values like equity, unity and inclusion are important to your audience – and for bad actors who spread disinformation, the prospect of Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities taking action that's grounded in these values is scary.
- **Do inoculate:** Prime your audience to distrust disinformation when they see it by naming bad actor's motivations and fear of your audience's individual and collective power. Share factual information from trusted sources to combat the falsehood.
- **Don't amplify:** Social media algorithms feed on engagement, whether negative or positive. Even reacting with “angry” on a Facebook post boosts it and creates the possibility for more people to see the piece of disinformation. Only respond when



the disinformation poses a high-level threat to your audience and you feel confident you can debunk the false information.

- **Do respond on the same platform:** If you encounter a high-level disinfo threat that requires a response, only share your inoculation message on the same platform to avoid spreading the false claim to other platforms. For example, if you see a post on Facebook, avoid posting on Twitter about it, even to remark that it is incorrect. That only helps the disinfo spread and makes it more likely that it will become viral on other platforms.
- **Do report:** If you encounter a piece of disinformation, flag it for removal from the social media platform and/or submit it to DDL expert partners via the [Disinfo Reporting Form](#) for further evaluation.



COVID-19 and Public Health Disinformation

Disinformation flourishes in times of crisis. In the midst of the ongoing public health and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation campaigns rooted in xenophobia, racism and individualism are deliberately targeting Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities to stoke fear and confusion rather than collective action. Bad actors aim to sow distrust in government, science and public health institutions, while embedding racially-divisive narratives in communities of color to undermine our shared goals for public health and safety.

Sample messaging to counter COVID-19 and public health disinfo:

- This is a time to come together, yet bad actors are exploiting this public health crisis to divide us by denying science and scapegoating Asian Americans, immigrants, other people of color and those struggling to make ends meet. These disinformation tactics endanger all of us by discouraging solidarity and inciting fear of each other in response to this pandemic. But we must remember that our own well-being is tied to everyone else's.
- Our own health depends on the health of the person next to us, and the person next to them. Ensuring others can access care is how we take care of ourselves and our communities.
- Now more than ever, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that we are dependent on each other – no matter where we come from, what we look like or how much money we have. It's time to pull together to demand the testing, treatment and time off we all need to keep our communities safe and healthy.
[Insert/adapt call to action to reflect priorities/policy needs in your community]
- By standing together and making sure each and every one of us has the resources and information we need, we can prevail through this pandemic and ensure better health for us all and for generations to come.

For more information and COVID-19 messaging guidance, please read [Race Class Narrative and ASO Communications' National COVID-19 Messaging Guide](#). For additional guidance, read [PEN America's tip sheet on COVID-19 and disinformation](#).



Racist and Anti-Immigrant Disinformation

Leading up to the 2020 election, disinformation campaigns are targeting Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities with racist and anti-immigrant narratives focused on voting policies and procedures, and vilifying the Black Lives Matter movement. For decades, communities of color have been historically disenfranchised, and the spread of voting disinformation online is just one of many ongoing voter suppression tactics to prevent people from making their voices heard in this pivotal moment. Bad actors are preying on existing fears and confusion around the COVID-19 pandemic to further depress the vote of communities of color, make people distrustful of our democratic institutions and undermine racial justice protests around the country.

Sample messaging to counter election disinfo targeting communities of color:

- No matter what we look like or where we come from, most of us believe that for democracy to work for all of us, it must include us all. But bad actors are trying to divide us by sowing doubts about this election and the right of every eligible American to have our voices heard, no matter our color or origin, our income or zip code. We are joining together with people from all walks of life to vote in record numbers, demand that every single vote is counted, and deliver our democracy.
- Bad actors want to confuse you about when and where you can vote to keep you from participating in our democracy. They are trying to silence our voices and deny our rights – but we know better. Whether you decide to vote in person or vote by mail, your vote is your voice. Visit [\[Link to trusted source\]](#) for up-to-date and trusted information about voting deadlines and dates in your state. Eligible voters should make a plan for how they'll vote based on what feels most safe and secure to them—because voters shouldn't have to choose between their health and their vote.

Sample messaging to manage expectations for election results and why we must count every vote, and counter disinformation pushing for results before all votes are counted:

- Every eligible voter should have their voice heard and their vote counted. We have to #CountEveryVote that is cast – from members of the military who send in their vote from overseas, to people voting by mail, to people who vote on Election Day. That may mean we won't know the winner of the election on election night,



but that's okay – counting every vote is more important than speedy election results. When we take time to count and verify every ballot, it's a sign our democracy is working.

- As more voters cast their ballot by mail this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, states need time to ensure every vote is counted before announcing results – because every vote **MUST** be counted. Additional time is necessary to ensure the rigorous checks and balances that protect the fairness and accuracy of our elections can take place. Ensuring every vote counts is more important than speedy election results.

For more information and messaging guidance, please use the [When to Expect Election Results Social Media Toolkit](#). For additional narrative guidance, read the [messaging poll brief](#) from the Voting Rights Lab, The Leadership Conference and Strategies 360.

Sample messaging to counter mis/disinfo about vote-by-mail:

- Ensuring our elections are safe, secure and accessible is critical to our democracy. Voting absentee or by mail is one of multiple options to cast a ballot, along with robust in-person and early voting, to ensure all eligible voters can participate in our democracy without jeopardizing their health.
- Politically-motivated bad actors want you to think vote-by-mail will lead to an increase in ballot manipulation. They hope that breeding mistrust in the vote-by-mail process will depress voter turnout, especially in communities of color who have been hit hardest by COVID-19.
- The truth is that vote-by-mail is safe and secure. States have a long history of safeguarding mail-in ballots by using identity verification, tracking barcodes, 24-hour surveillance of ballot drop boxes, setting clear chains of custody for all ballots and more. False and disingenuous claims to the contrary are the product of coordinated racist efforts to prevent historically disenfranchised people from voting.
- Increased voter turnout has historically benefitted civil and human rights, helped to change policy in favor of workers and away from oppressive power structures. Having the option to vote by mail is critical to ensuring the health, safety and rights of every eligible voter.



- Vote-by-mail has been tried and tested in states across the country. Five states – Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington – now have all-mail elections. Recent studies show there is no evidence of a partisan advantage in all-mail voting states.
- The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is for everyone. It is a constitutional public service that is necessary for democracy. Millions of Americans trust and rely on the USPS to send their tax returns, stimulus checks, medications and other essentials. If you can trust mail for your stimulus checks, you can trust mail for your vote.

For more information and messaging guidance, please read the Advancement Project's Vote-By-Mail Messaging Guide.

Sample messaging to counter disinfo about Black Lives Matter protests:

- Throughout our history, Americans have joined together across race and place to express our right to protest. As we're marching together in anger and mourning the brutal killings of Black people by police, a handful of politicians and bad actors are trying to turn us against one another, stoking hatred against Black people, immigrants and other people of color. They hope that by spreading lies about our collective public actions and sowing fear we will turn against these efforts to secure equal justice under the law.
- We reject their attempts to divide us because we know a better future is possible. By coming together, we can make our country a place where all of our rights are respected. And where we vote in real leaders who reflect the very best of every kind of American. **[Insert your specific call to action]**
- We must use every tool available from marching to voting to make this a country we can be proud to call home. Voting is critical, and the people organizing protests today are the ones making calls, sending texts and registering voters. We must do both. A ballot cannot stop a bullet. To cast your vote, you have to be alive to do it.

For more information and messaging guidance, please read Race Class Narrative and ASO Communications' Messaging This Moment guide on policing, protest and racial injustice. For additional guidance, read PEN America's tip sheet for combatting protest disinformation.



Misogynistic and Sexist Disinformation

In this intensely divided climate, disinformation rooted in sexist stereotypes and tropes and that targets, threatens and seeks to silence women is rampant across media platforms. Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx women, already often targets of racist, nativist, xenophobic and other disinformation, are also commonly targets of misogynistic and misogynoir disinformation and misinformation.

Bad actors rely on misogynistic and misogynoir disinformation because left unchallenged, it can be an effective tool – especially online in the world of the 24-hour news cycle. As DDL disinfo expert Dr. Joan Donovan has written, “Misogyny has become an important tactic to control narratives, where online communities of men are coordinating harassment campaigns across social media for the purpose of silencing key public figures and sending their targets into hiding.”

