



**Did Trump incite  
the riots?**

**Only with the help of Big Tech**

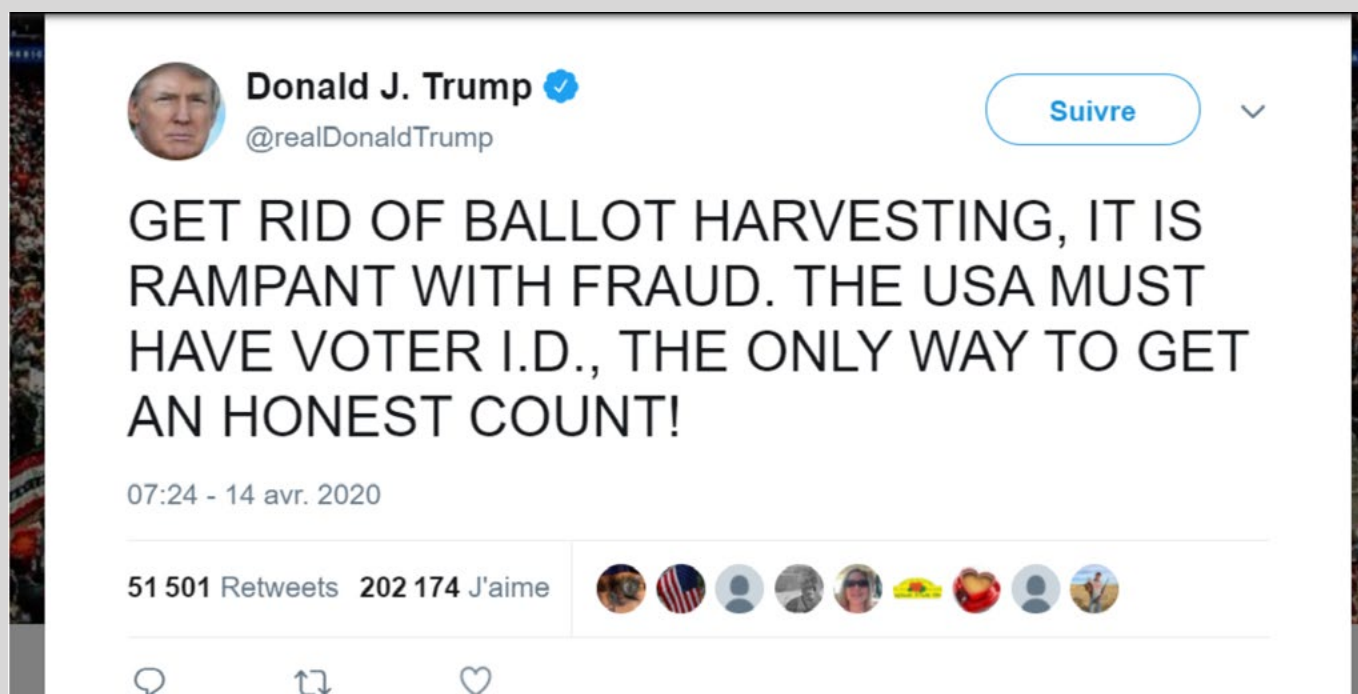
Next week at the Senate impeachment trial, Donald Trump's lawyers will argue that President Trump was not "singularly responsible" for inciting the Capitol riots. Campaigning group SumOfUs has dug into dozens of social media accounts, pages, and groups, as well as far-right disinformation websites, and has found several key incidents that highlight how Trump used social media to rally his base in support of the events that took place on January 6, and how the power of Trump's tweets and retweets - sometimes of obscure pro-Trump accounts - escalated to the use of violence.

From the evidence, it is clear that while Trump lit the match that set this violent far-right movement ablaze, it was tech companies that provided the platforms for organizing — and their policies, algorithms, and tools directly fueled it.

The briefing reveals how tech platforms responded, and how the measures they took came up massively short in preventing the escalation of violence. It also highlights how ad tech platforms like Google and Amazon are profiting off of disinformation websites — which are in turn amplified on Facebook and continue to circulate in far-right extremist networks.

In addition to holding Donald Trump to account for his role in the insurrection, SumOfUs urges lawmakers to launch an official investigation into the role tech companies played in aiding and abetting the insurrection, as well as the role Facebook's algorithmic amplification played in boosting electoral disinformation.

# Trump: the Internet's firehose of disinformation



President Trump's [tweet](#) about ballot harvesting, April 14, 2020

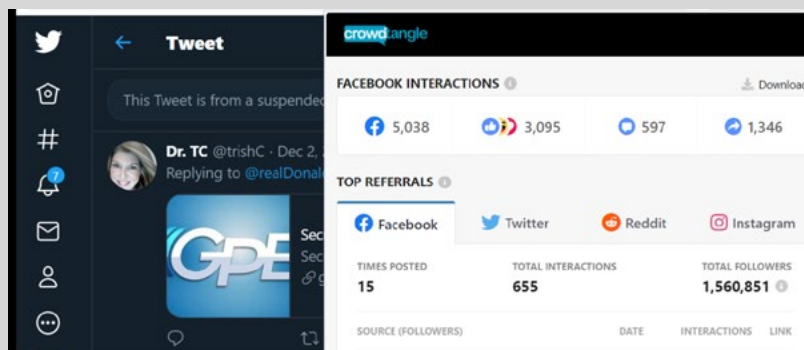
Responsibility for content casting skepticism about the election lies first and foremost with Donald Trump.

Early in the spring, roughly 200 days before the election, Trump tweeted that mail-in ballots are rampant with fraud. In response, [Factcheck.org](#), the [US Government's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#), and many other experts began to strongly denounce all claims of fraud.

This [tweet](#) from April 14<sup>1</sup> was retweeted more than 51,000 times and received more than 200,000 likes. Beyond Twitter, a look at CrowdTangle shows that cross-platform sharing of this tweet alone had a potential reach of over 1.5 million accounts on Facebook, and about half a million accounts on Reddit.

<sup>1</sup> April 14 tweet about election fraud. [Original tweet link](#), also archived [here](#)

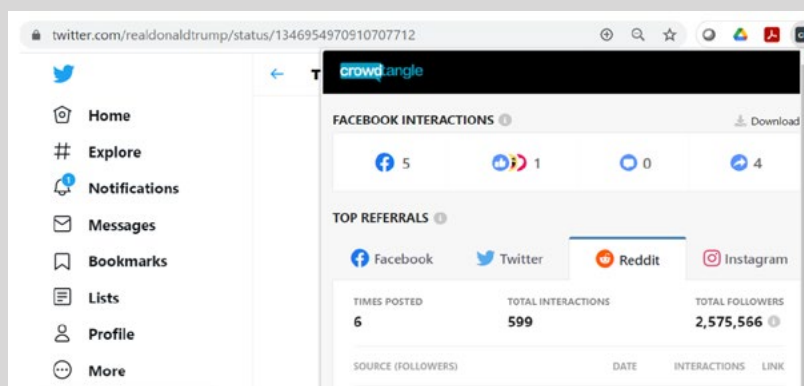




A look at Trump's first main tweet about election fraud shows that it potentially reached a network of 1.5 million people on Facebook. At this point, neither Twitter or Facebook were flagging or removing election related content.



Trump [tweets](#) about the Democrats rigging election, May 24, 2020.



One of Trump's [tweets](#) about mail-in ballots resulting in fraud was reshared on Reddit and potentially reached a network of 2.5 million people

Just over a month later, on May 24, Trump [tweeted](#)<sup>2</sup> that the Democrats were attempting to rig the election. This claim was fact-checked as false by multiple [sources](#).

In response to this and other tweets at around the same time, Twitter began adding warning labels to Trump's tweets about mail-in ballots. It was too little, too late to stop the firehose of disinformation — that May 24 tweet was retweeted at least 27,000 times, and received at least 87,000 likes.

Facebook's response to Trump's posts was even weaker. The platform allowed the content to circulate freely, sowing doubt in the reliability of the US election. It wasn't until the [end of June](#) that Facebook finally decided to add warning labels on misleading information about the election and harmful content. Nevertheless, as of February 2021, SumOfUs discovered [multiple posts](#)<sup>3</sup> that *continue* to remain up without a fact-check label.

Trump continued to peddle the blatantly false claim about the election being rigged by Democrats. By November 5, this piece of disinformation reached an online climax: a [Facebook group](#) with the title "Stop the Steal" began to go viral, growing to over [300,000 members](#) within hours.

<sup>2</sup> May 24th tweet about Democrats rigging the election. [Original tweet link](#), and also archived [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Facebook [posts](#) claiming [election fraud](#) without any fact-check labels remain up. Archived [here](#) and [here](#).

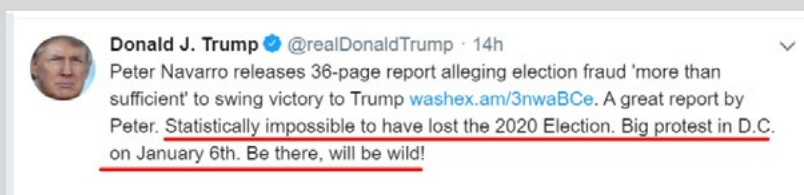
Facebook responded by removing the Facebook group and banning certain hashtags, but its response was ineffective. In the wake of the original takedown of Stop the Steal, several other groups grew up to replace it — some even reaching nearly [100,000 members](#).



Between January 1, 2020 and January 7, 2021 Trump used the word '[rig](#)' or '[rigged](#)' 103 times and the word '[fraud](#)' 165 times to refer to the US Elections



[Posts](#) on Facebook about Trump's tweets regarding [election fraud](#) remain up on Facebook without any fact-check label, as of February 3, 2021.



Trump's tweet claiming election fraud and a big protest in DC that will be "wild", December 19, 2020



Ali Alexander [tweets](#) about rallies on December 16. Three days later, Donald Trump [echoes](#) Alexander's call to protest.<sup>4</sup>

Facebook's whack-a-mole approach to content moderation allowed these groups to continue to exist and grow — even using their group recommendations to help boost membership and reach.

While Facebook claims to have turned off group recommendations for political content, an investigation by [TheMarkup](#) shows that political group recommendations have continued to take place, and in fact, half of the groups recommended to Trump voters after the election were political. So, despite Facebook's actions, it was the company's algorithms that directly enabled these groups to flourish online — bringing together the very community that would later support and organize the insurrection.

On December 16, Ali Alexander, an outspoken Trump supporter with 219,000 followers on [Twitter](#), tweeted about rallies to 'stop the steal'. Three days later, Trump jumped on the bandwagon, and [tweeted](#) that it was "Statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 Election. Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!"

While Trump did not directly specify what would happen at the "wild" protest, he subsequently [retweeted](#)<sup>5</sup> the organizers of the riot on [multiple](#)

<sup>4</sup> Michael Coudrey quotes Ali Alexander's tweet detailing upcoming protest locations. Original [tweet link](#), and also archived [here](#). Donald Trump's [tweet](#) on December 19, 2020 with original tweet, and also archived [here](#).

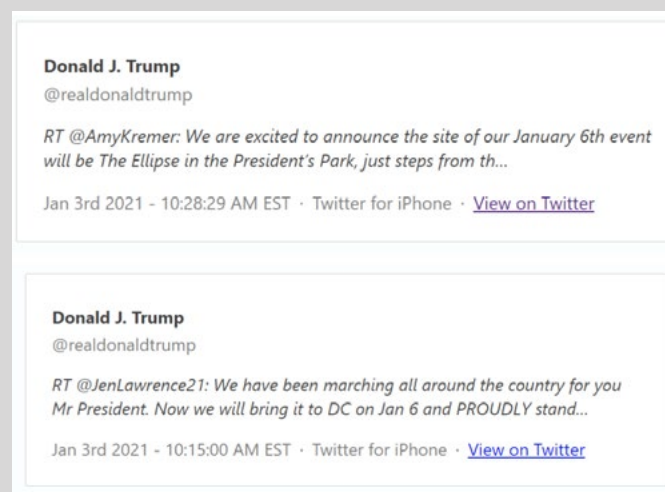
<sup>5</sup> This contains a selection of archived tweets showing Trump's retweets of the riot organizers. More tweets can be found [here](#).



occasions, including Amy Kremer, a popular Trump supporter who posted a video about receiving “tactical training” two days before Trump tweeted about the “wild” protest. Kremer’s tweets remain up.<sup>6</sup>



Trump supporters — a mother/daughter duo — announcing their “tactical training” ahead of the riots. Trump has retweeted Amy Kremer 11 times, and tweeted about the “wild” protest 2 days after this was posted



