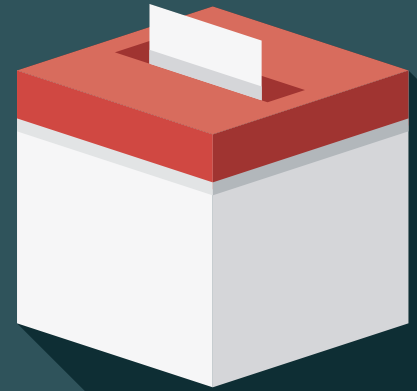


COVID-19 AND THE US DEMOCRATIC PROCESS



NETGAIN PARTNERSHIP

THE FUTURE OF OUR DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON SAFE AND RELIABLE DIGITAL PLATFORMS

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

The growth of online platforms and digital processes has galvanized democratic movements on the frontlines of social change in the United States and across the globe. But as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, already susceptible platforms and processes are increasingly exposed to security threats and deliberate attacks from bad actors working to undermine the safety and validity of our democratic institutions. The susceptibility of our democracy to these kinds of threats hinders our ability to hold free, fair, and safe elections and the first “high-tech” Census in 2020. Advocates and grassroots organizers also face a new reality as community education, outreach, and offline mobilization grind to a halt, and campaigns are forced to rely solely on digital strategies to carry on.

[In April 2020, more than 3 billion people used Facebook, Messenger, Instagram or WhatsApp in a single month for the first time ever.](#)

WHY IT MATTERS

While digital technology has transformed the way we work, learn, and communicate with one another, shifting to an exclusively digital world in the time of

COVID-19 poses immense security challenges to our ability to participate, mobilize, and express diverse opinions freely. Online attacks, intimidation efforts, and disinformation campaigns not only threaten the safety and security of our policymakers and social justice leaders, but silence the diversity of voices on the frontlines of our most crucial social change movements and erode the very foundation of our democracy. Without protections and safeguards in place to flag or remove disinformation, our ability to be accurately counted in the Census or receive reliable information about elections will be jeopardized and ultimately controlled by state actors and tech giants who wield dangerous power over our digital society. We must embrace multifaceted interventions that hold platforms accountable and engage directly with Big Tech to develop solutions alongside communities most impacted by potential harms, including native communities and communities of color.

TOP INTERVENTIONS

Federal, state, and local governments face the herculean task of safeguarding our elections amidst a global pandemic and evolving technological world. They must also prevent a massive undercount in the 2020

Census. To protect the foundation of our democracy and curb the spread of disinformation online, we must hold Big Tech companies, like Facebook, Google, and Twitter, accountable so that all people have the reliable and timely information on the COVID-19 health crisis, along with accurate information about elections and the Census. While major platforms provide a digital space to voice opinions and build community, they must also work with advocates and policymakers to train dedicated staff on election and Census threats, and commit to strengthening content policies and interference protections to prevent rampant voter suppression, hate speech, and intimidation on their sites. These interventions, among many others, are crucial to protecting the integrity of our democratic institutions.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Advocates and public interest groups are addressing these growing harms by leaning into secure, innovative digital tools and strategies for online outreach and mobilization to better meet people where they are in this moment.

As an existing leader in digital organizing, **Color of Change** launched the [2020 Voter Justice Agenda](#) to fight for universal, no-excuse vote-by-mail, secure and accessible ballot collection sites and ensure voter-verifiable ballot tracking in the time of COVID-19 – to ultimately make voting less burdensome for Black voters already facing systemic barriers at the ballot box. **The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights** [developed digital organizing resources](#) to help secure an accurate census count for hard-to-reach communities, despite social distancing restrictions, and continues to collaborate with Big Tech, including Facebook, to address gaps in election and census information security on their sites. At the forefront of voting technology, **Dr. Juan E. Gilbert**, Ph.D, University of Florida, created an [open source voting system](#) for federal, state, and local systems across the U.S. to make voting more secure and accessible during the pandemic and long after. This technology will potentially allow voters to reserve a time to vote and ensure social distancing is practiced in states where vote-by-mail cannot be achieved statewide. **United We Dream** is also working to support and reach immigrants online with [trusted community](#)

[messengers to inoculate against disinformation](#) and other relentless attacks from the Trump administration, as well as producing digital resources for voting procedures during COVID-19 and participating in the 2020 Census.

MORE INFORMATION

The [NetGain Partnership](#) is a philanthropic collaboration between the Ford Foundation, Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Mozilla Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Omidyar Network, and Wallace Global Fund that seeks to advance the public interest in the digital age. NetGain works hand-in-hand with the nation's leading philanthropic organizations to address our most pressing challenges at the intersection of technology and digital society. As COVID-19 rages on, NetGain is deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on technology and society, especially as the crisis exacerbates economic and social inequities across the world and challenges our democratic institutions. There is a significant need for funders and civil society organizations to access critical information to help them understand the current and future impacts of COVID-19 on society and the unique role that technology and the internet are playing as the crisis continues.

ABOUT NETGAIN

To learn more about NetGain's work or hear their latest briefing series on top technological challenges and harms that have emerged as a result of COVID-19 and actionable responses from civil society to address them, please visit:

<https://www.netgainpartnership.org/events/covid19/us-democratic-process>

For funders who are interested in the specific policy proposals outlined in this one-pager or have questions, please visit <https://mediademocracyfund.org/>

ABOUT MEDIA DEMOCRACY FUND

Media Democracy Fund (MDF) works at the crossroads of digital technology and social justice and is the leading convener between public interest grantees, funders and allies across the digital rights field.