Sample messaging to counter misogyny-based disinfo:

- Our vision of a more just, equitable and inclusive country for everyone will guide how we vote in the upcoming election and have a significant impact on the outcome.
- To people who don't share our values or vision for the future, our community is the biggest threat to what they want to achieve. That's why they rely on spreading racist and sexist lies (disinformation) to confuse us, turn us against each other, hopefully make us stay home on Election Day and convince our family and friends to stay home too.
- This election cycle, we can expect sexist messages on social media. “Too ambitious, out for herself, not really capable of leading...” Before you share, recognize these messages are harmful to everyone. Stop this cycle of sexism and vote according to your values.
- Online attacks against women are targeted and intentional. They undermine women and people of color in politics. The only things that should determine electability are candidates' positions, values, accomplishments and public service.



- These people hide behind their computers and work together to spread these lies inside our community. Even though they may look like they're from our community on social media, in many cases they aren't who they say they are.
- The truth here is that... [Insert truth about the specific disinformation, without repeating it. Focus on what *is* not what *is not*]
- You can check it at: [Insert link to trusted source]
- Remember, these people are spreading lies to silence and scare you, your family and community because they're afraid of our power when we come together and vote. That's why it's important that we vote in November and continue to have a voice after.

For more information on misogyny-based disinformation, please read Ultraviolet's Fairness Guide for Covering Women and People of Color in Politics.



Faith-Based Disinformation

For the more than 50% of Americans who identify as religious, any perceived affront to the principles and freedom of their faith can be a powerful wedge. That's why bad actors rely on disinformation that's rooted in faith to stoke division, fear and confusion. Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities are among the most religious in this country, and are ripe for this type of disinformation as subjects and as targets. This, on top of the reality that communities of color already face disinformation that is rooted in racist, sexist and nativist tropes and stereotypes, makes it important for Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities to be prepared for and equipped to combat faith-based disinformation and misinformation.

Sample messaging to counter faith-based disinfo:

- Our vision of a more just, equitable and inclusive country will guide how we vote in the upcoming election and have a significant impact on the outcome.
- To people who don't share our values or who don't want what's best for our community, we are the biggest threat to what they want to achieve. That's why they rely on spreading lies to confuse us, turn us against each other, and try to convince us, our family and our friends to stay home on Election Day.
- These people hide behind their computers and work together to spread these lies inside our community. Even though they may look like they're from our community on social media, in many cases they aren't who they say they are.
- The truth is that... [Insert truth about the specific disinformation, without repeating it and focus on what *is* not what *is not*]
- You can check it at: [Insert link trusted source]
- Remember, these people are spreading these lies to silence and scare you, your family and community because they're afraid of our power when we come together and vote. That's why it's important that we vote in November and continue to have a voice after.



Verifying Online Content

Verifying online content is a key component of combating mis- and disinformation, as all of us are susceptible to false information shared online. DDL's expert research partners at First Draft have developed the following resources to help everyone understand basic verification skills, whether you are looking at an eyewitness video, a manipulated photo, a sockpuppet account or a meme.

- **First Draft's Essential Guide to Verifying Online Information:** This guide includes essential concepts, checklists, tips and techniques to verify online content. It will introduce you to the five pillars of verification and how to tackle each one:
 - **Provenance:** Are you looking at the original account, article or piece of content?
 - **Source:** Who created the account or article, or captured the original piece of content?
 - **Date:** When was it created?
 - **Location:** Where was the account established, website created or piece of content captured?
 - **Motivation:** Why was the account established, website created or the piece of content captured?
- **Basic toolkit on verification:** This toolkit provides a collection of tools, readings and resources to get newsrooms and civil society organizations started with online social newsgathering, verification and responsible reporting.
- **Verifying content online challenge:** This interactive exercise will help you verify images, places and accounts that you find online.
- **Observation online challenge:** This interactive exercise will help you learn how to use visual cues to identify where photographs were taken.
- **Covering coronavirus: An online course for journalists:** This online course on verification includes First Draft's most recent videos on verifying sources.

For more information, please read DDL member PEN America's tip sheet focused on [how to talk to friends and family who share misinformation](#), which is available in both English and [Spanish](#).



DISINFORMATION MESSAGING GUIDANCE FOR LATINX COMMUNITIES

October 2020 UPDATE

Bad actors continue to spread disinformation online and offline seeking to sow distrust in our electoral process and amplify tensions in the Latinx community. It is important that progressives communicate a message of unity and a sense of trust in our democratic process while ensuring communities have the tools and information they need to make their voices heard.

To that end, we propose focusing on a message of action, unity and agency to fight back against the message of chaos, fear and division. This strategy seeks to build trust (and even patience) should the election results be too close to call on Election Day.

NOTE: *If you are encountering disinformation that is targeted to a person or organization or if you are seeing unusual levels in impact or reach, please contact our team so we can help investigate and/or to help develop a tailored message to combat disinformation.*

In this updated memo you will find:

- **General guidance** on how to respond to disinformation grounded in research including conspiracy theories **(NEW)**;
- **UPDATED Talking points** addressing key election related themes and disinformation themes targeting Latinx communities (TPs in **Spanish- NEW**);
- **NEW: Unbranded social media content** to help in your effort to develop a positive message that mobilizes the Latinx community.
- Guidance on spokespeople/validators

GENERAL GUIDANCE ON RESPONDING TO DISINFORMATION

1. **Do not engage with disinformation directly.** Do not like, comment or share—even to debunk because that informs algorithms that the message is important. If you need to respond to disinformation, do so indirectly (e.g. "Politicians are spreading lies about X for political gain, but...")
2. As a general rule, **only engage with content you want to reward and spread.**
3. **Prime people to be skeptical.** Point out (using non-political examples) how easy it can be for anyone to unintentionally believe or spread false information.
4. **Acknowledge shared concerns**, then pivot to a proactive, positive message.
5. **Redirect to accurate information.**

Guidance on Conspiracy Theories

- Bad actors and the far-right are investing in moving conspiracies (ie. Q'Anon, wild stories about Hunter Biden) in far-right Latinx spaces on social media. These kinds of conspiracies and "hack and release" stories can be highly successful at forcing mainstream and progressive actors to shift the wider political conversation. It is important that progressives do not take the bait and do not engage in fighting the veracity of claims themselves.
- If it becomes necessary to engage with a specific claim, do so by undermining the credibility of far-right messengers and calling out their strategy, NOT by engaging with the substance of any false claims. For example, note that conspiracies are not rooted in fact, are tied to real-world acts of violence, and spread dangerous and hateful claims. Or note that the sources spreading false claims have a history of spreading lies, ties to far-right groups, and are looking to help flailing political campaigns.
- These conspiracies and stories do not require a direct response that might repeat or amplify any attack or disinformation. Progressives should focus on their own messages and priorities. Rather than fact-checking the claims, it's more important to push positive responses and keep the focus on core issues such as COVID-19, health care, and the economy.

TALKING POINTS ON UNITY, EMPOWERMENT AND PRO-DEMOCRACY:

- The path to the White House goes straight through Latinx communities in key states like Arizona, Florida, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. Latinx voters of all backgrounds have begun breaking voter turnout records, and they have the power to impact this election and the direction of our country.
- Elections are both our most sacred obligation and our greatest national project. And while this election will unfold differently than previous ones, we need to do what we can to protect our institutions of democracy.
- Increased voter turnout has historically benefitted civil and human rights, helped to change policy in favor of workers and challenged oppressive power structures.
- Democracy is about government for and by the people. It looks like Americans of all backgrounds and persuasions exercising their right to vote and fulfilling their responsibilities to strengthen the country through participation.
- By joining together as voters, we will deliver a democracy where everyone counts, no exceptions.
- A successful election is one in which everyone eligible to vote can do so, every ballot is counted and when the voters decide the winner.

TALKING POINTS IN CASE THERE IS A DELAY IN ELECTION RESULTS :

- In response to the coronavirus pandemic, many states are allowing more voters to use absentee ballots than in past elections. It takes election officials longer to verify and count absentee ballots than votes cast by electronic voting machines because they need extra time to double check that those ballots have been verified and counted before announcing a result. What's more, in some states, by law election officials can't even start processing these ballots until after polls have closed on Election Day.

- The coronavirus is also going to make the process of counting all the votes and declaring a winner take longer than normal. Just like many workplaces, election officials are being careful to stay socially distanced and are sometimes working with reduced staff or fewer resources
- Democracy's long-term fate depends on adherence to the rules of the game, even if that takes time. We must maintain a path back to national unity—both in recognizing the legitimacy of the eventual winner and in condemning any improper attempts to undermine the result.
- Just about everything is different in 2020, and the November election will be no exception.
- We have to count every ballot that is cast — from members of the military who send in their vote from overseas, to people with pre-existing conditions voting absentee because of COVID-19, to people who vote in person on Election Day.
- No one in the media or in either party should rush to make any announcements about who has won the election until all the votes have been counted, even if that takes a week or more to complete. Every eligible voter should have their voice heard and their vote counted. When election officials take the time to count and verify every ballot, that's a sign that our democracy is working.
- Be skeptical of allegations of fraud or interference, regardless of who makes them. It's easy to make accusations, but very hard to pull anything off without getting caught.

