

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-3641
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June 22, 2023

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet, Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Mr. Neal Mohan
Chief Executive Officer
YouTube
901 Cherry Avenue
San Bruno, CA 94066

Dear Messrs. Pichai and Mohan:

We write to express our deep disappointment in YouTube's recent decision to reverse its election misinformation policy regarding the 2020 election cycle.¹ Based on your recent announcement, our understanding is that YouTube will now allow false content disputing the integrity of the 2020 Presidential election and other past United States Presidential elections to remain on its platform. While you claim that taking such action is "core to a functioning democratic society,"² we emphatically disagree. Not only is this decision extremely irresponsible, but, in fact, it threatens to weaken our democracy, and therefore we strongly urge you to reconsider this harmful policy decision.

We are firm believers in the First Amendment and respect a social media platform's desire to foster a fulsome discussion of political ideas and thoughts. However, false content that questions the legitimacy of a Presidential election has already caused real-world harms to

¹ YouTube, *An update on our approach to US election misinformation* (June 2, 2023) (<https://blog.youtube/inside-youtube/us-election-misinformation-update-2023/>).

² *Id.*

election workers,³ law enforcement,⁴ and elected officials,⁵ among others.⁶ Therefore, any decision to allow users of the YouTube platform to offer a repeatedly disproven narrative about a Presidential election⁷—or any election—should be taken with the utmost caution and consideration. This is especially true given that the 2024 Presidential election cycle will likely feature several of the same misinformation tactics that we saw in the 2020 Presidential election.⁸ In fact, it already has.⁹

As the Committee with jurisdiction over electronic communications and the internet, we have deep concerns about YouTube's decision to reverse course and once again allow false Presidential election information on its platform. Accordingly, we request detailed responses from YouTube to the following questions by no later than **July 6, 2023**:

1. Please provide a detailed explanation of how election misinformation surrounding the 2020 Presidential election cycle is not a violation of YouTube's policy against posting previously removed content¹⁰ or general elections misinformation policies,¹¹ especially as it relates to voter suppression, given that election misinformation has led to voter suppression efforts in the United States¹² and has been found to erode confidence in the democratic process¹³ and materially discourage voting.¹⁴
2. Since YouTube will no longer remove election misinformation concerning the 2020 Presidential election cycle from its platform, please provide a detailed description of how YouTube plans to fact check, label, provide context around, or reduce the spread of such content on its platform considering the multiple court decisions and studies finding there was no widespread election fraud during the 2020 Presidential election cycle.

³ *"Just hateful": Public servants had lives upended by threats after Trump's claims of a stolen election*, CBS News (June 21, 2022).

⁴ *Dozens more US Capitol Police officers were injured on January 6 than previously known, report says*, CNN (Mar. 7, 2022).

⁵ *Frantic Secret Service radio traffic show how close Pence was to danger*, Washington Post (July 22, 2022).

⁶ *These Are the People Who Died in Connection with the Capitol Riot*, New York Times (Jan. 5, 2022).

⁷ *Trump-funded studies disputing election fraud are focus in two probes*, Washington Post (June 5, 2023).

⁸ Brennan Center for Justice, *See The Election Deniers' Playbook for 2024* (May 3, 2023).

⁹ *Fact check: Trump repeats false claims during rally in Waco, Texas*, CNN (Mar. 26, 2023).

¹⁰ YouTube, *Additional Policies*, (June 22, 2023) (https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2801981?hl=en&ref_topic=9282365&sjid=2103531773503639-NA)

¹¹ YouTube, *Elections misinformation policies* (<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/10835034?hl=en>) (accessed June 7, 2023).

¹² *'A Perpetual Motion Machine': How Disinformation Drives Voting Laws*, New York Times (May 13, 2021).

¹³ Erik C. Nisbet et al, *The presumed influence of election misinformation on others reduces our own satisfaction with democracy*, Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review (March 12, 2021).

¹⁴ Jon Green et al, *Online engagement with 2020 election misinformation and turnout in the 2021 Georgia Runoff election*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (July 6, 2022).

3. Please provide a detailed description of YouTube's planned election misinformation policies for the 2024 Presidential election cycle, including new policies or tools that YouTube has not yet publicly announced. Please also provide a detailed description of how YouTube plans to address content containing election misinformation for the 2024 Presidential election cycle that also contains election misinformation surrounding the 2020 Presidential election.

We appreciate your prompt attention to the matters raised in this letter and look forward to receiving your responses. Should you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Epperson of the Democratic Committee Staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Jan Schakowsky
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and
Commerce



Doris Matsui
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology



Kathy Castor
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations