

# POLITICAL ACTIVISM ON SOCIAL MEDIA

## Addressing Political Ads, Posts and Bans

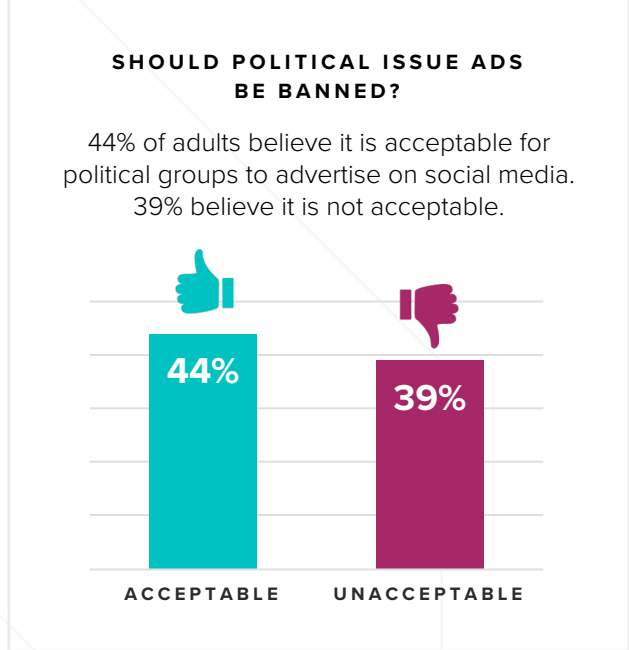
### Research Overview

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat have become ubiquitous, and there's no escaping their use for political communications. Research shows that 24% of Americans report reading social media ads promoting political or social issues, and 22% have read ads promoting candidates or legislation. In addition, 39% say they often see political posts from those they follow on social media and 14% often write their own political posts.

As the presidential election season heats up in 2020, so has the debate over the suitability of paid political posts on social media. **Americans are divided on the propriety of political advertising:**

- Forty-four percent (44%) of Americans believe it is acceptable for political groups to advertise on social media, while 39% believe it is not acceptable.
- Users of an individual social media platform are more likely than the general public to call for a ban of advertising on political or social issues.
- Support for and against banning political ads follows a consistent pattern whether the ads promote a candidate, specific legislation, or a social or political cause.

**Trust in political communication depends on the source.** While only 2% of Americans say they trust information in a political ad “a lot” and 16% trust it “some,” those numbers are still higher than the trust awarded to unpaid posts made by super PACs. (Two



percent trust super PAC posts “a lot” and 7% trust them “some.”)

Information from friends and family on social media is trusted by 53% of the public, while information from news outlets on social media is trusted by 34%. Political campaigns themselves are considered less trustworthy sources for unpaid posts, with only 3% trusting them “a lot” and 16% trusting them “some.”

**Social media posts on politics often have impact.** One out of five Americans (20%) say they have changed their opinion on a political issue after seeing or reading a post. In addition, many more people are being exposed to major political and social movements through those they follow on social media. Recent movements that received the most

attention include gun control (40% read posts), gun rights (39%), Impeach Trump (39%), Make America Great Again (33%) and Black Lives Matter (32%).

Americans also report extremely high levels of familiarity with these and other political and social movements. While a majority believe that social media activism has not changed their opinions, it's undeniable that social media has greatly increased public awareness of issues.

### Should Political Ads Be Banned?

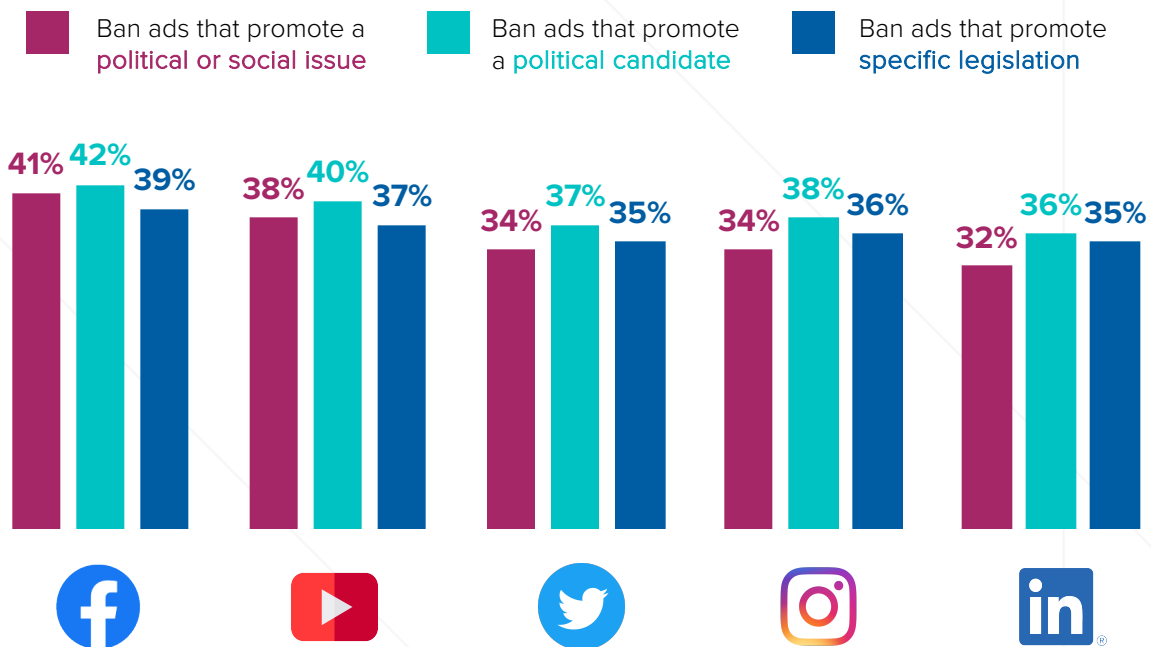
Forty-four percent (44%) of Americans believe it is acceptable for political groups to advertise on social media; 39% believe it is not acceptable. Younger people are more likely to support this type of advertising: 56% of Gen Z (age 18-22), for example, find it acceptable while only 34% of Boomers (age 55-73) agree.