Trump retweets organizers of the riots

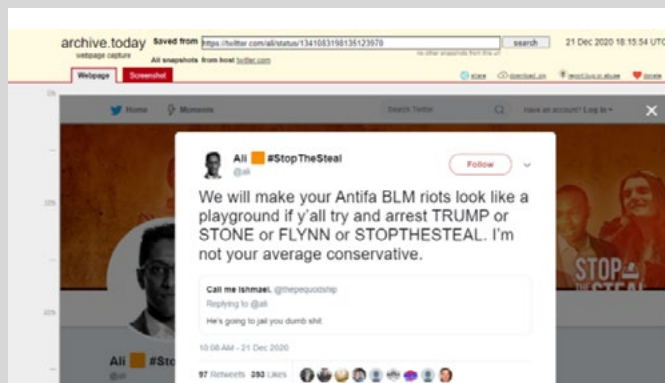


Trump retweets organizers of the riots

<sup>6</sup> Tweets claiming to receive tactical training ahead of the riot. Archived [here](#).

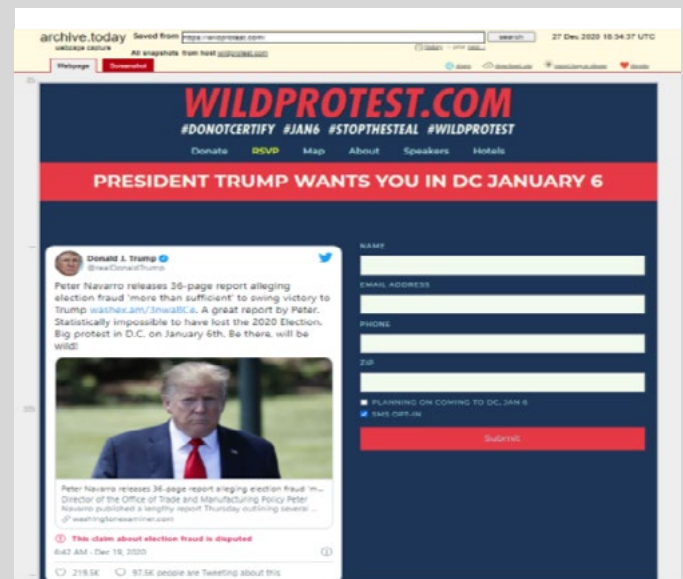


Alexander Ali, a Trump supporter who has been retweeted by the former President, claiming "I am willing to give my life for this fight."



Alexander Ali insinuating there will be violence if organizers are arrested.

Soon after, websites promoting the riots began to pop up, citing Trump's call to action as a motivation. SumOfUs found at least 12 riot-organizing websites specifically referencing Trump's December 19 tweet.



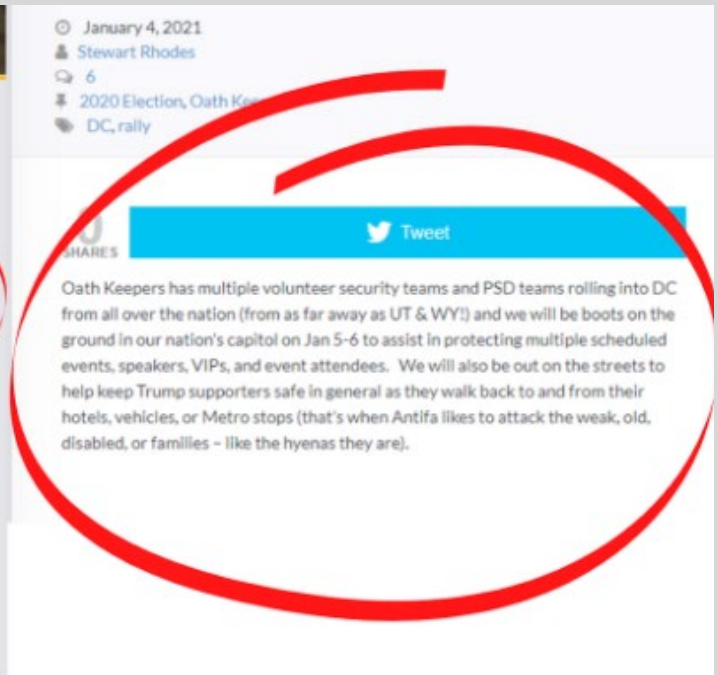
Trump's tweet inspired the name of this website

A right-wing militia organization called 'Oath Keepers' also insinuated on their website that there could be violence by claiming to provide "multiple security teams" acting as "boots on the ground" to protect Trump supporters at the rally.

Trump made no moves to denounce, condemn or dissociate himself from these organizers. In fact, President Trump's retweeting of organizers like [Alexander Ali](#), [Amy Kremer](#), and [Jennifer Lynn Lawrence](#) gave these organizers more legitimacy in the pro-Trump community<sup>7</sup>, each receiving thousands of retweets from Trump followers and inevitably elevating them in the platforms' algorithms.

<sup>7</sup> [Kyle Jane Kremer](#) and [Jennifer Lawrence](#) all thanked and celebrated Donald Trump for his retweets





Oath Keepers event promotion, claiming there will be security detail and "boots on the ground"

In response to the violence on January 6, Trump [tweeted](#) (and then deleted): *"These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!"*

Before the tweet was deleted, it had been shared 27 times on Facebook by accounts with huge followings, driving up the Facebook reach of that content to 763,779 — while on Reddit, it had potential of reaching 2,575,566 people.