TALKING POINTS ON KEY DISINFORMATION THEMES:

Vote By Mail/Voting Absentee

- More than ever we need all eligible voters to register and vote in this election. Vote early, no matter how you do it: in person or by mail.
- Vote by Mail/Voting Absentee is a safe and tested way to vote. States across the US have been doing it successfully for many years.
- You don't have to choose between your health and your vote. Eligible voters can vote safely and securely from your home if they choose to.
- While voting is easy for most people, for some it is really tough. At a time when people are struggling and have enough to worry about, we need safe and secure options for in-person, early, and mail-in voting. Protecting our vote means protecting our right to stand up for a fairer, safer society.
- No one should have to worry about the safety of voting. Some national leaders want to make it harder for us to make our voices heard, but we won't let that happen. Voters can get the information they need to cast a safe and secure ballot at vote411.org.

Voter Mobilization/Engagement

- The coronavirus pandemic means this election will be different. It might be harder to vote than in the past because of delays in the mail or fewer polling places available. But there are plenty of ways to vote safely. It is not too late to make a plan for how you are going to vote this year to make sure your vote is counted.
- Protecting our vote means protecting our right to stand up for a fairer, safer society.

- Whether it is police and justice reform, healthcare access, climate change, or immigration reform, communities of color need to vote to keep the momentum and make our voices heard in the 2020 election.
- Communities of color turned out in unprecedented numbers in 2018. We need to continue this momentum and vote for the change we need.

Racial Solidarity

- Communities of color, whether Black/Brown or Indigenous, face many of the same challenges: institutional racism, police brutality, lack of access to healthcare, jobs and other resources.
- We have more in common than what separates us and our common struggles outweigh our differences. We work hard, we care for our families, we give back to our communities, and we stand in solidarity with one another.
- By definition Latinx people come from various backgrounds and are multiracial- we are Indigenous, Black, Jewish, Muslim, Asian, Mestizo, and White. We can't be separated from each other.
- There are others who seek to divide us, but we can resist them. These forces do not have the Latinx communities' interest at heart. To build power and effect change, we have to show solidarity, be present and united, and not allow others to sow distrust and create tensions among us. By the same token, we need to recognize the racism/colorism inside our communities.
- Ours is a common struggle for fairness, justice and opportunity.
- Our faith calls on us to love one another, to treat others with compassion, to fight for equality no matter our gender, race, or creed, and to care for the most vulnerable among us.

Socialism

- Those that seek to divide us by attacking the press, lying, and threatening political opponents are the ones that are attacking our democracy.
- Many of us have come to the US in search of a better life for ourselves and our families, escaping dictators, conflict and poverty. Now it is our turn to maintain and support our democracy by voting.
- We are fighting for our basic social contract: the need to take care of each other and the right to basic dignity.
- The pandemic has shown us more than ever how important living wages, paid sick days and healthcare access are for our collective well being. Policy interventions that allow for greater health, safety and dignity for our communities should be uplifted not demonized.

GUIDANCE ON SPOKESPEOPLE/VALIDATORS

In general, trusted, local leaders are the most effective to drive messages of participation.

- Uplift leaders who are multiracial, women, young people, and those who work across movements.
- Uplift unusual messengers (ie. business owners, faith leaders, etc).
- Find validators/spokespeople representative of the communities you are trying to reach.

- Provide them with factual information and resources on a regular basis to ensure they are prepared to deliver timely and effective messages.

UNBRANDED CONTENT:

We are continuously developing unbranded content with a message of participation and also to demystify different aspects of the election process. In this [google spreadsheet](#) you will find:

- Unbranded content in English/Spanish to download and use on Twitter, FB and IG.
- All the text has been reviewed so that it is consistent with our messaging.
- Text is under the character limits for Twitter.
- All you have to do is copy and paste.

Examples:

Video: <https://vimeo.com/468226449/761a2b2f8a>

Title: Who runs the election?

Format: 30 second video

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🗳️ Be a voter. Send in your ballot, vote early, or vote in person.



GUÍA DE MENSAJES DE DESINFORMACIÓN PARA COMUNIDADES LATINX ACTUALIZADO OCTUBRE 2020

Los malos actores continúan difundiendo desinformación en línea y en otros medios buscando sembrar desconfianza en nuestro proceso electoral y amplificar las tensiones en la comunidad latinx. Es importante que los progresistas comuniquen un mensaje de unidad y un sentido de confianza en nuestro proceso democrático a medida que se aseguran de que las comunidades tengan las herramientas y la información que necesitan para hacer oír su voz.

Con ese fin, proponemos centrarnos en un mensaje de acción y unidad para luchar contra el mensaje de caos, miedo y división. Esta estrategia busca generar confianza (e incluso paciencia) en caso de que no tengamos los resultados finales en el día de la elección.

NOTA: Si encuentra desinformación dirigida a una persona u organización o si observa niveles inusuales de impacto o alcance, comuníquese con nuestro equipo para que investiguemos y / o ayudemos a desarrollar un mensaje personalizado para combatir la desinformación.

En este memorando actualizado encontrará:

- **Orientación general** sobre cómo responder a la desinformación incluyendo teorías de conspiración (**NUEVO**);
- **ACTUALIZADO: Puntos de conversación** que abordan temas clave relacionados con las elecciones y temas de desinformación dirigidos a las comunidades latina; (en español también)
- **Consejos sobre portavoces** / validadores
- **NUEVO: Contenido para usar en las redes sociales** que busca amplificar un mensaje positivo de movilización en la comunidad Latinx.

ORIENTACIÓN GENERAL PARA RESPONDER A LA DESINFORMACIÓN

1. No responda directamente a la desinformación. No guste, comente o comparta, incluso para desacreditar porque eso le dice a los algoritmos que el mensaje es importante. Si necesita responder a la desinformación, hágalo indirectamente (por ejemplo "Los políticos están difundiendo mentiras sobre X para obtener beneficios políticos, pero ...")
2. Como regla general, interactúe solo con el contenido que desea difundir.
3. Prepare a las personas para que sean escépticas. Señale (utilizando ejemplos no políticos) lo fácil que puede ser para cualquier persona creer o difundir información falsa sin querer.
4. Reconozca las preocupaciones compartidas, luego gire hacia su mensaje proactivo y positivo.
5. Redirigir a información verosímil y precisa.

Guía para enfrentar las teorías de la conspiración

- Los malos actores y la extrema derecha están invirtiendo en conspiraciones (es decir, Q'Anon, cuentos sobre Hunter Biden) en los espacios latinx de extrema derecha en las redes sociales. Sin embargo, este tipo de conspiraciones pueden obligar a los progresistas a cambiar el diálogo político. Por eso, es importante que los progresistas no muerdan el anzuelo y no se comprometan peleando la veracidad de las afirmaciones.
- Mas bien si se vuelve necesario enfrentar una afirmación específica, hágalo socavando la credibilidad de los mensajeros de extrema derecha y dando a conocer su estrategia, NO comprometiéndose con la esencia de las afirmaciones falsas. Por ejemplo, ponga en enfoque que las conspiraciones no están arraigadas en hechos reales, están vinculadas a actos de violencia y difunden afirmaciones peligrosas y llenas de odio. O que las fuentes que difunden afirmaciones falsas tienen un historial de difundir mentiras, tienen vínculos con grupos de extrema derecha y buscan agitar las campañas políticas.
- Estas conspiraciones e historias no requieren una respuesta directa que repita o amplifica cualquier ataque o desinformación. Los progresistas deben centrarse en sus propios mensajes y prioridades. En lugar de verificar las afirmaciones, es más importante impulsar respuestas positivas y mantener el enfoque en temas centrales como COVID-19, atención médica y la economía.

