ACCELERATE
CHANGE

TikTok 2022 Election Interference

Evidence of TikTok Suppression of
Get-Out-the-Vote Efforts in 2022

Overview

In the 2022 U.S. midterm elections, nonprofit media lab Accelerate Change ran a series of experiments that found TikTok heavily suppressed nonpartisan videos that encouraged users to vote.

Accelerate Change's study concludes that TikTok suppressed over 37 billion views of voting videos by TikTok users in 2022—**more than 200 voting videos suppressed per user in the U.S.**

Using past studies of the impact of voting messages on social platforms, Accelerate Change estimates that **TikTok may have suppressed over 2 million votes from young people in 2022 by curtailing voting messages from the influencers they trust.**

Peter Murray, President of Accelerate Change, noted that "often with an algorithm performance experiment like this, you struggle to see a pattern in the data, but in this case, the result was dramatic and clear: TikTok is suppressing more than 59 percent of voting video views. TikTok's voter video suppression is the largest anti-democratic intervention by a media platform in U.S. history."

Accelerate Change ran the same experiments on YouTube and Instagram and found no evidence of voter suppression on those platforms. The cross-platform tests further clarified the unprecedented suppression of voting content by TikTok.

What We Did

Accelerate Change worked with 22 TikTok influencers whom each produced two nonpartisan posts encouraging their followers to vote. In one video, the creator held handmade signs with nonpartisan Get-Out-the-Vote messaging (but avoided saying election words). In the other, the influencer read an identical script with pro-voting messages but said the election words aloud instead of presenting them on handmade signs, and included election captions and hashtags that were detectable by TikTok.

Each video pair was shared within a 24-hour window in the run-up to the November 8, 2022 election and Georgia's Senate runoff on December 6, 2022. The posting order of the paired videos was randomized to avoid bias. (See Appendix A.)
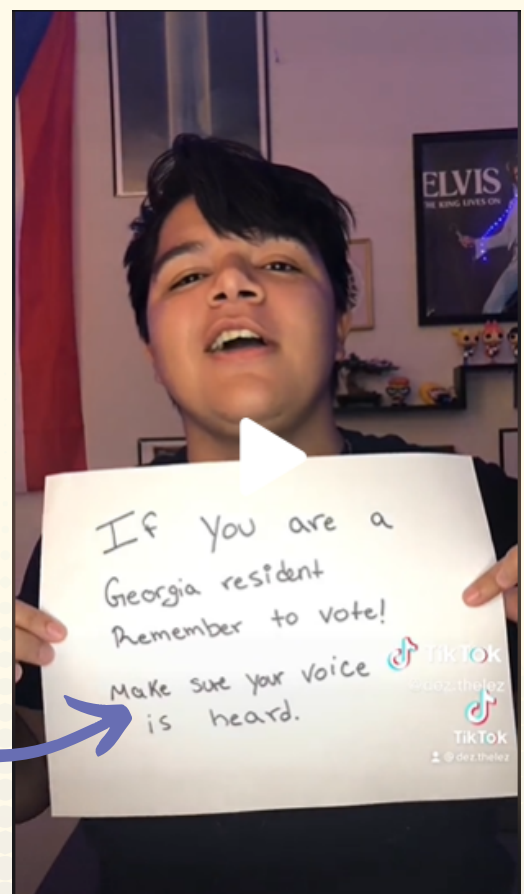
Video with election captions and hashtags