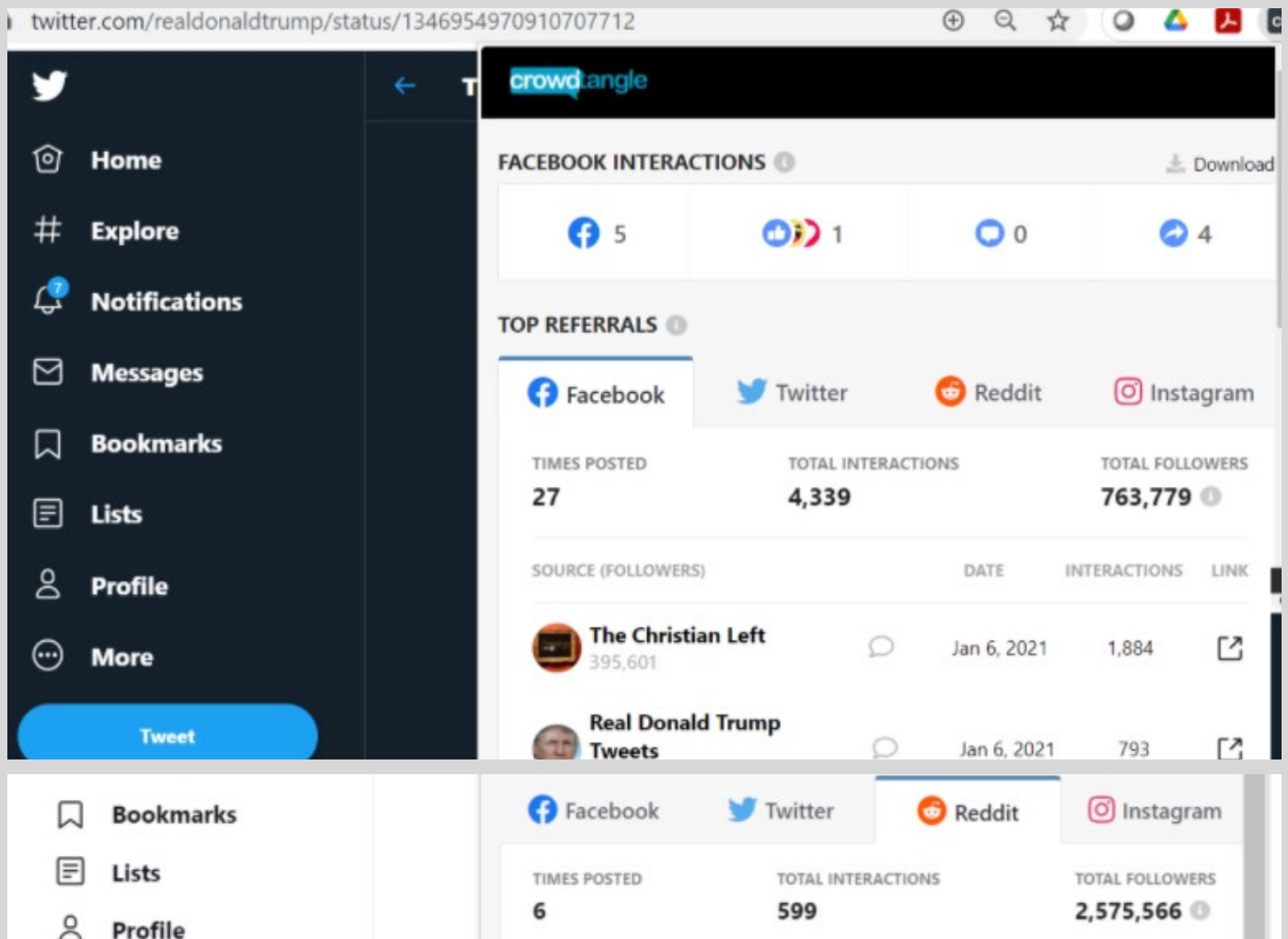
<sup>6</sup> Tweets claiming to receive tactical training ahead of the riot. Archived [here](#).



Trump's December 19, 2020 tweet quoted verbatim: "Be there, will be wild"



Trump's [tweet](#) glorifying the riots, before it was deleted.



CrowdTangle data showing how Trump's tweet glorifying the riots had massive potential reach across Facebook and Reddit

Two days after the insurrection, and after 4 years of Donald Trump berated Americans with harmful lies — Twitter finally banned Trump, and Facebook soon followed. Trump truly is America's firehose of disinformation — the platforms saw a [73% decrease](#) in election misinformation after the companies took action.



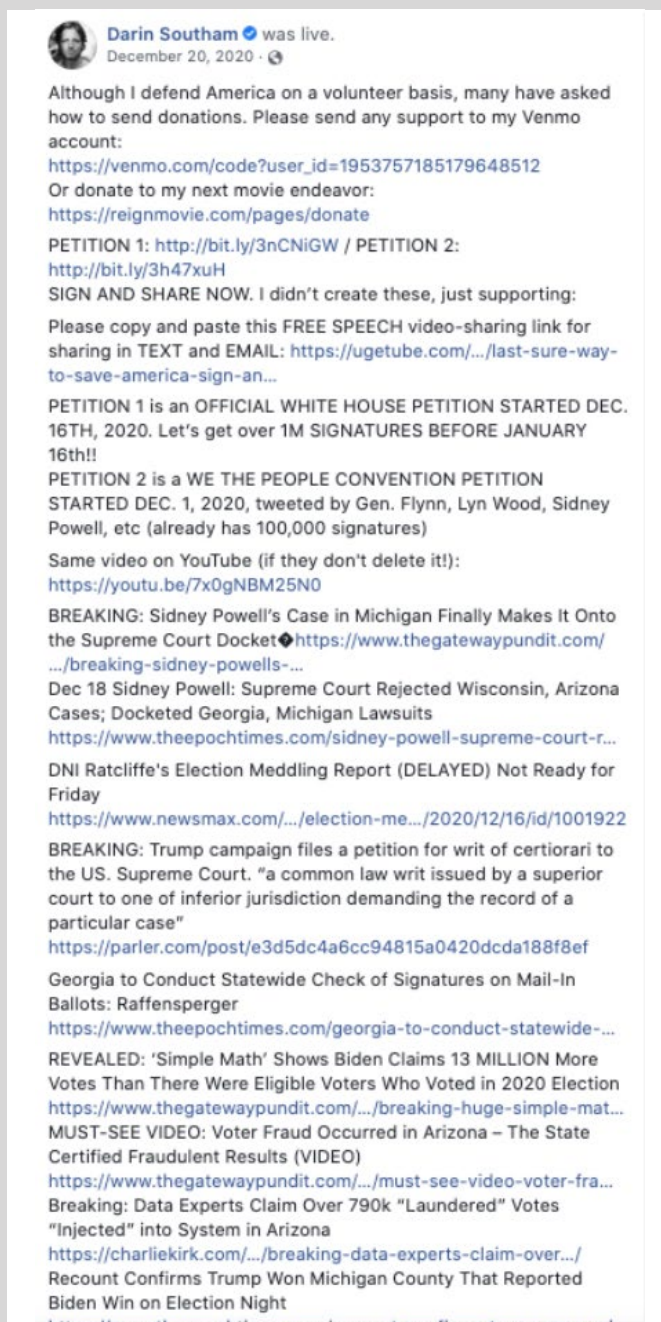
After the insurrection, SumOfUs docked a boat outside Jack Dorsey's home in San Francisco urging the CEO to ban Trump. Photo credit: SumOfUs/Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call/[Business Insider](#)

# The take-down loophole

Though Facebook took action by censoring some election disinformation - like removing the biggest Stop the Steal group, adding labels to some election-related disinformation, and eventually banning Trump - various websites echoing Trump's false claims and pushing other harmful disinformation narratives and conspiracy theories remain in circulation on Facebook and Twitter.

