



June 26, 2023

Neal Mohan
CEO
Google LLC
D/B/A YouTube
901 Cherry Avenue
San Bruno, CA 94066

Dear Mr. Mohan,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the undersigned organizations, we write to strongly urge YouTube to reverse the recent decision to allow false election claims about the outcome of the 2020 election on your platform and reinstate the policy that prohibits 2020 election denial content on the platform.

For years, our organizations have urged major tech platforms like YouTube to take responsibility for ensuring that their products and business processes protect civil and human rights and do not result in harm or bias against historically marginalized groups. As a prominent platform, content posted to YouTube plays a significant role in shaping public discourse, and YouTube, therefore, has a responsibility to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the content it hosts.

More than two years ago on January 6, 2021, in a catastrophic reminder of the fragility of our democracy, the U.S. Capitol was attacked by extremists attempting to overturn the free, fair, and secure 2020 presidential election. This violent insurrection did not happen in a vacuum. It was paired with numerous hurdles that voters faced during the 2020 election cycle amid a pandemic. It was also exacerbated by relentless efforts to spread disinformation on social media platforms to threaten civil rights, escalate hate speech, undermine election integrity, impose barriers to the ballot box, and discount the votes of communities of color.

Online disinformation on your platform continues to confuse, intimidate, and harass people, including voters; suppress the right to vote; spread hate speech; and otherwise disrupt our democracy. Disinformation narratives about voting procedures and policies, including false information about the use and security of mail-in ballots, drop boxes, and ballot collection, continued to proliferate on YouTube and other platforms through the 2022 midterm election and are still prevalent today.

The disinformation is anchored by the “Big Lie” about the outcome of the 2020 election. False information about the “Big Lie” is still spreading rapidly on social media and is the basis for the forthcoming spread of disinformation about the 2024 elections by election deniers and high-profile users. False information about voting and election processes has worked its way into some mainstream media

outlets and has had real and detrimental effects on our freedom to vote, serving as the impetus for many states to enact restrictive voting legislation.

The Leadership Conference and our coalition have repeatedly urged YouTube to take immediate steps to curb the spread of voting disinformation and hate speech in the midterms and future elections to protect the health of our democracy. In May and October of 2022, our coalition sent letters that called on major platforms, including YouTube, to take several affirmative steps well in advance of the midterm elections to combat election disinformation.¹ These include consistently enforcing existing policies, particularly against high profile users; addressing election disinformation continuously, not just in the weeks leading up to election; and taking action against disinformation across all languages, including Spanish and Asian languages.

To date, we have yet to see meaningful steps on the actions that we have requested in our previous letters. YouTube's enforcement of current voting disinformation policies continues to be erratic and inconsistent, particularly against high profile users. Eliminating the prohibition on "Big Lie" content will only exacerbate the spread of disinformation. In a March CNN poll, a disturbingly high 63 percent of Republican and Republican-leaning respondents continue to question the validity of 2020 election results despite the absence of evidence to support the doubt. Equally concerning, young people have a high degree of distrust in the results. In The Leadership Conference Education Fund's report, "[Cause for Concern](#)," we documented the rise in hate crimes during election cycles. Election denial is both a baseless reality and a tactic by the high-profile individuals and groups who want to disrupt our elections and undermine our democracy.

The decision by YouTube to stop monitoring and addressing content online that spread lies about the 2020 election is a shocking abandonment of principle. As the largest online video platform, YouTube's new policy can and will have far-reaching consequences for public trust in the electoral system and further undermine the democratic process. We strongly urge you to reverse this decision as quickly as possible.

Eliminating this policy as the 2024 election cycle is heating up, and without discussion or engagement with the civil rights community, is unacceptable. It may further endanger our democracy and serve the aims of organized hate and extremist groups — leaving people of color, religious minorities, and others, more vulnerable to violence. At a time when far too many rely on social media platforms for news and information, and as artificial intelligence (AI) increases opportunities for more sophisticated forms of mis- and disinformation, we need private companies like yours to be transparent partners and responsible stewards of that news and information on a consistent basis.

¹ <https://civilrights.org/resource/the-leadership-conference-and-120-civil-rights-democracy-groups-urge-social-media-platforms-to-take-meaningful-steps-to-address-election-disinformation/>;
<https://civilrights.org/resource/leadership-conference-and-democracy-groups-urge-social-media-platforms-to-address-voter-disinformation-ahead-of-midterms-2/>

While we are grateful to the Google and YouTube staff who have made the time to speak with us in recent days, there are a number of questions that remained unanswered that we would like to hear from you on, so we formally request a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss this very urgent and critically important matter. Please contact Dave Toomey, Voting Rights and Technology Fellow at toomey@civilrights.org to set up the meeting or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
ADL (the Anti-Defamation League)
Common Cause
The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
All Voting is Local
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Brennan Center for Justice
Center for American Progress Action Fund
Color of Change
NAACP
National Urban League
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
UnidosUS