Video with only handmade election terms
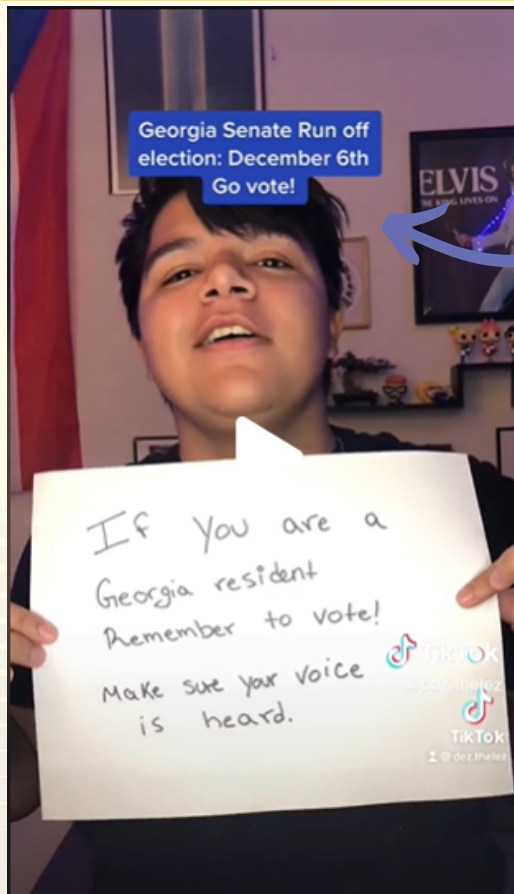
Detectable Election Words

Undetectable Election Words

What We Learned

The results of the experiment were striking and clear: TikTok heavily suppressed videos with detectable election words and hashtags.

As of December 7, 2022, all influencer videos had received a combined total of 878,800 views. But those views were not split equally among the two versions.

Videos in which influencers only wrote voting-related words on handmade signs received 2.3-times more views (612,525 views) than videos with detectable election words and hashtags (266,275 views). See Appendix B.

This striking disparity makes clear that **TikTok suppressed 57 percent of potential views on videos related to voting.**

57%

Suppression of potential views on videos that TikTok's algorithm deemed voting-related.
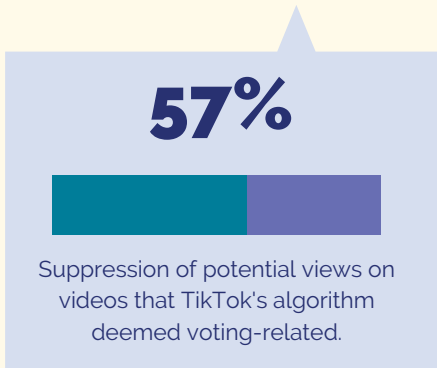
Accelerate Change also tested the paired videos on Instagram and YouTube (32 of the videos on Instagram and 18 on YouTube). On both Instagram and YouTube, there were no statistically significant differences in view counts, which further clarified TikTok's algorithmic suppression of voting videos.

TikTok Stifled Get-Out-the-Vote Efforts

Overall, the videos with election words generated just 43 percent of the views of the handmade sign versions.

So, videos with detectable voting words generated fewer than half the views of the videos with only handmade signs.

266,275 VIEWS ON 22 VIDEOS

612,525 VIEWS ON 22 VIDEOS

ELECTION WORDS & HASHTAGS

HANDMADE SIGNS ONLY

* This difference is highly statistically significant (two-tailed P value is 0.0027). The average difference between the handmade sign versions and the spoken election word versions is 15,738. The 95% confidence interval of this difference is between 6,118 to 25,360.
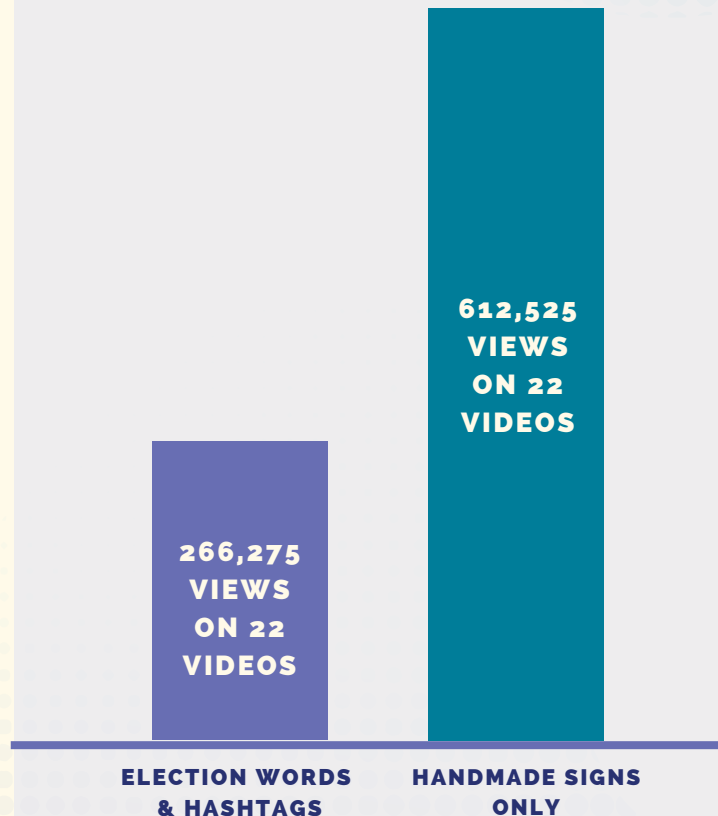
Scaled Get-Out-the-Vote Suppression