A [Facebook post](#)<sup>8</sup> by a popular Trump supporter with over 51,000 followers links to 12 election fraud articles on websites deemed untrustworthy by the nonpartisan independent news monitor [NewsGuard](#). As of February 3, 2021, this post remains up without any fact-checking labels and has received roughly 21,000 engagements by Facebook users.

<sup>8</sup> Facebook [post](#) linking to 12 disinformation articles about election fraud. Archived link [here](#).



**Darin Southam** was live.  
December 20, 2020 · 🌐

Although I defend America on a volunteer basis, many have asked how to send donations. Please send any support to my Venmo account:  
[https://venmo.com/code?user\\_id=1953757185179648512](https://venmo.com/code?user_id=1953757185179648512)  
 Or donate to my next movie endeavor:  
<https://reignmovie.com/pages/donate>

PETITION 1: <http://bit.ly/3nCNiGW> / PETITION 2: <http://bit.ly/3h47xuH>  
 SIGN AND SHARE NOW. I didn't create these, just supporting:

Please copy and paste this FREE SPEECH video-sharing link for sharing in TEXT and EMAIL: <https://ugetube.com/.../last-sure-way-to-save-america-sign-an...>

PETITION 1 is an OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PETITION STARTED DEC. 16TH, 2020. Let's get over 1M SIGNATURES BEFORE JANUARY 16th!!

PETITION 2 is a WE THE PEOPLE CONVENTION PETITION STARTED DEC. 1, 2020, tweeted by Gen. Flynn, Lyn Wood, Sidney Powell, etc (already has 100,000 signatures)

Same video on YouTube (if they don't delete it!):  
<https://youtu.be/7x0gNBM25N0>

BREAKING: Sidney Powell's Case in Michigan Finally Makes It Onto the Supreme Court Docket! <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/.../breaking-sidney-powells-...>

Dec 18 Sidney Powell: Supreme Court Rejected Wisconsin, Arizona Cases; Docketed Georgia, Michigan Lawsuits  
<https://www.theepochtimes.com/sidney-powell-supreme-court-r...>

DNI Ratcliffe's Election Meddling Report (DELAYED) Not Ready for Friday  
<https://www.newsmax.com/.../election-me.../2020/12/16/id/1001922>

BREAKING: Trump campaign files a petition for writ of certiorari to the US. Supreme Court. "a common law writ issued by a superior court to one of inferior jurisdiction demanding the record of a particular case"  
<https://parler.com/post/e3d5dc4a6cc94815a0420dcda188f8ef>

Georgia to Conduct Statewide Check of Signatures on Mail-In Ballots: Raffensperger  
<https://www.theepochtimes.com/georgia-to-conduct-statewide-...>

REVEALED: 'Simple Math' Shows Biden Claims 13 MILLION More Votes Than There Were Eligible Voters Who Voted in 2020 Election  
<https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/.../breaking-huge-simple-mat...>

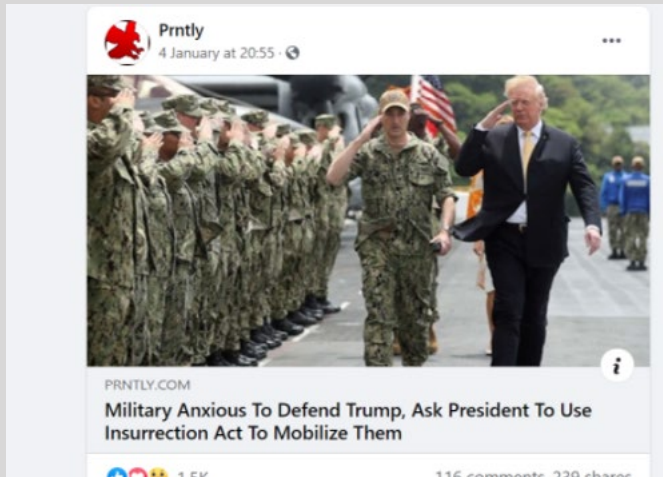
MUST-SEE VIDEO: Voter Fraud Occurred in Arizona - The State Certified Fraudulent Results (VIDEO)  
<https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/.../must-see-video-voter-fra...>

Breaking: Data Experts Claim Over 790k "Laundered" Votes "Injected" into System in Arizona  
[https://charliekirk.com/.../breaking-data-experts-claim-over-...](https://charliekirk.com/.../breaking-data-experts-claim-over-.../)

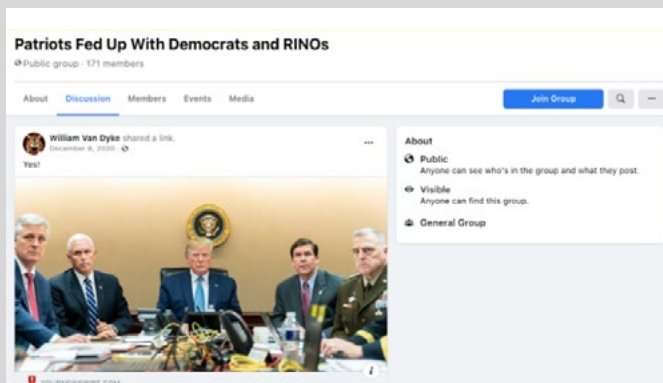
Recount Confirms Trump Won Michigan County That Reported Biden Win on Election Night  
<https://www.theepochtimes.com/recount-confirms-trump-won-mi...>

Facebook [post](#) linking to 12 articles about election fraud on websites deemed as untrustworthy by NewsGuard. Despite numerous fact-checking organizations debunking these claims, the post remains up without any fact-check labels.





Disinformation about the Insurrection Act spread by Prntly remains in circulation on Facebook without any fact-check labels.



