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Release is effective immediately

HAWKEYE POLL: Majority of Iowans believe social media companies are biased when flagging posts

In a time where false news [travels faster](#) than factual news online, a majority of Iowans believe social media companies' decisions on labeling posts or banning individuals target political ideologies, particularly those espousing conservative viewpoints. A recent Hawkeye Poll – conducted between March 23 and April 12 by faculty and students at the University of Iowa – found that 56.5% of Iowans indicated that they think social media decisions to label posts or ban users are either somewhat (24.3%) or very (32.2%) likely to target certain political viewpoints than others. Among respondents that perceive at least some ideological targeting, 56.0% believe that conservative viewpoints are targeted more than liberal or moderate ones. In contrast, 15.5% believe that liberal viewpoints were targeted more often and 10.6% believe that moderate viewpoints are targeted more often. Just 2.0% believe some other viewpoint is most often targeted. This poll was conducted in the wake of Twitter flagging dozens of Tweets from former President Donald Trump while he was still in office following the November 3rd election. The majority of social media companies banned Trump from their platforms after the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6. Recently, the Iowa legislature has been considering legislation (e.g., Senate File 571 and House File 830) that would eliminate tax breaks for social media companies that restrict access by citizens or elected officials to their sites.

Party identification was a major indicator of Iowans' feelings on this issue. Only 10.8% of Democrats thought that it was very likely that social media companies were biased, whereas 53.4% of Republicans thought the same. Independents were between those totals with 34.7% of respondents thinking bias was very likely. Among those that thought bias was somewhat or very likely, 72.9% of Republicans and 60.3% of Independents thought conservative viewpoints were targeted. In contrast, just 26.1% of Democrats thought conservative viewpoints were targeted. In fact, Democrats were most likely to report that liberal viewpoints were most often targeted, with 27.7% identifying this viewpoint. In contrast only 13.0% of Republicans and 9.3% of Independents thought liberal ideologies were targeted the most.

Men were more likely than women to respond that social media companies' decisions targeted some viewpoints and also more likely to believe that conservative viewpoints were targeted. 35.7% of men thought it very likely and 25.7% somewhat likely that social media companies' decisions targeted certain viewpoints unequally compared to 28.8% and 23.9% of women. Among those that perceived unequal targeting, 62.7% of men responded that conservative viewpoints are targeted compared to 48.5% of women. 18.1% of women and 13.2% of men indicated that liberal viewpoints were targeted more often.

Overall, Iowans lack of confidence in social media companies' ability to determine which posts should be labeled as inaccurate or misleading. The majority of Iowans, 58.2%, expressed either no confidence (31.0%) or not too much confidence (27.2%) in their ability to label posts. Just 6.9% expressed a great deal of confidence. 25.4% indicated they had a fair amount of confidence. Lack of confidence was

highest among Republicans, among whom 48.6% had no confidence and 27.2% had not too much confidence. A small majority of Democrats either had a great deal of confidence (9.0%) or a fair amount of confidence (44.1%).

Younger Iowans were more likely to express confidence than older Iowans. 42.7% of respondents aged 18-29 had a great deal or a fair amount of confidence. This drops to 33.3% among those 30-49, 30.5% among those 50-64, and 22.5% among those 65 and over.

Yet despite perceptions of bias and concerns about social media companies' ability to label posts for misinformation, more respondents approve than disapprove of labeling posts from elected officials or ordinary users as misleading or inaccurate. 25.2% strongly approve and 17.6% approve of such labels for posts by elected officials against 22.9% who strongly disapprove and 11.3% who somewhat disapprove. Similar results emerge for labeling posts of ordinary users: 22.3% strongly approve and 18.5% somewhat approve compared to 21.7% who strongly disapprove and 11.4% who somewhat disapprove. Majorities of Democrats strongly or somewhat approved of labels posts for both: 66.3% for posts from elected officials and 73.8% for posts from ordinary users. In contrast, majorities of Republicans either strongly or somewhat disapproved for both types of user: 51.8% for elected officials and 51.1% for ordinary users. Patterns of responses for these two questions were largely similar among men and women and across age groups.

RESPONDENT IDENTIFICATION: The Iowa Social Science Research Center (ISRC) assisted with data collection. Responses were gathered by phone (89) and by web (902). The ISRC obtained a random sample of Iowans consisting of 40% household landline numbers and 60% mobile phone numbers. All respondents who stated they were over age 18 and willing to participate in the survey were included. After training, students in the class used the ISRC's computer-assisted interviewing resources to complete the calling and interviews. No quotas were set for the phone component. For the web portion, the ISRC contracted with a respected web panel vendor to field the survey to a demographically representative sample of 902 web respondents. Respondents invited to complete the web survey were Iowa adults, aged 18-120 years, recruited for participation via web panel.

SAMPLE: 991 voting-age residents in Iowa, margin of error $\pm 3.2\%$.

WEIGHTING: Reported results are weighted by age, sex, and party identification.

ABOUT THE HAWKEYE POLL

The poll was conducted by the Hawkeye Poll Cooperative, comprised of University of Iowa faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in the Political Science departments. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project, which uses the facilities of the Iowa Social Science Research Center directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science and faculty advisor for the poll. The Department of Political Science, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the University of Iowa Public Policy Center support the poll; financial support was provided through a Student Technology Fee award (#1290-91).

Stuart Brown, Kaleb Wiebel, and Jake Wheeler assisted with the preparation of this release.

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