Accelerate Change has extrapolated the suppression rates from our experiments to estimate TikTok's total suppression of voting videos in the 2022 election.

Through analysis of video hashtags (See Appendix C), we found that applying a 57 percent suppression rate to TikTok's most popular voting-related hashtags suggests the platform has suppressed over 35 billion views of election-themed videos.

For the average user in the U.S., TikTok suppressed over 200 views of voting videos in the 2022 election.

"Many have been closely watching TikTok's management of videos about Taiwan and Hong Kong," said Murray, "but it turns out that we need to be watching closer to home. In our own elections, TikTok is running a massive suppression of Get-Out-the-Vote efforts by youth influencers."

The lack of any detectable voter suppression on Instagram and YouTube with the same pairs of videos further confirmed our results: TikTok suppression of nonpartisan Get-Out-the-Vote videos is unprecedented.

"TikTok's suppression of nonpartisan voter turnout videos is the largest anti-democratic intervention by a media platform in U.S. history," Murray said. "We were stunned by the scale of voting video suppression—tens of billions of views of voting messages curtailed by TikTok—which likely led to millions of young people not voting because they aren't getting voting messages from the influencers they trust."

For further details, see the experiment design and results overview.

Suppressing Youth Voting in 2022

Multiple randomized controlled trials (<u>example</u>, <u>example</u>, <u>example</u>) have shown that voting messages from trusted sources on social media platforms can drive significant increases in voter turnout.

Based on these previous studies, Accelerate Change estimates that **TikTok's suppression of 35 billion voting videos in 2022 may have resulted in 2 million 18 to 34-year-olds not voting.**

Beyond suppressing videos, unlike many of its competitors, **TikTok does not have a proactive voter registration or Get-Out-the-Vote program** encouraging users to cast ballots. <u>Facebook</u>, for example, invites users to change their profile picture frames to voting-themed graphics during election seasons, while <u>Snapchat</u> has allowed users to register to vote through its platform. TikTok has made no comparable effort.

"TikTok could be a positive force for democracy and voter engagement," Murray said. "But instead they have chosen to intensely suppress nonpartisan voting messages on their platform. Given the scale of their platform, this suppression could significantly depress youth voter turnout throughout the country. "

For further details, see <u>Accelerate Change's voting impact estimates</u>.

For more information, contact:

Accelerate Change President Peter Murray
<u>peter@acceleratechange.org</u>.