Another example of a [disinformation](#)<sup>12</sup> website that remains in circulation on [Facebook](#) without any fact-check labels<sup>13</sup>.



CrowdTangle data shows that this [fake news article](#) about the Insurrection Act has a potential reach of 33,518 on Facebook, and still doesn't have a fact-check label.

On January 4, two days before the riots, a pro-Trump fake news website, Prntly.com, published [an article](#) stating that the US military was asking Trump to invoke the Insurrection Act. The logic behind this piece of fake news was that carrying out an insurrection would enable Trump to take control of the White House with the military's help. This idea began to circulate on various other [disinformation sites](#)<sup>9</sup> and [platforms](#)<sup>10</sup>. According to CrowdTangle data, these stories have a potential reach of at least 1.5 million people across platforms, **and continue to circulate on Facebook**<sup>11</sup> **without any fact-check labels**.

Facebook not effectively removing election disinformation websites, or at least flagging posts for false claims, is not the only "takedown loophole". Many Trump supporters sidestepped Facebook's moderation of "Stop the Steal" by changing their group names to things like "Stop the Fraud" and "Stop the Rigged Election". As mentioned previously, Facebook failed to remove these groups effectively, and despite claiming to have turned off group recommendations, research from [TheMarkup](#) shows that political group recommendations were still being shown to at least a quarter of Trump supporters.

Additionally, while posts using #StopTheSteal have been removed from the search feature, posts with the same type of "Stop the Steal" content are searchable through other similar trending hashtags like #DoNotCertify. SumOfUs found several #DoNotCertify posts which have remained visible and searchable on Facebook, even as some of them include the #StopTheSteal hashtag. Many of these posts call on "patriots" to be "prepared to die" for their country — insinuating that January 6 would be a violent insurrection.

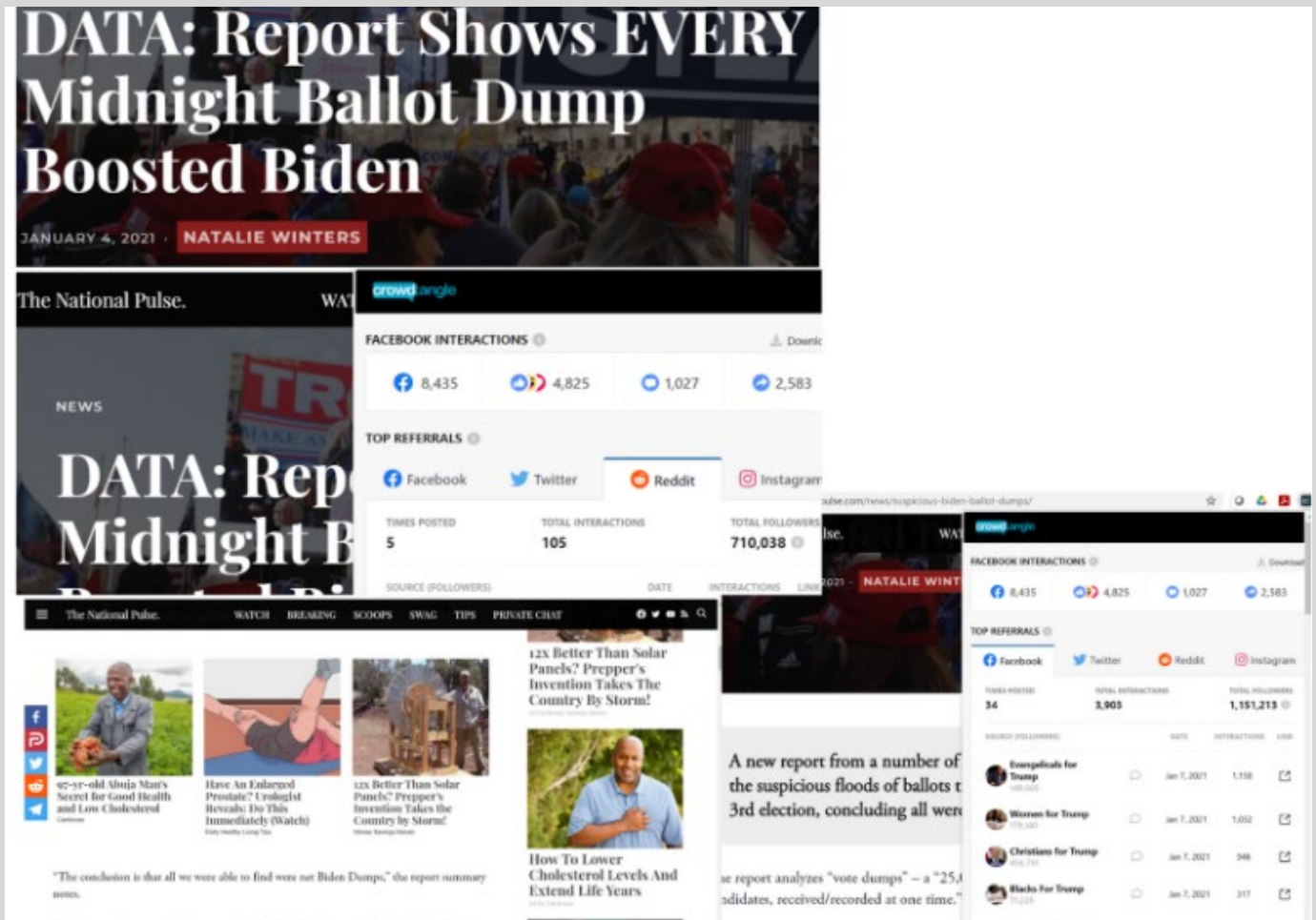
<sup>9</sup> Disinformation about the Insurrection Act on [bitchute.com](#). Archived link [here](#).

<sup>10</sup> Disinformation about the Insurrection Act on [Twitter](#). Archived link [here](#).

