

Misinformation about the midterm elections is already flourishing on TikTok

And TikTok is already failing to moderate it

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Update (11/4/22): *It appears that TikTok has since removed all of the videos and all but one of the search terms discussed in this piece.*

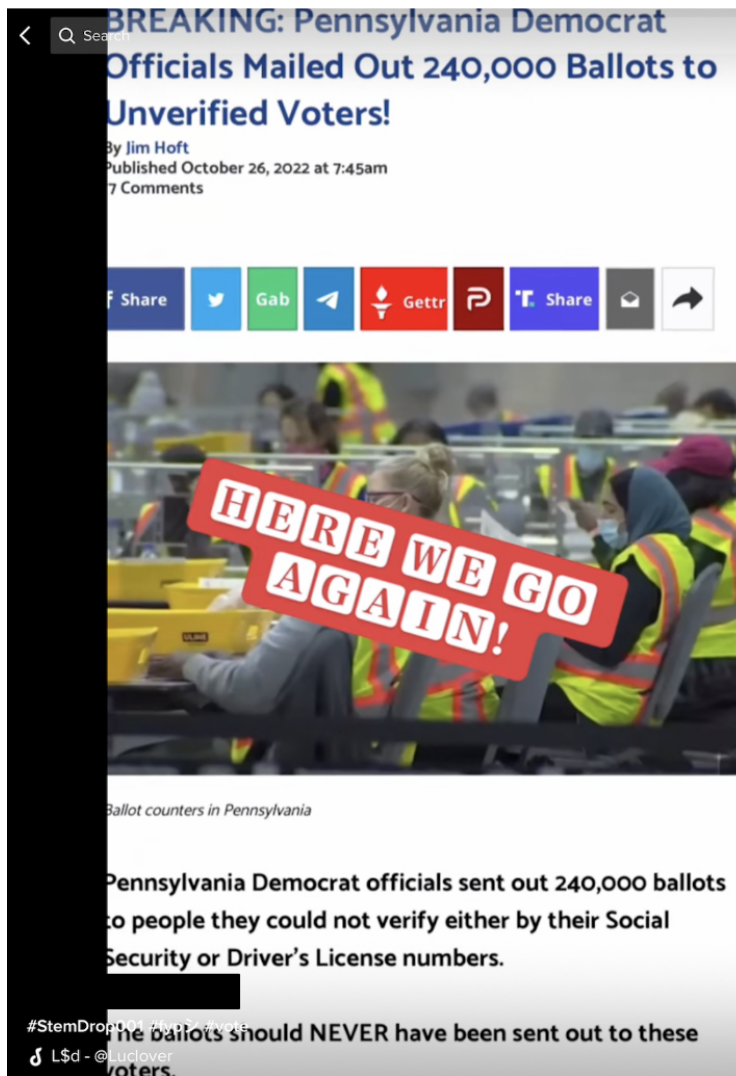
TikTok is woefully unprepared to combat election misinformation about the midterms. The platform has been allowing unfounded election conspiracy theories to circulate in the weeks leading to Election Day and Media Matters has now uncovered that TikTok hasn't even taken some of the most basic steps to prevent its spread.

For a company claiming to be committed to upholding election integrity, TikTok has yet to show any indication of actually following through with meaningful effort, and its inability to identify and tackle even the most predictable election misinformation sets a bleak precedent. TikTok is neglecting to protect its users from midterm election misinformation, with glaring moderation gaps already enabling the spread of election lies.

Terms such as "rigged midterm," "stolen midterm," and "stolen elections" are searchable and immediately return far-right misinformation about the midterms. "Democrats cheat" and "corrupt midterms" also return similar misinformation.

On search terms TikTok has blocked – like "rigged election" – dropping or varying one or more letters in the term (a common moderation evasion tactic) works and returns misinformation.

Conspiracy theories peddling unfounded claims of ballot fraud are also circulating on TikTok.



The ballot fraud conspiracy theories all rely on the lie that Democrats are tampering with ballots to somehow rig the midterms in their favor.



One user uploaded a TikTok implying that dead Democratic voters will be voting – a common conspiracy theory wrongly claiming that Democrats cast extra votes by using the identity of deceased individuals.

Misinformation about supposed ballot fraud was pervasive during the 2020 presidential election cycle, and TikTok should have been able to proactively counter similar misinformation during the midterms, yet terms like “ballot harvesters” are still searchable on the platform. In fact, ballot fraud conspiracy theories spread on TikTok in 2020, but it’s clear the platform has yet to learn from its past failures.

Election misinformation on TikTok isn’t new, but it is particularly dangerous. TikTok’s “For You” page algorithm makes the chance of virality for otherwise low-profile users much more likely than on any other platform, meaning it’s easier to spread misinformation to a large audience even without a large following.

TikTok must aggressively and proactively fight midterm election misinformation, rather than enabling the spread of such dangerous falsehoods with poor content moderation.