PUNTOS DE CONVERSACIÓN SOBRE UNIDAD Y PRO-DEMOCRACIA:

- El camino hacia la Casa Blanca atraviesa por las comunidades latinas en estados clave como Arizona, Florida, Nevada y Pensilvania. Los votantes latinos de todos los orígenes han comenzado a batir récords de participación electoral y tienen el poder de influir en esta elección y en la dirección de nuestro país.
- Las elecciones son nuestra obligación más sagrada y nuestro mayor proyecto nacional. Y aunque esta elección se llevará a cabo de manera diferente por la pandemia, debemos hacer todo lo posible para proteger nuestras instituciones democráticas.
- El aumento de la participación electoral históricamente ha avanzado los derechos civiles y humanos, ha ayudado a cambiar la política a favor de los trabajadores y ha desafiado las opresivas estructuras de poder.
- La democracia es un sistema de gobierno para y por el pueblo. Es cuando los Estadounidenses de todos los orígenes y creencias ejercen su derecho al voto y cumplen con sus responsabilidad de fortalecer el país a través de la participación.
- Al unirnos como votantes, lograremos una democracia en la que todos cuentan, sin excepciones.
- Una elección exitosa es aquella en la que todos los elegibles para votar pueden hacerlo, cuando se cuentan todos los votos, y cuando los votantes deciden quien es el ganador.

PUNTOS DE CONVERSACIÓN EN CASO DE QUE HAYA RETRASO EN LOS RESULTADOS DE LAS ELECCIONES:

- Por causa de la pandemia, muchos estados están permitiendo que más votantes utilicen boletas en ausencia que en elecciones pasadas. A los funcionarios electorales les toma más tiempo

verificar y contar los votos ausentes que los votos emitidos por las máquinas de votación electrónica porque necesitan más tiempo para verificar que esos votos se hayan verificado y contado antes de anunciar un resultado. Es más, en algunos estados, por ley, los funcionarios electorales ni siquiera pueden comenzar a procesar estas boletas hasta que las urnas hayan cerrado el día de las elecciones.

- El coronavirus también va a hacer que el proceso de contar todos los votos y declarar un ganador tome más tiempo de lo normal. Al igual que muchos lugares de trabajo, los funcionarios electorales están teniendo cuidado de mantenerse socialmente distanciados y, a veces, trabajan con personal reducido o menos recursos.
- El destino de la democracia a largo plazo depende del cumplimiento de las reglas del juego, incluso si esto lleva tiempo. Debemos proteger un camino de regreso a la unidad nacional, tanto reconociendo la legitimidad del eventual ganador como condenando cualquier intento inadecuado de socavar el resultado.
- Casi todo es diferente en 2020, y las elecciones de noviembre no serán una excepción.
- Tenemos que contar cada boleta que se emite, desde miembros de las fuerzas armadas que envían su voto desde el extranjero, hasta personas con condiciones preexistentes que votan ausentes debido a COVID-19, hasta el de las personas que votan en persona el día de las elecciones.
- Nadie en los medios de comunicación ni en ningún partido debería apresurarse a hacer ningún anuncio sobre quién ganó las elecciones hasta que se hayan contado todos los votos, incluso si eso lleva una semana o más en completarse. Cada votante elegible debe hacer que se escuche su voz y se cuente su voto. Cuando los funcionarios electorales se toman el tiempo para contar y verificar cada boleta, es una señal de que nuestra democracia está funcionando.
- Sea escéptico ante las acusaciones de fraude o interferencia, independientemente de quién las haga. Es fácil hacer acusaciones, pero es muy difícil hacer algo sin que se descubra.

PUNTOS DE CONVERSACIÓN SOBRE TEMAS CLAVE DE DESINFORMACIÓN:

Voto por correo / Voto en ausencia

- Más que nunca necesitamos que todos los votantes elegibles se registren y voten en esta elección. Vote temprano, no importa cómo lo haga: en persona o por correo.
- Votar por correo / votar en ausencia es una forma segura y probada de votar. Muchos estados de los EE. UU. lo han estado haciendo con éxito durante muchos años.
- No tiene que elegir entre su salud y su voto. Los votantes elegibles pueden votar de forma segura desde su hogar si así lo desean.
- Si bien votar es fácil para la mayoría de las personas, para algunos es realmente difícil. En un momento en que la gente está luchando y tiene mucho de qué preocuparse, necesitamos opciones seguras para la votación en persona, anticipada y por correo. Proteger nuestro voto significa proteger nuestro derecho a defender una sociedad más justa y segura.
- Nadie debería tener que preocuparse por la seguridad de la votación. Algunos líderes nacionales quieren que nos resulte más difícil hacer oír nuestras voces, pero no permitiremos que eso

suceda. Los votantes pueden obtener la información que necesitan para emitir un voto seguro en vote411.org.

Movilización / Participación de votantes

- La pandemia de coronavirus está haciendo que esta elección sea diferente. Puede ser más difícil votar que en el pasado debido a retrasos en el correo o menos lugares de votación disponibles. Pero hay muchas formas de votar de forma segura. No es demasiado tarde para hacer un plan de cómo va a votar este año para asegurarse de que su voto sea contado.
- Proteger nuestro voto significa proteger nuestro derecho a defender una sociedad más justa y segura.
- Ya sea que se trate de la reforma policial y judicial, el acceso a la atención médica, el cambio climático o la reforma migratoria, las comunidades de color deben votar para mantener el impulso y hacer que nuestras voces se escuchen en las elecciones de 2020.
- Las comunidades de color votaron en números sin precedentes en 2018. Necesitamos continuar con este impulso y votar por el cambio que anhelamos.

Solidaridad racial

- Las comunidades de color, ya sean Afro-Americano / Latinas o indígenas, enfrentan muchos de los mismos desafíos: racismo institucional, brutalidad policial, falta de acceso a la atención médica, trabajos y otros recursos.
- Tenemos más en común de lo que nos separa y nuestras luchas en conjunto superan nuestras diferencias. Trabajamos duro, nos preocupamos por nuestras familias, retribuimos a nuestras comunidades y nos solidarizamos unos con otros.
- Por definición, las personas latinas provienen de diversos orígenes y son multirraciales: somos indígenas, negros, judíos, musulmanes, asiáticos, mestizos y blancos. No podemos separarnos el uno del otro.
- Hay otros que buscan dividirnos, pero podemos resistirlos. Estos esfuerzos no buscan el interés de las comunidades latinx. Para construir poder y efectuar cambios, tenemos que mostrar solidaridad, estar presentes y unidos, y no permitir que otros siembren desconfianza y tensión entre nosotros. De la misma manera, necesitamos reconocer el racismo/colorismo en nuestras comunidades.
- Forjamos una lucha en común: por la equidad, la justicia y las oportunidades.
- Nuestra fe nos llama a amarnos unos a otros, a tratar a los demás con compasión, a luchar por la igualdad sin importar nuestro género, raza o credo, y a cuidar de los más vulnerables entre nosotros.

Socialismo

- Los que buscan dividir al pueblo atacando a la prensa, mintiendo y amenazando a los opositores políticos son los que realmente están atacando nuestra democracia.
- Muchos hemos venido a los EE.UU. en busca de una vida mejor para nosotros y nuestras familias, escapando dictadores, conflictos y pobreza. Ahora es nuestro turno de mantener y apoyar nuestra democracia participando y votando.

- Luchamos por un concepto básico: la necesidad de cuidarnos unos a otros y el derecho a la dignidad.
- La pandemia nos ha demostrado más que nunca cuán importantes son los salarios dignos, los días de enfermedad pagados y el acceso a la atención médica para nuestro bienestar colectivo. Las intervenciones políticas que permitan una mayor salud, seguridad y dignidad para nuestras comunidades deben ser elevadas, no demonizadas.

CONSEJOS SOBRE PORTAVOCES / VALIDADORES

- En general, los líderes locales de confianza son los más eficaces para impulsar mensajes de activismo.
- Eleve a líderes multirraciales, las mujeres, los jóvenes y los que trabajan en distintos movimientos.
- Eleve a mensajeros inusuales (es decir, dueños de negocios, líderes religiosos, etc.).
- Encuentre validadores / portavoces representativos de las comunidades a las que está tratando de llegar.
- Brindarles información objetiva y recursos con regularidad para asegurarse de que estén preparados para transmitir mensajes oportunos y eficaces.

CONTENIDO DISPONIBLE PARA LOS ORGANISMOS:

Estamos continuamente creando contenido para usar en redes sociales con un mensaje de participación y también para desmitificar diferentes aspectos del proceso electoral.

En este [documento de Google](#) encontrará:

- Contenido sin marca en inglés / español para descargar y usar en Twitter, FB e IG.
- Todo el texto ha sido revisado para que sea coherente con nuestros mensajes.
- El texto está por debajo del límite de caracteres de Twitter.
- Todo lo que tienes que hacer es copiar y usar.

Ejemplos:

Video: <https://vimeo.com/468226449/761a2b2f8a>

Título: ¿Quiénes manejan las elecciones? (solo en inglés)

TW/FB/IG

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Voting During a Pandemic: Messaging Guide

Version 1: August 2020



Introduction

Voting is the language of American democracy. The ability to participate in civic life — to have a voice in choosing the elected officials whose decisions impact our lives, families, and communities — is at the core of what it means to be an American.

As such, voting is one of our most precious rights that policymakers and election officials should do everything to safeguard and uphold. However, policymakers by and large have shirked their fundamental duty to ensure that every eligible voter can cast a vote free from discrimination, intimidation, or unnecessary hurdles. Too many voting machines are inaccessible for voters with disabilities, polling places are often closed or moved at the last minute in Black and Brown and poor neighborhoods, and too many laws on the books erect unnecessary, discriminatory barriers to registering to vote and casting a ballot.

As the nation continues to grapple with COVID-19's impact on every aspect of our lives, our work as advocates for free, fair, safe, and accessible elections is more important than ever. This year, we have already seen how badly elections can go when our officials and policymakers fail to make the necessary changes that enable every eligible voter to cast a ballot and stay healthy.

People should not have to choose between their health and their vote. It is policymakers' job to ensure that our systems are secure and work for all voters, especially when there is a crisis like our current pandemic. They must make changes to election laws and policies *right now* so that all eligible voters can vote and are not further disenfranchised in November.

This toolkit provides resources to help you to discuss policy changes that must be made quickly to ensure that all eligible voters can vote in November safely and securely. It is compiled from polling and messaging resources provided by Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, Common Cause, Movement Advancement Project, National Vote at Home Institute, Rethink Media, Voting Rights Action, and Voting Rights Lab.

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Protecting Public Health and In-Person Voting

Election officials must adopt measures that allow for all eligible voters to have their voices heard, while prioritizing the public health of our communities. That includes maintaining accessible polling places so people who need or want to vote in person are able to do so.

Lengthening early in-person voting periods and offering absentee/vote-by-mail options will help decrease the density of people at polling locations so voters are better able to cast their ballots in accordance with public health guidelines. Research shows that many voters are more confident that their votes will be counted when they vote in person, and that's particularly important in states that do not have a history of extensive mail or absentee voting.

The Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission provided guidance about creating safe, healthy polling locations that can help prevent COVID-19 transmission.

- [Considerations for Election Polling Locations and Voters \(CDC\)](#)¹
- [COVID-19 Resources \(U.S. Election Assistance Commission\)](#)²

These guidelines show that we don't have to choose between protecting public health and safeguarding a vibrant, robust democracy that maintains in-person voting. We can and must do both.

Among the recommendations that must be undertaken now:

Polling places should be sanitized before and during voting, with protective measures and protocols for voters and poll workers.

- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol should be provided at each step in the voting process where voters interact with poll workers, after using voting machines, and after the voting process is completed.
- Polling-place surfaces that are frequently touched by multiple people (e.g. door handles, registration tables, pens, and clipboards) should be disinfected frequently.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention "[Considerations for Election Polling Locations and Voters](#)"
2. U.S. Election Assistance Commission "[COVID-19 Resources](#)"

Protecting Public Health and In-Person Voting

- Voting equipment (including voting machines, laptops, and tablets) touched by voters should be disinfected between each use.
- Poll workers and poll observers must be required to wear face masks. Masks should be provided along with guidance on proper usage.
- Poll workers should wash their hands frequently with soap and water.

Election officials should direct additional resources, workers, and supplies to polling sites to minimize crowding and delays at the polls.

- Polling places should be reconfigured to allow for recommended social distancing, including setting up voting equipment further apart, using tape to mark a six-foot span between a voter and poll worker, and between voters waiting in line. Election officials should have plans to manage lines to ensure social distancing can be maintained.
- Voters should be strongly encouraged (via voter communications and signage at voting locations) to wear masks and be provided with masks as necessary. Voters should not be required to wear their masks while checking in to vote unless clearly necessitated by statute.
- Polls should be open for extended hours and over a long period of time to decrease lines and crowding. Early voting should be extended and should include weekends (where allowed by law, including available emergency powers).
- Curbside voting, while inappropriate in some instances, can be used to provide in-person voting opportunities to high-risk individuals and others.
- Plans to recruit more poll workers than usual — especially from lower-risk populations, such as students — should be developed.

Adjustments to polling place locations should be done thoughtfully and communicated clearly to voters.

- Polling places should be relocated away from buildings that serve high-risk populations, like senior centers.
- Providing too few polling places may cause unhelpful crowding. Polling place changes and consolidation must not reduce access for any particular populations such as people with disabilities or language access needs, people of color, students, seniors, and others.

Protecting Public Health and In-Person Voting

- Any plan to change polling locations must include effective communication of the change to impacted voters.
- Any consolidation should prioritize maintaining equitable distribution of polling places and anticipated demand, using current data on voter registration and previous vote-by-mail rates rather than the expected distribution of high propensity voters, who are likely to vote absentee.
- Any consolidation must allow for more machines per location to maximize points of service within social distancing guidelines, such that larger buildings and multi-building campuses should be identified for optimizing polling place design and line flow.



How Americans Think and Feel About Absentee/Vote-by-Mail

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every facet of our lives, which creates anxiety and confusion for millions of people who are grappling with a lot of change and uncertainty. As advocates, understanding what all of this means — where our audiences are — is essential to developing effective messaging that shifts and shapes narratives.

Below are findings from research by Voting Rights Lab and/or Voting Rights Action, conducted between March-July 2020 to keep in mind when developing messages:

- **Voters want to ensure that voting is healthy and safe during the pandemic.** In an April 2020 Voting Rights Lab/Voting Rights Action survey, 60% of respondents agreed that “I’m more concerned that we won’t do enough to adapt the way we conduct elections in response to the coronavirus outbreak.”
- **Voters are used to voting in person, and most will continue to do so even if COVID-19 is still a problem.** A majority (52%) of respondents in a July 2020 Voting Rights Action poll said they still intend to vote in person in November, though just 10% said they will do so without making any changes; others said they will carry protective gear (18%), vote during an early voting period (13%), or vote during a less busy time on Election Day (11%).
- **When it comes to in-person voting, 45% of voters said they would not feel safe voting in person even while using personal protective equipment like a mask.** When asked what concerned them most about voting in person at a polling place, 36% of respondents to an April 2020 Voting Rights Lab/Voting Rights Action survey said the risk of infection from other people; 29% said the risk of infection from touching objects like voting machines and pens; and 21% said the possibility of contributing to unsafe conditions for others like poll workers and older voters.
- **Amid the pandemic, voting by mail as an option that supplements in-person voting is universally popular.** In a July 2020 Voting Rights Action poll, an overwhelming majority (84%) of voters nationwide — including 89% of Black voters and 88% of Latino/a voters — said that “voting using an absentee ballot sent to your home, by mailing the ballot back” is safe. And 87% (including 93% of Black voters and 88% of Latino/a voters) saw dropping their mail ballot off at a secure drop box as safe.

How Americans Think and Feel About Absentee/Vote-by-Mail

- **Most voters report that a ballot mailed to their home would make them more likely to vote.** When asked “If your ballot was mailed to you in advance of the election, do you think it would make you more or less likely to vote in that election?” 56% of voters in an April 2020 Voting Rights Lab/Voting Rights Action survey said it would make them more likely to vote, and only 3% said it would make them less likely to vote.
- **However, many voters — including many Black voters — are unfamiliar with absentee/vote-by-mail, and with that unfamiliarity comes concerns.** Black voters in an April/May 2020 Voting Rights Lab/Voting Rights Action survey reported having concerns about their ballot not arriving to their home, getting lost when they return it, and/or not being counted by election officials (though trust in the post office remains high). In-person voting, despite the possibility of long lines, does not raise these concerns for Black voters, in part because they are able to see their cast ballot processed.
- **Features like ballot tracking (allowing voters to monitor the processing of their ballots) and signature verification (to ensure that ballots are not filled out by individuals other than the voter) appear helpful in soothing concerns about vote-by-mail,** according to an April/May 2020 Voting Rights Lab/Voting Rights Action survey. Additional research to understand how to encourage utilization of both in-person and vote-by-mail options is forthcoming.