Appendices

Accelerate Change designed this experiment to gauge whether or not TikTok is actively suppressing nonpartisan voting videos.
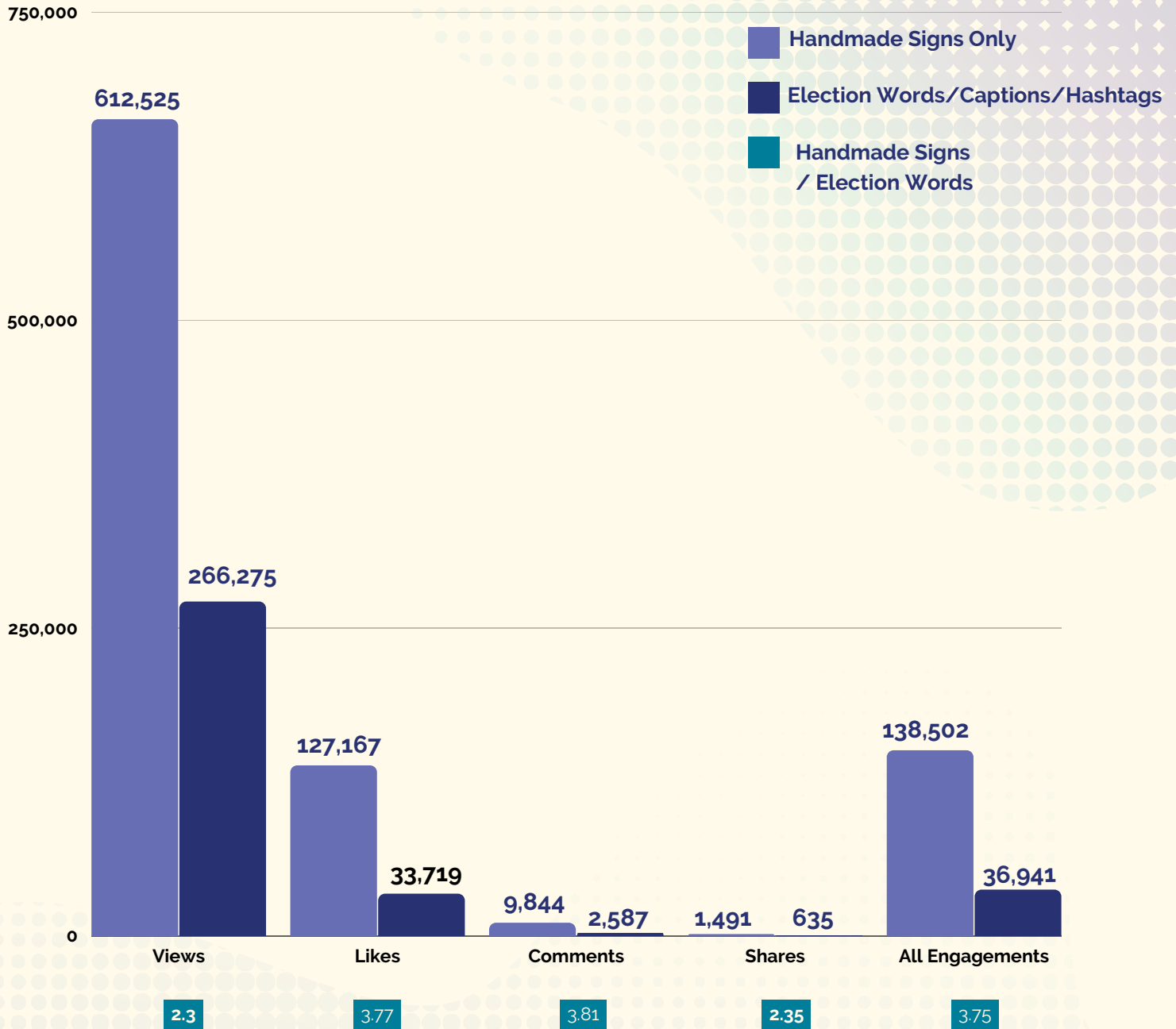
Hypothesis

Nonpartisan TikTok videos that explicitly mention and/or caption voting or elections will receive significantly fewer views than TikTok videos that avoid speaking or captioning these words.

Experiment Design and Implementation

➡ During the 2022 U.S. midterms and Georgia Senate runoff on December 6, Accelerate Change engaged 24 TikTok influencers who helped execute this experiment (all influencers and video links).

➡ Accelerate Change asked each influencer to create a pair of nonpartisan voting videos: one with detectable election words, captions and hashtags; another with the same voting pitch, but in which the influencer only holds up a handmade sign for words such as "elections," "voting," "mid-terms," and "get out and vote."

➡ We asked the influencers to post both videos within the same 24-hour period in the few days before the Nov 8th and Dec 6th elections. We also randomized the order that influencers posted their two videos to avoid any posting order bias.