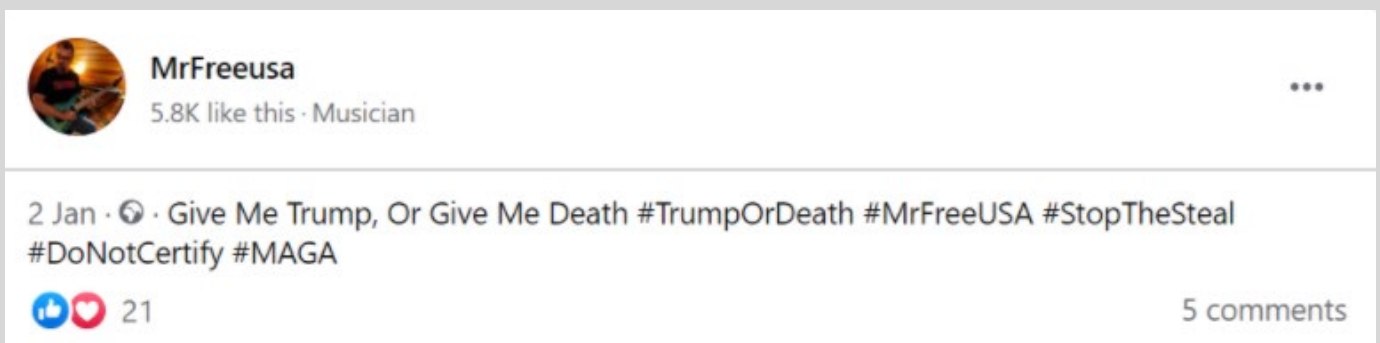
<sup>11</sup> Disinformation about the Insurrection by Prntly on [Facebook](#). Archived link [here](#).

<sup>12</sup> YourNewsWire.com disinformation [article](#), also archived [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> Example of YourNewsWire disinformation in circulation on [Facebook](#), also archived [here](#).



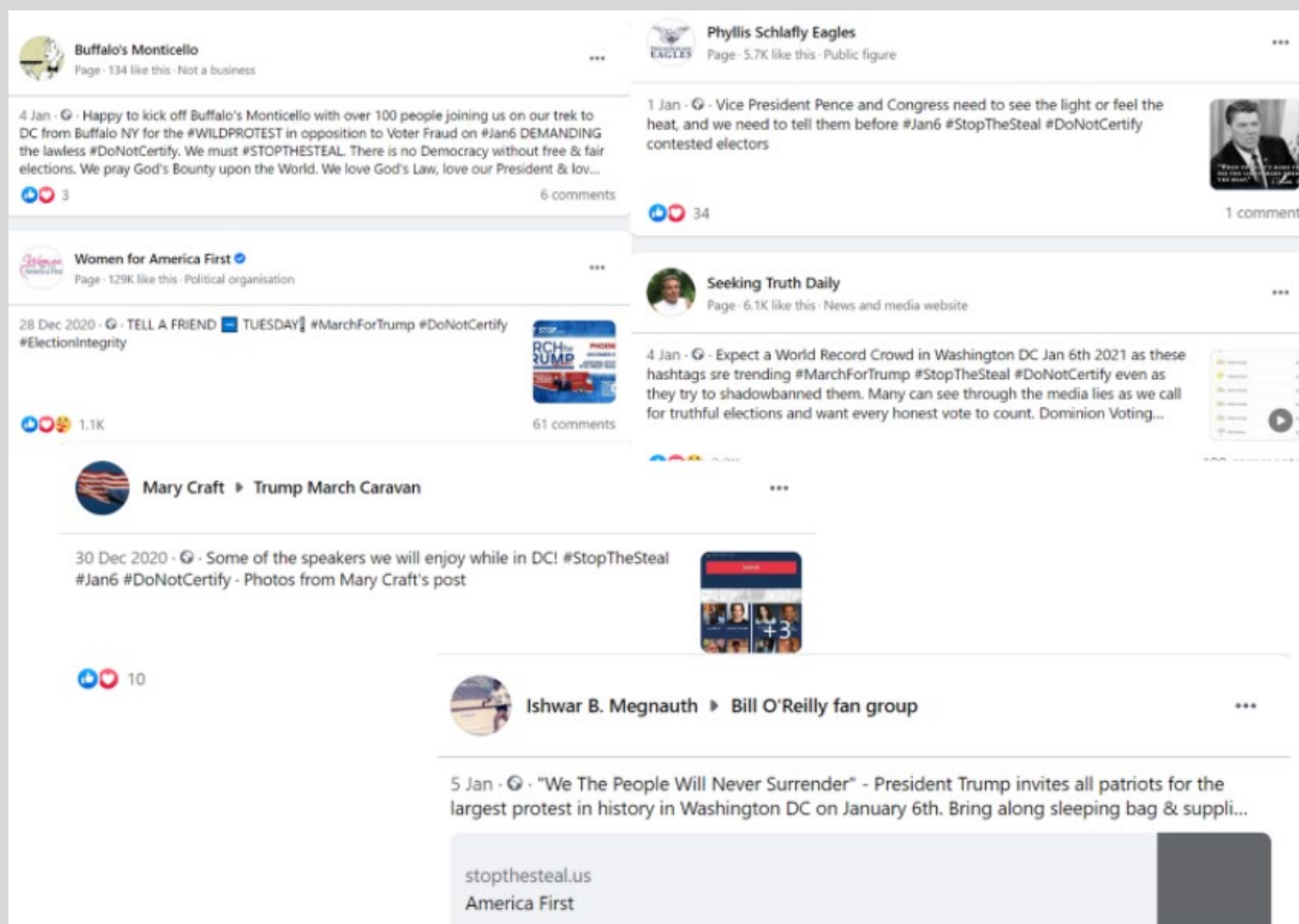
Another example of a disinformation site, [National Pulse](#)<sup>14</sup>, circulating election disinformation on Facebook. CrowdTangle data shows these articles potentially reached a network of 1.8 million people across platforms.



A [#StopTheSteal](#) [post](#)<sup>15</sup> remains searchable via [#DoNotCertify](#) as of February 3, 2021

<sup>14</sup> The National Pulse live link [here](#). Archived [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> Post made with live link [here](#). Archived [here](#).