Key Approaches for Talking About Absentee/Vote-by-Mail

- 1. Start with shared perspectives and values.** In response to the pandemic, we need to proactively take steps to protect the health and safety of voters, because nobody should have to choose between their health and their constitutional right to vote. There is broad agreement that the time to prepare is now, which should be a central part of the message: the need to act quickly so states can plan and execute this properly.
- 2. Address unfamiliarity and misconceptions by explaining the policy in simple, relatable terms.** Explain the policy proposal in simple, understandable terms without getting into the weeds. Many voters are unfamiliar with absentee/vote-by-mail and absentee/vote-by-mail laws in their states, and few have personal experience voting by mail. Unsurprisingly, there are numerous misconceptions about what a vote-by-mail election consists of, and that unfamiliarity heavily impacts voters' ability to understand how and why mail voting is both secure and helps ensure every voter is able to make their voice heard. Be sure to be clear about the proposal in question so voters aren't being asked to support an idea they don't understand.
- 3. Talk about vote-by-mail as an option that supplements in-person voting.** Be careful to always stress that in-person voting options are still available and that vote-by-mail/absentee voting proposals do not change that. Numerous recent public polls have asked voters about an "all-mail election" or "universal absentee/vote-by-mail." Such wording is not only an inaccurate representation of how mail voting options work, but it also generates lower support from voters. Advocates for mail voting should be clear that voters who receive a ballot in the mail have the option of returning it in the mail, delivering it to a secure ballot dropbox, or choosing to vote with it in-person at a polling place.
- 4. Emphasize that mail voting options are critical to ensuring a safe and secure election this year.** Help voters understand that absentee/vote-by-mail is a commonsense, tried-and-tested adjustment to voting laws to account for the public health crisis. And while some voters are open to a permanent change — a proportion which would hopefully increase after more states become familiar with the process — currently a majority of voters prefer this change be made only temporarily for now.

Key Approaches for Talking About Absentee/ Vote-by-Mail

5. **Make the case for mail voting as a safe, secure solution to the pandemic’s effect on our elections.** We are proposing solutions that protect both the health and safety of Americans and the integrity of our elections. Most voters recognize that in-person voting could pose a risk to their health and safety and that of their community. They intuitively understand how and why mail voting could be a potential solution. But their hesitation often hinges on concerns that this policy could result in ballots not being counted and/or the integrity of the elections being undermined. It does no good to ignore that concern, or to directly refute it. Rather, we should name the security measures that vote-by-mail policies contain to assuage those concerns. It is to our benefit to own both “health” and “security” as pro-voter values that voting by mail can accomplish.
6. **Recognize the fact that we need to build confidence and trust in mail voting within traditionally disenfranchised communities — and among Black voters in particular.** Vote-by-mail systems should address and make accommodations for communities that have experienced particular challenges with voting rights (e.g. African Americans) or mail reliability (e.g. Native Americans), and we should proactively address these concerns as well. Making sure voters of color understand how safeguards like ballot tracking help ensure that their votes will be counted is vitally important to building support for vote-by-mail. We must emphasize that vote-by-mail isn’t replacing in-person polling places. Every state must provide both the option to vote by mail and enough in-person polling places that are equipped and designed to protect voters and poll workers from COVID-19. We must make clear that those who can’t rely on the mail — as well as those who encounter problems with mail voting — must have a safe way to participate in our elections.
7. **Encourage vote-by-mail as the most reliable way to keep vulnerable populations safe in the 2020 voting environment.** While there are justifiable hesitations among Black voters and other traditionally disenfranchised communities, we should not overly prioritize in-person voting among populations who have been documented to be at greater health risk. Instead, clear and specific information about vote-by-mail options should be proactively offered early and often in advocacy voter education along with early voting and in-person options so that voters can make their safe voting plans.
8. **Avoid references to “expanding” absentee/vote-by mail voting or the electorate.** Voters in the center and on the right can interpret this language as suggesting that a vote-by-mail or absentee option is intended to create a particular voting outcome. Instead, focus on the need to protect the health and safety of voters and the need for states to prepare so that eligible, registered voters will be able to cast their ballots and make their voices heard in November.

Proactive Message Framework

A good rule of thumb is to have three or four core messages that you repeat over and over again. If you say too many things, you are saying nothing. If you always say something new, people are never going to know what you care most about. The following messages are meant to help you frame your content in moral terms that will persuade audiences of our position. You can adapt and augment these messages with more specific policy ideas and examples while staying true to the moral frame embedded in each message.

→ **No one should have to choose between voting and protecting their health.**

We should not have to choose between public health and a functioning democracy. The choices that elected officials, regardless of party, make now will determine not just how we weather the outbreak of this virus, but also the strength of our democracy when it is over.

→ **States need to act now to give voters a clear range of options in November so that all eligible voters can vote and are not disenfranchised.**

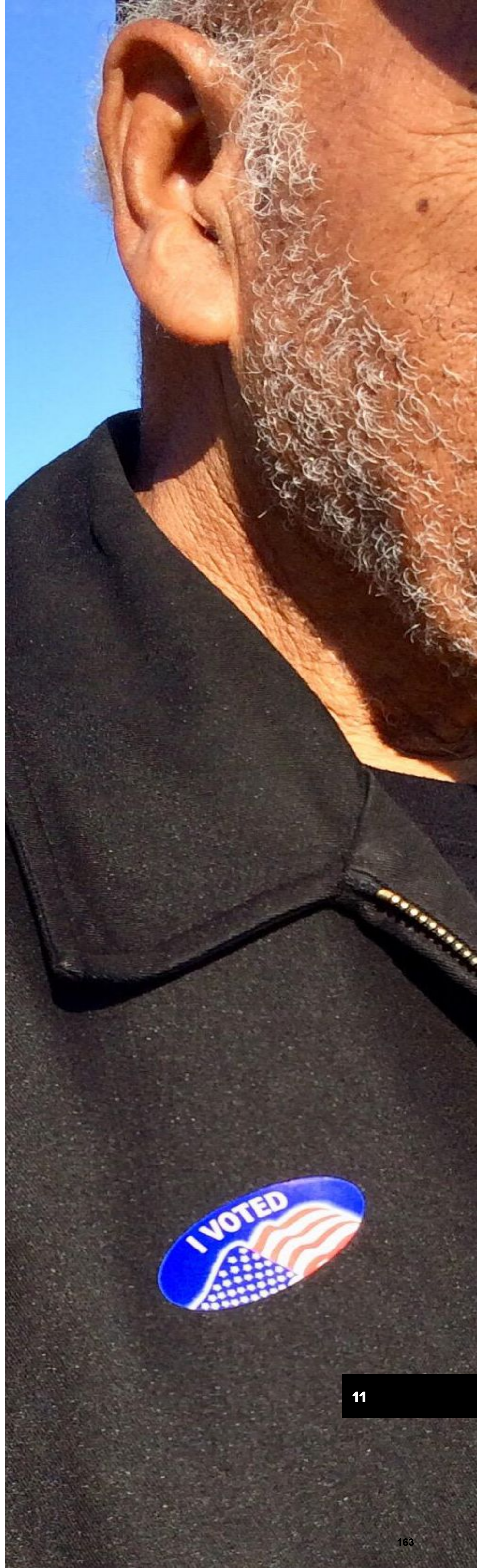
When states take a comprehensive approach and deploy creative solutions that protect voters' health and safety and maintain access for all, voters can be assured they can cast a ballot safely and without unnecessary barriers. That's going to be vital for people without internet and mail access, those who need assistance voting in their primary language, Black voters, many Native Americans, and people with disabilities who rely on voting machines to vote.

→ **Given the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the primaries, policymakers must make changes to election laws and policies right now**

so that all eligible voters can vote and are not further disenfranchised in November. It is policymakers' job to ensure that our systems are secure and work for all voters, especially when there is a crisis like the current pandemic. In too many states during the primary season, many voters — particularly voters of color — were unable to safely exercise their fundamental right to vote due to long lines, polling place closures, poll worker shortages and insufficient training, broken machines, and voting administrators' inability to process surges in absentee ballot requests. This is a wake-up call for our democracy. Those tragedies can't happen again.

Proactive Message Framework

- **Our democracy works best when every eligible voter is able to exercise their right to vote.** Voters need to be able to vote for the people they want to represent them and trust that those people will do what they were elected to do. It's our policymakers' job to ensure that our systems are secure and work for all eligible voters, especially when there is a crisis like our current pandemic. We will remain vigilant to ensure that the real public health crisis we're facing doesn't exacerbate problems in our voting system.



