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PRESS RELEASE

Disinformation Deluge in PA: New Poll Highlights Facebook's Failure to Protect Voters from Falsehoods Ahead of Election Day

****** Millions of voters in Pennsylvania have seen and believed false claims. Two-thirds believe the social media giant should "correct" misinformation and fix its algorithm. ******

New York, October 26, 2020.- According to a new SurveyUSA poll released today by the global campaigning group Avaaz, 65% of registered voters in nine swing states, including Pennsylvania, reported seeing political disinformation in their Facebook feeds. The study looked at top trending election-related misinformation, examining whether registered voters nationwide, in Pennsylvania, and in eight other swing states saw and believed the claims, and where they were exposed to them. The data reflects most poorly on Facebook as a trustworthy source of information with an average of 50% of voters saying they have seen false claims most often on the platform.

The survey in the state of Pennsylvania was conducted with 1,000 registered voters between October 14-19. It was conducted with a representative cross-section of registered voters based on gender, age, race, education, and home-ownership. In addition, a nationwide poll was conducted with 3,301 registered voters, and eight further polls were conducted in the swing states of Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Wisconsin, with at least 1,000 registered voters in each state. All questionnaires were identical.

The full report on the Pennsylvania survey can be seen here. **Topline poll findings in Pennsylvania:**

- **"Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class"**
  - 77'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
  - 36% believe it's true.
  - 66% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

- **"If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more"**
  - 81% of registered voters have seen this claim.
  - 36% think the claim is true.
  - 68% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

- **"Hollywood and democratic elites routinely engage in sex trafficking and pedophilia"**
  - 63% of registered voters have seen this claim.
  - 22% believe it's true.
  - 68% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

- **"Antifa activists started some of the wildfires in Oregon and Washington state"**
  - 43% of registered voters have seen this claim.
  - 18% think the claim is true.
  - 64% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

"This research confirms that Facebook is so riddled with disinformation that it is almost impossible for readers to tell true from false without doing their own research," said Fadi Quran, Avaaz Campaign Director. "This becomes even more frightening when you consider that we're only days away from voters in key states like Pennsylvania participating in the US elections. We have to act now if we are to protect democracy from the deluge of misinformation on Facebook."

"In the face of mounting concerns from government, users and advertisers, Facebook finally began instituting some important changes earlier this year, including occasional warnings on fact-checked

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misinformation." said Quran. "Nonetheless, respondents to the SurveyUSA polls feel that nearly half (43%) of what users put on Facebook, they know to be untrue when they post it."

"We stand with the seventy percent of participants in the SurveyUSA poll who agreed that 'if fact checkers verify that a post contains misinformation, Facebook should share corrections with everyone who saw the misinformation'. Facebook is the most popular social media platform on the planet. With this great popularity comes great responsibility. Facebook must protect its users from disinformation."

For more information: media@avaaz.org

Note to the editor: Full nationwide research can be seen here.

Topline findings from nationwide poll:

- 85% of registered voters nationwide were exposed to misinformation stating that "Mail-in voting will lead to voter fraud." 35% believed it to be true, and 68% of those who saw it did so on Facebook.
- 48% of registered voters saw the false claim that "Joe Biden is a pedophile", with 19% believing it to be true and 64% of those exposed seeing it on Facebook.
- 74% of registered voters were exposed to the claim that Joe Biden plans to "defund the police", with 32% accepting it as fact and 58% reporting seeing it on Facebook.
- 63% of registered voters saw that "Donald Trump will end social security if he is re-elected", with 27% believing it to be true and 65% of those who came across the claim seeing it on Facebook.
- 53'% of registered voters read that "George Floyd died from an overdose of drugs" (that he was not killed by the police) with 18% believing this to be true. 65% of respondents who saw the claim reported seeing it on Facebook.
- 84% of registered voters reported being concerned or very concerned that social media is being used to spread false information to intentionally influence the outcome of America's elections.
- Belief was similar across age, gender, race, education, and income but showed significant disparities between political affiliation and ideology.

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BACKGROUNDER: SOME KEY DATA FROM POLLS IN BATTLEGROUND STATES

SurveyUSA conducted ten separate, simultaneous polls between 14-19 October.