➡ 22 of 24 influencers completed the task as requested (data); one influencer created videos but did not use handmade signs and instead used Adobe Premier to add animated text, which likely is also detected by TikTok, and one posted with incorrect hashtags, deleted, and reposted, so we excluded those video pairs (data provided as well).

Appendices

Result Totals

Handmade Signs Only

Election Words/Captions/Hashtags

Handmade Signs / Election Words

	Views	Likes	Comments	Shares	All Engagements
Handmade Signs Only	612,525	127,167	9,844	1,491	138,502
Election Words/Captions/Hashtags	266,275	33,719	2,587	635	36,941
Handmade Signs / Election Words	2.3	3.77	3.81	2.35	3.75

Appendices

TikTok Video Data   (Link to Data Sheet)

Handmade Signs							
Name/Video Link	Views	Likes	Comments	Shares	All Engagements	Data Check Date	Check Time
Jordan Scott	55,800	14,000	1,010	102	15,112	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Yeganeh Mafaher	19,400	5,144	311	462	5,917	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Leah Melle	56,400	13,500	777	67	14,344	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Brian Brigantti	31,800	5,306	437	57	5,800	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Auggie Ryan	36,400	2,438	178	1	2,617	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Ziora	7,044	2,428	183	34	2,645	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Quentin Jiles	11,500	2,354	346	9	2,709	11/7/2022	8:35 AM ET
Laurenzo Adesso	6,468	1,054	33	6	1,093	11/7/2022	8:35 AM ET
Lily - sheshortnbrown	2,326	499	26	41	566	11/7/2022	8:35 AM ET
Corrbette Pasko	29,900	8,163	607	75	8,845	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Dara Starr Tucker	9,374	2,342	272	69	2,683	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Leonie	52,700	12,600	918	92	13,610	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
IAMLEGALLYHYPE	16,800	3,808	295	37	4,140	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
IndesKribeaBULL	5,257	343	21	2	366	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Maya	1,441	234	20	2	256	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Melissa	3,371	675	47	12	734	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Myca Hinton	2,266	391	33	2	426	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Nessa	6,078	666	20	5	691	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Harry Sisson	51,800	7,873	415	25	8,313	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Austin Archer	75,300	19,200	2,622	181	22,003	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Dez	88,800	20,900	1,244	207	22,351	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Evelyn Juarez	42,300	3,249	29	3	3,281	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET

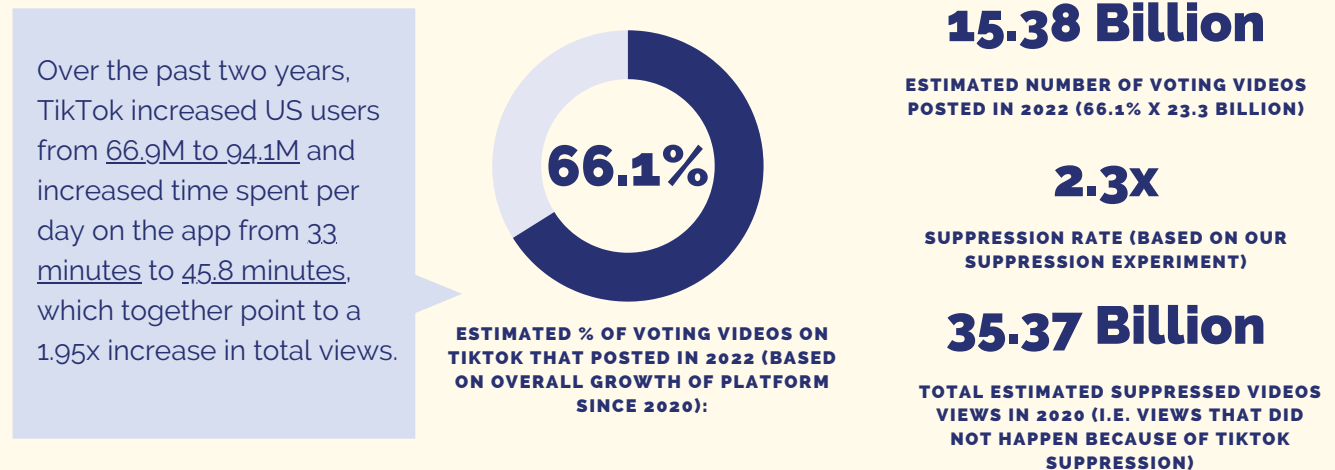| Spoken Election Words							
Name/Video Link	Views	Likes	Comments	Shares	All Engagements	Data Check Date	Check Time
Jordan Scott	18,400	1,569	182	26	1,777	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Yeganeh Mafaher	12,300	2,598	209	305	3,112	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Leah Melle	17,100	2,855	320	22	3,197	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Brian Brigantti	12,900	820	75	7	902	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Auggie Ryan	21,300	1,270	53	4	1,327	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Ziora	1,408	185	8	6	199	11/6/2022	11:11 PM ET
Quentin Jiles	3,219	626	98	7	731	11/7/2022	8:35 AM ET
Laurenzo Adesso	2,828	474	18	6	498	11/7/2022	8:35 AM ET
Lily - sheshortnbrown	1,218	175	8	4	187	11/7/2022	8:35 AM ET
Corrbette Pasko	4,562	846	53	10	909	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Evelyn Juarez	29,300	1,652	31	2	1,685	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Dara Starr Tucker	7,041	1,452	167	89	1,708	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Leonie	13,100	2,359	211	19	2,589	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
IAMLEGALLYHYPE	2,795	465	46	6	517	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
IndesKribeaBULL	7,016	856	71	4	931	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Maya	814	103	10	0	113	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Melissa	1,252	128	7	2	137	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Myca Hinton	3,479	761	105	17	883	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Nessa	3,512	201	7	1	209	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Harry Sisson	70,500	9,083	515	34	9,632	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Dez	24,000	4,048	217	50	4,315	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET
Austin Archer	8,231	1,193	176	14	1,383	12/7/2022	1:05 PM ET

Appendix C: TikTok Total Voting Messages: Hashtag Analysis

Based on Accelerate Change's hashtag analysis of 334 voting-related videos on the TikTok platform, Accelerate Change estimates that TikTok has over 23 billion views of voting messages on the platform. Our methodology for this estimate a) takes the view count that TikTok provides for the largest voting-related hashtag on TikTok (#vote); b) determines what percentage of a sample of voting videos on the platform have that voting tag; and c) extrapolates an estimated number of total voting video views like this:

8.4 Billion

#VOTE TOTAL VIEWS

23.3 Billion

ESTIMATED TOTAL VOTING VIDEO VIEWS ON TIKTOK (8.4B / 36%).

SAMPLED VOTING VIDEOS WITH #VOTE HASHTAG: **36%**

SAMPLED VOTING VIDEOS WITHOUT #VOTE HASHTAG: **64%**

0%   25%   50%   75%
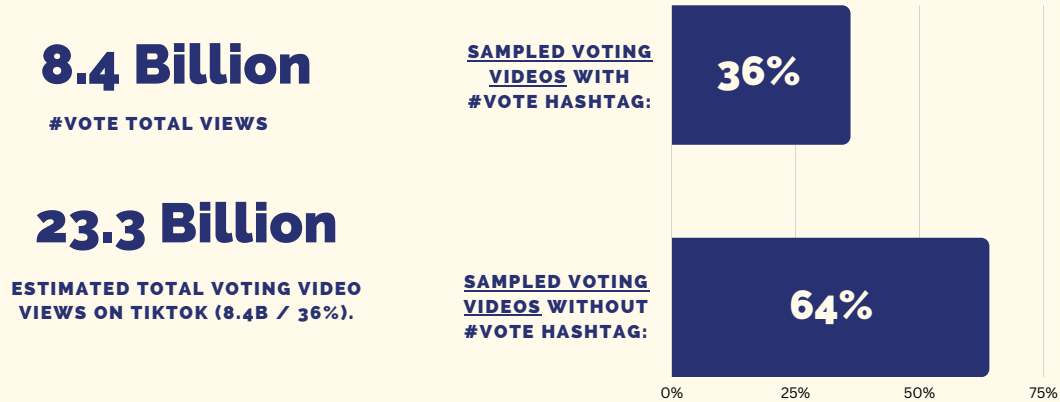
We further estimated the number of voting video views that were suppressed in 2022 with the following analysis (which is less precise than the total voter video views on TikTok calculation because it requires assumptions about when videos are posted):

Over the past two years, TikTok increased US users from 66.9M to 94.1M and increased time spent per day on the app from 33 minutes to 45.8 minutes, which together point to a 1.95x increase in total views.