Demystify Absentee/Vote-by-Mail

Some voters are familiar with absentee/vote-by mail, and many others are not. It is important to explain absentee/vote-by mail simply and clearly. Here are a few facts that you can use in your messages to help voters understand how absentee/vote-by-mail works:

- **Voters who request (or are sent) their ballot in the mail still have options for voting.** Voters can put their ballots in secure drop off locations placed throughout the community, take them to early vote centers, take them to polling places on Election Day, or they can go vote in person at their polling place.
- **Absentee/vote-by-mail is a safe and secure method of voting.** It is one of the safest and most secure forms of voting available, and it includes a paper trail and strong security measures that ensure the authenticity of ballots and track them from the day they are printed to the day they are counted. Members of the military typically vote using absentee ballots. In fact, members of the military have been able to vote absentee since the Civil War.
- **Absentee/vote-by-mail is an option in most states already.** Five states conduct elections entirely by mail (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington). Twenty-nine (29) states and D.C. offer “no-excuse” absentee voting, which means any voter can request a mail ballot without providing an excuse.
- **Absentee/vote-by-mail is also completely nonpartisan, and leaders across the political spectrum support it:** Absentee/vote-by-mail enjoys widespread support from leaders on both sides of the aisle. These leaders include Michigan’s Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, former Republican Secretary of Homeland Defense Tom Ridge, former Republican Senator and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, and many others.

Absentee/Vote-by-Mail Best Practices

Elections are a very secure process, including elections where voters get their ballot in the mail. No election system is perfect, but there are many checks and balances that ensure ballots aren't compromised. Here are the best practices that states should employ when building their vote-by-mail systems:

- **Accurate voter information is a key piece of vote-by-mail**, so it's important that election officials have the latest information on voters. Most states share information on voter movement across state lines, and others directly contact voters based on mail forwarding designations, death records, motor vehicle registrations, and more to make sure voter information is accurate.
- **Your ballot is as unique as you are.** Every voter gets a ballot with barcodes corresponding to the voter, the voter's address, the ballot itself, the election, precinct style, and other variables by state. Plus, ballots are printed on a special weight of paper, so it's probably easier to forge money than a ballot.
- **Once ballots are dropped off, they are then verified in-house and go through a process for acceptance including signature verification.** During their process, much like you'd go through when you are checking in at your polling location, election officials are making sure that your vote is recorded correctly.
- **The equipment is configured to scan only valid barcodes, and any barcodes that are not valid would be flagged for further investigation.** This is an added layer of security that ensures that only eligible voters vote, and protects you and your ballot.
- **At the next step, the ballot is extracted from the envelope.** The extraction equipment also has a thickness detector: This is when your ballot is removed from the envelope and moves on in the process. No one is able to see who you voted for, this way the privacy of your vote is protected.
- **Audits of envelopes to ballot numbers are conducted at each step.** These audits ensure that every eligible vote, including yours, is counted.

Absentee/Vote-by-Mail Best Practices

- ➔ **Then the ballots are sent to the counting room.** At this stage, scanning equipment count each batch of ballots. Each ballot has coding that indicates the ballot style. If the scanner cannot read it (if it is damaged or if it is not real) it will flag it for further investigation.
- ➔ **Signature verification is a best practice security measure when combined with input directly from the voter.** Voters sign their ballot the same way they sign other legal documents, and that signature is verified against other official signatures on record. When done according to best practice, signature verification is an important security measure that leads to greater election confidence. When done without proper accountability, ballots are compromised. To prevent this, ballots go through both electronic and manual review from bipartisan teams who don't know the demographics of the voter. Also voters should be given the opportunity to "cure" their ballots, meaning that they are able to directly verify the authenticity of their ballot.



Addressing Dis- and Misinformation

How to respond to dis- and misinformation on social media around voting rights:

- **Resist the urge to quote-tweet or share the post when responding.** When the tweet or post contains dis- and misinformation and lies about vote-by-mail and other voting options, we do not want to spread the message in any way, shape, or form. In fact, in some cases, we are urging social media platforms to remove these posts because they contain misinformation about voting.
- **DO NOT use the opposition's 'fraud' language in our response.** It may sound odd, but when responding to misleading social media posts about voter fraud, don't say "voter fraud." It's important to stay on our turf. Instead, use some of our proactive messaging around security and accessibility. It also doesn't help to refute the claim that voter fraud doesn't exist, even though it's true.
- **Identify trusted messengers.** Remember when you are trying to clear up dis- and misinformation on social media, you or your organization may not be the most trusted messenger. Sometimes it's a Republican elected official who supports voting by mail. Other times it's a nonpartisan election official. Other times it is a leader of color. Think through who is the best messenger for your audience in responding to the post before you post it.

For more information on addressing dis- and misinformation, check out [Rethink Media's message guide](#).³

³. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights "[Rethink Media's message guide](#)."

Responding to the Voter Fraud Narrative

The temptation when faced with the voter fraud narrative is to engage directly. We have to resist this urge and reframe the conversation back to one about the security and integrity of absentee/vote-by-mail systems and the need to ensure that every voter can cast a ballot in November.

These messages are based on testing conducted by Voting Rights Action:

- **No voter should have to choose between exercising their constitutional right to vote and protecting their health** — and America shouldn't have to choose between protecting our democracy and our public health. This proposal will ensure that we can protect our health and our right to vote.
- **Allowing all eligible voters to either vote in person on Election Day, vote in person during early voting, or vote by mail gives them the choice to vote in the way that works best for them, their schedule, and their health and safety.**
- **When eligible voters have the option of voting in person or by mail, it makes voting more accessible to the people who are most vulnerable to coronavirus** — like seniors and people with chronic medical conditions — as well as our front-line medical workers who might be too busy to vote otherwise.
- **Giving all registered voters the option to vote by mail means that people who are sick in November won't have to choose between their vote and the health and safety of their community.** Nobody should lose their right to vote just because they are sick. We have the resources to flatten the curve, keep communities safe, and ensure every eligible voter can cast a ballot in November.
- **Thirty-four states, including conservative states like Montana, Georgia, and Utah, already allow any registered voter to vote by mail** because it includes security features like signature verification, a paper trail to prevent foreign hacking, and ballot tracking that allows voters to know the status of their ballot at any time.

Responding to the Voter Fraud Narrative

→ **We do not have to choose between public health and a functioning democracy.**

And, according to many recent polls, Americans agree. We should be talking about providing states with the resources they need to get ready for safe, secure, and accessible elections in November. That's what's important right now.

- Sixty-two percent (62%) of adults approve of vote-by-mail, according to a May Economist/YouGov poll.
- Seventy-four percent (74%) of Americans support expanding access to vote-by-mail, according to an April TargetSmart poll.
- Seventy percent (70%) of Americans favor allowing any citizen to vote-by-mail if they want to, according to an April Pew Research Center poll.
- Nearly three-in-four Americans (71%) support giving all eligible voters the option to vote-by-mail in November, including more than half of Republicans, according to an April Navigator Daily poll from April 24.

As we've mentioned earlier in the toolkit, all voters are deeply concerned about the security of our elections. Any messaging that doesn't address that worry will fail. The trick is to address the concern without getting into a back-and-forth about whether or not fraud is real. It is best to assert that absentee/vote-by-mail systems are secure. Here are a few points based on testing conducted by CSME and Voting Rights Lab to incorporate into your messages:

- Under a vote-by-mail system, if a voter does not want to send their vote through the mail, they can drop it off in person at a secure drop off location.
- Government studies, nonpartisan election experts, and both Democratic and Republican leaders in states that have done vote-by-mail agree that the process results in safe and accurate elections. In 20 years of widespread absentee/vote-by-mail use with hundreds of millions of mail ballots cast, there have been almost no confirmed cases of fraud.
- Under a vote-by-mail system, electronic ballot tracking allows voters to know the status of their ballot at any time, from when it is mailed out to when it is verified and counted.
- Under a vote-by-mail system, every ballot is inspected for fraud or tampering, and the signature of the voter is checked against a record on file.
- This vote-by-mail system ensures that there is a paper ballot, which allows for post-election auditing and reduces the threat of election hacking by foreign governments or anyone else.

Discussing Attacks on the U.S. Postal Service

The Trump administration's attacks on the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) are designed to undermine voters' confidence in the validity of this year's election. As such, it's important that our messaging about these attacks reinforce the safety and security of absentee/vote-by-mail and the important role that the post office plays in our elections and our democracy. Our job is to reinforce support for, and belief in the integrity of, the post office.

→ **The U.S. Postal Service is essential to the functioning of our democracy.** The USPS has long been the most popular federal agency in the nation, with 91 percent of people in our country holding a favorable opinion about the agency. Delivering mail-in ballots is just one of the essential functions the post office plays.