(1) The nationwide poll included 3,301 registered voters.

(2) In addition to the national poll, SurveyUSA conducted nine polls in the swing states of Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. These polls surveyed a minimum of 1,000 registered voters in each state, following the same methodology as the national poll.

All questionnaires were identical and polling was conducted with a representative cross-section of Americans based on gender, age, race, education, and home-ownership.

HERE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS, STATE BY STATE

PENNSYLVANIA (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **"Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class"**
    a. 77'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 36% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 66% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **"If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more"**
    a. 81% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 36% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 68% of those who have seen this claim, have seen it on Facebook.
3. **"Hollywood and democratic elites routinely engage in sex trafficking and pedophilia"**
    a. 63% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 22% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 68% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
4. **"Antifa activists started some of the wildfires in Oregon and Washington state"**
    a. 43% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 18% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 64% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

GEORGIA (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **"Hollywood and democratic elites routinely engage in sex trafficking andpedophilia"**
    a. 62% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 28% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 67% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **"If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more"**
    a. 80% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 36% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 68% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **"Antifa activists started some of the wildfires in Oregon and Washington state"**
    a. 40% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 18% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 61% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

FLORIDA (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **"Donald Trump will end social security if he is re-elected"**
    a. 69% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 30% of them believe the claim is true.

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   c. 67% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **“Joe Biden wants to 'defund' the police”**
   a. 82'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 37% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 59% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **“Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class”**
   a. 78'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 39% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 65% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
4. **“If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more”**
   a. 81% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 35% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 63% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

MICHIGAN (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **“Jacob Blake, shot by police in Kenosha, once raped a 14-year-old”**
   a. 39% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 17% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 71% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **“Kyle Rittenhouse had a violent criminal history before the shootings in Kenosha”**
   a. 38% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 19% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 74% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **“If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more”**
   a. 79% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 31% of them think the claim is true.
   c. 64% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

NORTH CAROLINA (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **“Joe Biden wants to 'defund' the police”**
   a. 83'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 41% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 65% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **“Hollywood and democratic elites routinely engage in sex trafficking, pedophilia”**
   a. 61% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 26% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 67% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **“Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class”**
   a. 77'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 41% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 64% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
4. **“If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more”**
   a. 80'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 40% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 66% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
5. **“Joe Biden is a pedophile”**
   a. 49'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 19% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 70% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

ARIZONA (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **“Joe Biden wants to 'defund' the police”**

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   a. 85'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 36% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 56% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **"Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class"**
   a. 78'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 38% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 59% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **"If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more"**
   a. 80% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 35% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 58% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
4. **"Antifa activists started some of the wildfires in Oregon and Washington state"**
   a. 43'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 18% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 54% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

WISCONSIN (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **"Jacob Blake, shot by police in Kenosha, once raped a 14-year-old"**
   a. 51% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 23% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 69% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **"Kyle Rittenhouse has a violent criminal history before the shootings in Kenosha"**
   a. 38% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 14% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 69% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **"Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class"**
   a. 80'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 36% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 67% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
4. **"If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more"**
   a. 86% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 30% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 70% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

MINNESOTA (FULL SURVEY HERE)

1. **"Jacob Blake, shot by police in Kenosha, once raped at 14-year-old"**
   a. 37% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 17% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 64% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **"Kyle Rittenhouse has a violent criminal history before the shootings in Kenosha"**
   a. 37% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 15% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 58% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **"Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class"**
   a. 71'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 30% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 62% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
4. **"If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more"**
   a. 83% of registered voters have seen this claim.
   b. 34% of them believe the claim is true.
   c. 61% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

COLORADO (FULL SURVEY HERE)

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1. **“Antifa activists started some of the wildfires in Oregon and Washington state”**
    a. 44'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 16% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 65% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
2. **“Joe Biden plans to raise taxes on the middle class”**
    a. 68'% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 31% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 64% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.
3. **“If the number of COVID cases has increased, it's only because we are testing more”**
    a. 81% of registered voters have seen this claim.
    b. 28% of them believe the claim is true.
    c. 67% of those exposed saw the claim on Facebook.

ENDS