66.1%

ESTIMATED % OF VOTING VIDEOS ON TIKTOK THAT POSTED IN 2022 (BASED ON OVERALL GROWTH OF PLATFORM SINCE 2020):

15.38 Billion

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF VOTING VIDEOS POSTED IN 2022 (66.1% X 23.3 BILLION)

2.3x

SUPPRESSION RATE (BASED ON OUR SUPPRESSION EXPERIMENT)

35.37 Billion

TOTAL ESTIMATED SUPPRESSED VIDEOS VIEWS IN 2020 (I.E. VIEWS THAT DID NOT HAPPEN BECAUSE OF TIKTOK SUPPRESSION)

Note that in November of 2022, Accelerate Change made an initial estimate of 30 billion views of voting videos had been suppressed in the 2022 election. TikTok responded noting that our estimates of total voting views on the platform were likely too low (and thus our estimates of voting video view suppression are also too low). We've expanded our data collection and slightly adjusted our estimate of suppression upwards to 35.37B video views suppressed. But our estimates are imperfect and we encourage TikTok to release the data on how many election-related video views occurred on their platform and their own estimates of the number of views that they have suppressed.
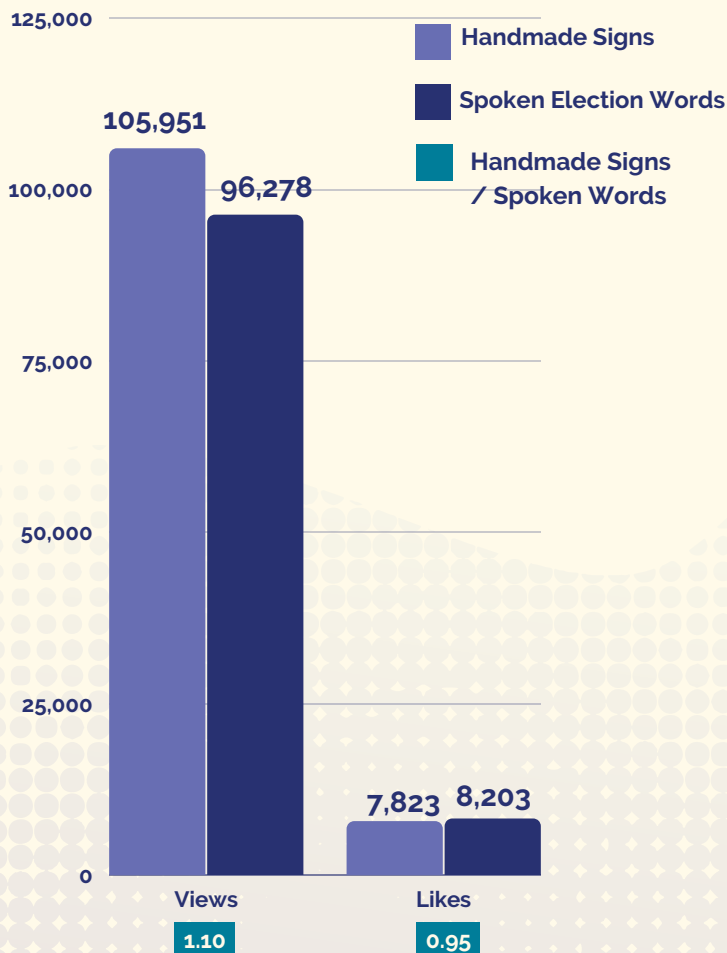
Appendices

For those influencers who have significant YouTube and Instagram followers, we had the influencers also post the pair of videos on those platforms. As with TikTok, we randomized the order of posting and both videos were shared within 24 hours of each other. This test allowed us to see if a consistent difference in video performance between the two versions existed on other platforms as it had on TikTok, as well as gauge any suppression of voting-related content on YouTube or Instagram.