Undermining and disrupting USPS's work will affect:

- People in rural communities, seniors, and people with disabilities, who depend on the USPS to deliver essential medications and daily necessities in a timely and affordable way;
- Working people who depend on the USPS for their paychecks;
- Veterans who depend on the USPS for medicines and VA benefits;
- Small businesses that depend on the USPS to ship their products to customers; and
- Without the USPS' public service commitment to provide the "last mile" of delivery, rural and tribal communities may be excluded from mail services entirely by private companies that may not find it profitable to continue rural postal routes.

→ **Postmaster General DeJoy's announcement today is a step in the right direction, but offers no commitment to undo the harmful effects of his previous actions.** Raising the costs on mailing ballots and intentionally slowing down mail service are cynical, dangerous and harmful moves that are particularly pernicious when you consider that the federal government has done very little to help states cover the costs of administering an election during a pandemic. This administration's attacks on the post office, one of our most critical and storied public institutions, is just one more example of its wholesale attacks on our democratic norms.

- At the upcoming congressional hearings, General DeJoy must answer all questions about how he is going to restore decommissioned sorting machines and mailboxes so Americans get the truth about his actions to undermine the USPS.

Discussing Attacks on the U.S. Postal Service

- **Voters should not be forced to choose between their health and their fundamental right to vote.** Voting by mail with an absentee ballot is a safe and secure method of voting in most states already. Several states as well as the military have utilized vote-by-mail on a large scale for years, and vote-by-mail is available and utilized in every state in the country. Not every voter will choose to vote by mail, but every voter should have the option to do so. Moreover, adoption of voting by mail can help make in-person voting less crowded and safer for those who need or prefer it.
- **Voters should make a plan *now* to vote early, either in person or by mail.** They should request a mail ballot now, fill it out, and send back using the methods their state allows. If they vote in person, they should wear a mask and follow social distance protocols.
- **Congress must act now to protect the U.S. Postal Service and Americans' ability to send and receive mail.**
 - Pass a new COVID-19 relief package that includes \$25 billion to strengthen the U.S. Postal Service.
 - Investigate the shifts in postal operations by new Postmaster General DeJoy, including changes to overtime policy and the decommissioning of 10 percent of its bulk sorting machines, about 671 machines nationwide that have caused delays, service interruptions, and slowdowns throughout USPS.
 - Pass new legislation to:
 - End the overtime cap for USPS employees;
 - Reinstate “late and extra trips” that allow carriers to catch-up on backlogged deliveries; and
 - End the sudden, suspicious, and disruptive operational changes like removing mailboxes and sorting machines put in place by DeJoy, a logistics expert who must have known the problems these changes would cause.

Responding to Tough Questions

It's important to keep in mind that the goal of any external communications is to get your message out. This means that you have to practice answering tough questions or navigating hostile narrative terrain in a way that keeps you on message.

The trick is to always answer the question you wish you were asked in a way that doesn't look like you are trying to dodge the actual question. Below are a few examples of how you can navigate tricky questions based on the guidance in this toolkit:

Q. Voting in person runs the risk of people being exposed to COVID-19. Shouldn't we just move entirely to an absentee/vote-by-mail system?

A. Well, I'd think of it this way: During the pandemic, a lot of people have chosen to order their groceries online. But we haven't responded by closing all the grocery stores. We've kept them all open so that people who go into grocery stores are less likely to encounter crowding. The same is true here. We support giving voters options for securely and safely voting in November. No voter should have to choose between exercising their constitutional right to vote and protecting their health.

Voters have different circumstances that should be taken into account. Some voters — for example, the 26% of Native Americans in Arizona without a U.S. Postal Service — do not have access to a reliable vote by mail option. Some people with disabilities or voters with language access needs rely on in-person voting to cast their ballot. Allowing all eligible voters to either vote in person on Election Day, vote in person during early voting, or vote by mail lets them choose what works best for them, their schedule, and their health and safety.

Q. What do you say to voters who are worried about the security of mail-in ballots or afraid that their mail-in ballot might get lost in the mail?

A. We all care about the integrity and security of our election system and absentee/vote-by-mail is one of the safest and most secure forms of voting available. It includes strong security measures that ensure the authenticity of ballots and track them from the day they are printed to the day they are counted. **[Include an example of one of the security measures if necessary.]**

Responding to Tough Questions

And voters have options for voting with mail ballots. They can choose to take the ballots to secure drop boxes, to early vote centers, to their polling place on Election Day, or they can go vote in person at their polling place.

Q. Aren't we running out of time to stand up an absentee/vote-by-mail system? What should states do to ensure voters will be able to vote in November?

A. States have to think about public health and the integrity of our democracy. So they must provide absentee/vote-by-mail options while maintaining ample in-person voting opportunities. And, in doing so, they must follow CDC and EAC guidance for creating safe, healthy polling locations. But there are other options states can pursue as well. For instance, they can expand early voting to reduce the likelihood of people having to stand in long lines and expose themselves to the virus. **[Swap in another/different policy as circumstances dictate.]** Ultimately, we want people to be healthy and be able to exercise their constitutional right to vote. No voter should have to choose between the two.

Q. We've seen absentee/mail-in ballots rejected in states and these rejections tend to disproportionately affect Black and Brown voters and other disadvantaged communities. How do we create a secure vote-by-mail system and ensure that every vote counts?

A. We all care about the integrity and security of our election system. And we have long been concerned with the ways that voters of color have been disenfranchised in our system. First and foremost, states with vote-by-mail must ensure every eligible voter receives a ballot early enough that they can cast their ballot by the deadline. Second, states should proactively notify any voter whose ballot has been flagged for rejection and allow them time to fix those errors to have their ballot counted during the "cure" period. No state should be allowed to throw out ballots without a process that gives voters a chance to ensure the vote they cast is counted.

Responding to Tough Questions

Q. Trump has been calling for a delay to the election because he says vote-by-mail is fraudulent. Can he delay the election?

A. Trump's attempt to undermine our elections is desperate and irresponsible. We all care about the integrity and security of our election system and vote-by-mail is one of the safest and most secure forms of voting available. It includes strong security measures that ensure the authenticity of ballots and track them from the day they are printed to the day they are counted. **[Include an example of one of the security measures if necessary.]** Under the U.S. Constitution, Trump has no legal power to affect our elections. That power is reserved for the U.S. Congress. The 2020 general election will be held on November 3, 2020. We should be talking about how Congress needs to get \$3.6 billion to states and election officials who are working diligently to ensure that all voters will be able to cast a ballot — in whatever way works best for them — in November.

Q. Much of your voting rights work is holding states and localities accountable for failing to meet the standards of the law. Do you believe officials have the capacity and desire to implement your recommendations?

A. We recognize the gravity of the circumstances and understand that this requires more than what states and localities typically do in an election year. Voters are doing everything in their power to have their voices heard and participate in our democracy. Election officials must rise to the occasion and do everything in their power to protect public health and voting rights. Too much is at stake not to. That's why we're advocating for flexibility. States must make changes now to ensure voters can make the best choice for them in how they want to cast their ballot in November.

Q. How will you ensure that federal dollars will be spent equitably?

A. The costs of administering this election will be enormous. States will have to expend additional resources recruiting and training new poll workers, printing additional absentee and provisional ballots, relocating polling places, and ensuring the safety of polling places and poll workers. It is the federal government's responsibility to ensure that states spend dollars that it allocates in ways that ensure every community has the resources it needs and that additional resources go to **[Black, Brown, Native, etc.]** communities that they have previously underresourced. **[Insert specific example of policy or remedy dollars should be spent on.]** If states spend the money smartly and fairly, every voter will be able to cast a ballot freely without intimidation or unnecessary burden. We also expect that the federal government will conduct oversight to ensure this is the case.

PEN America: “Spot it. Check it. Stop it.”



[Click here to watch PEN America's video on disinformation.](#)

WIN BLACK: THREE THINGS TO KNOW



Link to Video: ["Three Things to Know About Misinformation"](#)

From WIN BLACK:

We just completed rigorous message testing for our latest video "Three Things to Know About Misinformation" -- and it's off the charts persuasive with a particularly hard-to-move audience - Black people aged 18-24, particularly men.

Partners: Among the hundreds of content pieces we've produced, this is the asset most likely to move and motivate potential young Black voters. Now is the time to flood your feeds - post, share, uplift!

Here is social copy to go along with it:

Good people can have bad information. Check your sources, only fight with your friends, and #Vote (early if you can). www.winblack.org