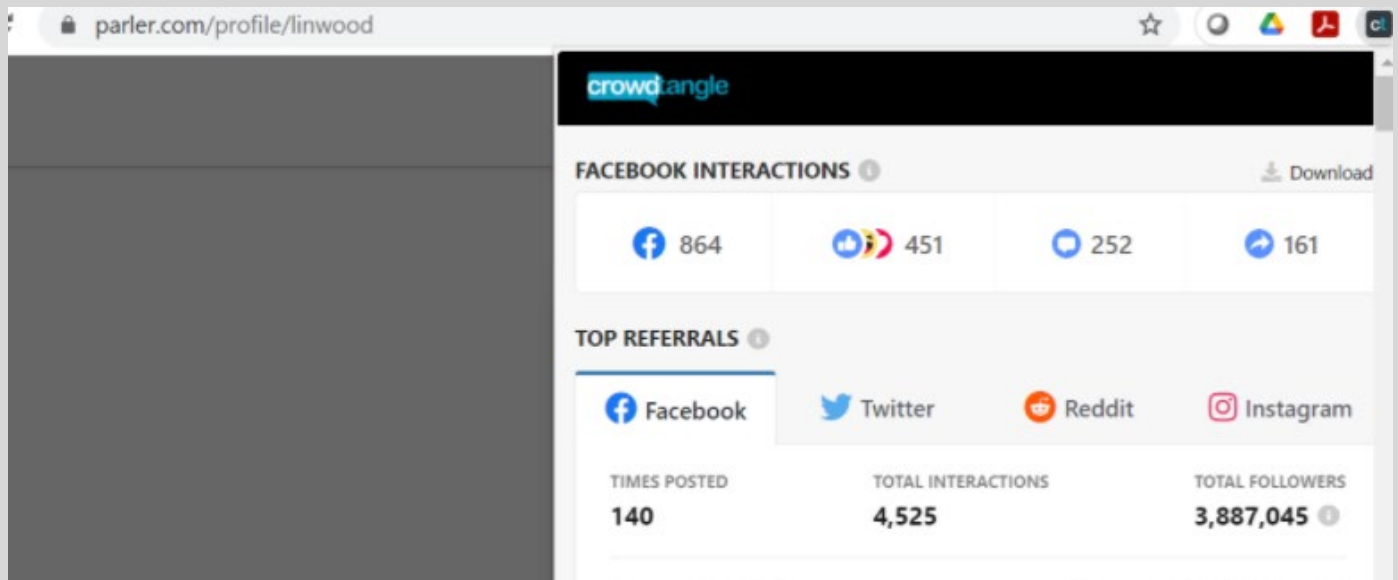


More examples of posts using the #StoptheSteal hashtag, which can still be found via search for other hashtags like #DoNotCertify, highlighting how Facebook's whack-a-mole approach to content moderation is failing.

After Facebook began to take action against Stop the Steal, Trump supporters started to flock to a different social media platform, Parler, and many began advocating for violence before and during the riot on January 6.

After a video showing the rioters surging on the Capitol, a Parler user with the username 'Linwood' [responded](#) with, "They let them in. Get the firing squads ready. Pence goes FIRST." CrowdTangle data shows that Linwood's Parler account at the time had a reach of 3,887,045 on Facebook alone.





*Parler user Linwood called for violence on the morning of January 6, and had a potential reach of nearly 4 million on Facebook*

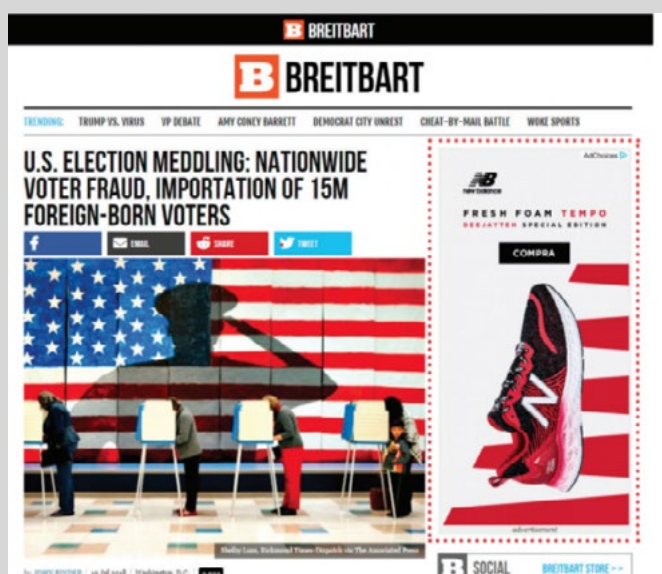
# Not just a social media problem — how Google and Amazon are complicit

In addition to Facebook, “Ad Tech” platforms like Google and Amazon continue to fuel the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories by allowing websites to monetize their content through advertisements. The [Global Disinformation Index](#) has documented hundreds of [examples](#) of unsuspecting brands appearing next to content promoting covid conspiracies, election fraud, and riot disinformation.

Ads for brands like New Balance, Warby Parker, Bloomberg, and Reuters can be seen on websites peddling election disinformation.

SumOfUs and allies have raised this issue with Google on multiple occasions, and even proposed a short-term fix to allow advertisers to opt out of advertising on websites that have been flagged for disinformation by independent, non-partisan groups — but Google continues to allow both these websites and itself to profit off harmful content that resulted in a violent insurrection on the Capitol.

It is estimated that Google similarly earned [\\$19 million](#) from Covid disinformation, and nearly 200 sites spreading electoral disinformation make over [\\$1 million in ad revenue](#) each month. Google accounts for 71 percent of all advertising dollars placed on the 200 disinformation sites.



*New Balance ads next to election disinformation*

Both Google and Amazon have joined dozens of corporations in suspending donations to lawmakers who voted against President Biden’s certification, yet both ad tech platforms continue to fuel and profit off the very disinformation they claim to be fighting against.

## The last word

Donald Trump launched and sustained a movement that resulted in a violent insurrection. He did this with a steady stream of disinformation that reached millions of people online, and amplified the calls of others doing the same.

However, this was facilitated and indeed made possible in its entirety by tech companies and their failure to properly moderate their platforms as well as their algorithmic amplification of extreme content to millions of people.

Facebook, one of the largest and most powerful companies in the world, is still not able to place fact-check labels on blatant election disinformation receiving high engagement from users — even after four years of this kind

of material being posted by Trump and his supporters. While it managed to remove a large “Stop the Steal” group, it failed to prevent related groups from emerging, and failed to effectively turn off political group recommendations despite publicly claiming to do so. And ad tech platforms like Google and Amazon are directly complicit by profiting from, and funding this harmful content.

Facebook, Twitter, Google, Amazon, and other platforms should be investigated and held to account for their role in propagating disinformation and calls to violence that culminated in the violent attack on the US Capitol on January 6. The failure to do so will ensure that the tech world learns nothing from its complicity and mistakes.