- We had 16 of the influencers post their paired videos (32 videos total) on Instagram.
- We had 9 of the influencers post their paired videos (18 videos total) on YouTube.

There was no statistically significant difference in the average video views on YouTube (12.3% less reach for videos with only handmade signs) or on Instagram (9.6% less reach for videos with only handmade signs), meaning no suppression was detected on these channels for the videos.

Instagram Video Data Result Totals

Legend:
- Handmade Signs
- Spoken Election Words
- Handmade Signs / Spoken Words

	Views	Likes
Handmade Signs	105,951	7,823
Spoken Election Words	96,278	8,203
Ratio	1.10	0.95

YouTube Video Data Result Totals

Legend:
- Handmade Signs
- Spoken Election Words
- Handmade Signs / Spoken Words

	Views	Likes
Handmade Signs	22,481	3,522
Spoken Election Words	25,419	3,250
Ratio	0.88	1.08

Appendices

Instagram Video Data

Handmade Signs				
Name	**Views**	**Likes**	**Collection Day**	**Collection Time**
Auggie Ryan	16200	238	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Leah Melle	15,000	1,453	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Quentin Jiles	1,929	115	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Ziora	1,653	95	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Vanessa Diosdado	3,289	214	12/6/2022	1:30
Maya Nepost	1,286	135	12/6/2022	1:30
Dara Tucker	11,200	540	12/6/2022	1:30
Jerrilyn Lake	21,100	965	12/6/2022	1:30
Mel D	2,473	238	12/6/2022	1:30
Dez	2,957	450	12/6/2022	1:30
Corrbette Pasko	2,174	359	12/6/2022	1:30
Myca Hinton	202	13	12/6/2022	1:30
Harry Sisson	2,415	424	12/6/2022	1:30
Leonie Lowenherz	2,312	218	12/6/2022	1:30
A.B Burns-Tucker	5,961	473	12/6/2022	1:30
Austin Archer	15,800	1,893	12/6/2022	1:30

Spoken Election Words				
Name	**Views**	**Likes**	**Collection Day**	**Collection Time**
Auggie Ryan	3102	62	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Leah	8332	624	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Quentin Jiles	3086	190	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Ziora	499	35	12/7/2022	9:54 AM
Vanessa Diosdado	5078	431	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Maya Nepos	594	58	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Jerrilyn Lake	34000	1910	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Dez	6955	1298	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Dara Tucker	7915	744	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Mel D	2395	211	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Corrbette Pasko	1334	183	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Myca Hinton	307	18	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Harry Sisson	3148	662	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Leonie Lowenherz	2114	162	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
A.B Burns-Tucker	8412	649	12/6/2022	1:30 AM
Austin Archer	9007	966	12/6/2022	1:30 AM

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YouTube Video Data

Handmade Signs

Name	Views	Likes	Collection Day	Collection Time
Laurenzo	4000	9/18/1901	11/8/2022	8:53 AM
Quentin Jiles	320	NA	12/7/2022	8:54 AM
Dara Tucker	48	1/10/1900	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Jerrilyn Lake	384	1/28/1900	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Myca Hinton	113	1/2/1900	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Harry Sisson	116	12/30/1899	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Dez	14,000	7/27/1906	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
A.B Burns-Tucker	1,100	6/7/1900	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Austin Archer	2,400	10/19/1900	12/6/2022	1:30 PM

Spoken Election Words

Name	Views	Likes	Collection Day	Collection Time
Laurenzo	5300	677	11/8/2022	8:53 AM
Quentin Jiles	284	NA	12/7/2022	8:54 AM
Jerrilyn Lake	391	27	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Dez	15000	2200	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Dara Tucker	75	10	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Myca Hinton	1100	17	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Harry Sisson	1300	70	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
A.B Burns-Tucker	969	130	12/6/2022	1:30 PM
Austin Archer	1000	119	12/6/2022	1:30 PM