When asked about the wisdom of banning political ads on each social media platform, more people than not are in favor of political ad bans, but neither side of this issue crosses the 50% support threshold. That's because many respondents either aren't familiar with a given platform or just don't have an opinion. For example, 38% believe that YouTube should "definitely" or "probably" ban political ads promoting political or social issues, 33% disagree and 29% are unsure. In the case of Facebook, 41% are pro-ban, 32% are anti-ban and 27% are unsure.

Users of individual social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube are more likely than the general public to approve of a ban of advertising on political or social issues.

Public desire to ban political ads is consistent whether the ads support a candidate, specific legislation, or a social or political cause.

HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT BANNING POLITICAL ADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



## Do Political Ads And Posts Make A Difference?

Poll results reveal why political advertising is popular with advertisers — nearly one in four Americans read them either somewhat or very often. Twenty-four percent (24%) read ads promoting political or social issues often, compared to 22% who often read ads promoting candidates or specific legislation. Younger (age 18-29), Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than the general public to say they frequently read ads promoting political or social issues on social media.

Meanwhile, 45% of social media users, regardless of the platform, report they see or read political posts from those they follow at least somewhat often. And, while one in five people (20%) report they have changed their minds about an issue after reading a political post, among Gen Z users, that percentage is more than one in three people (34%).

Many individuals are now making their own political posts as well. Fifty-four percent (54%) of liberals report posting on social media about political issues at least occasionally compared to 40% of conservatives and 39% of moderates.

Americans across the political spectrum believe their social media posts make a difference. Altogether, 63% feel their posts have at least a small impact on their own followers.

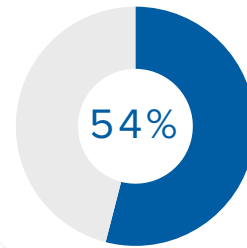
Perceived impact differs significantly by age. Seventy-two percent (72%) of 18-29-year-olds believe their posts make at least a small impact, compared to 53% of seniors (65+).

## Policy Positions Make A Difference In Political Ad Favorability

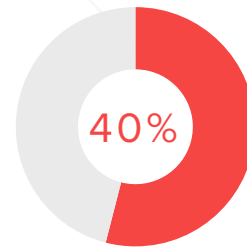
There are noticeable differences in what Americans consider acceptable ad topics on social media from political groups promoting their policy positions. Education had the highest rating with 48% of Americans saying this is an acceptable ad topic. Healthcare and the economy were right behind with 46% each. The least acceptable policy ad topics from political groups were foreign affairs at 36% acceptable and LGBTQ issues at just 35% acceptable.

### WHO POSTS ABOUT POLITICS?

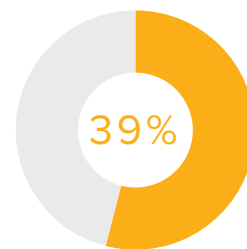
54% of liberals post about politics on social media at least occasionally compared to 40% of conservatives and 39% of moderates.



LIBERALS



CONSERVATIVES



MODERATES

Across the board, Democrats were more open to policy ads from political groups. The widest variations occurred with LGBTQ issues, acceptable to 46% of Democrats and 28% of Republicans; women's rights, acceptable to 55% of Democrats and 38% of Republicans; and climate change, acceptable to 54% of Democrats and 37% of Republicans.

## Trust In Social Media Posts

Americans are most likely to trust social media posts from family and friends. Fifteen percent (15%) trust posts from family and friends “a lot,” and an additional 38% are at least somewhat trusting of the posts they see from family and friends. Only 34% trust social media posts from the news media, 19% trust posts from political campaigns and 9% trust posts from super PACs. Gen Z is the only generation with a net positive level of trust in posts from news outlets on social media (38% trust v. 29% don’t trust).

Most people are skeptical consumers of political advertising on social media. Only 2% say they trust information in a political ad “a lot” and only 16% trust it “some.”

The poll also explored whether the public believes individual social media platforms are politically biased. No significant bias toward one party or the other was found but 30% of the public believe Facebook is biased toward either Democrats (18%) or Republicans (12%), and 22% believe Twitter is biased toward either Democrats (13%) or Republicans (9%).

## “Guns” And “Trump” Are Most Recognized Movements

Many Americans have been exposed to major political and social movements through social media. Recent movements receiving attention include gun control (40% of Americans read posts on this topic), gun rights (39%), Impeach Trump (39%), Make America Great Again (33%) and Black Lives Matter (32%).

Even those who did not read a post about these movements are familiar with many of them. Seventy-two percent (72%) were familiar with the gun control movement while 70% were aware of campaigns to protect gun rights. Similarly, 76% were familiar with the

movement to impeach President Trump and 70% were aware of the Make America Great Again movement. Seventy-one percent (71%) were familiar with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Recall for particular movements varied by generation. While Boomers are most familiar with the Impeach Trump movement (80%), Gen Zers are most familiar with the gun control movement (78%).

## Facebook And YouTube Dominate Social Media Usage

Facebook and YouTube are the most widely used social media platforms tested in this study, with half of U.S. adults reporting they use Facebook multiple times a day. More than one third (35%) report using YouTube multiple times a day.

Social media usage differs greatly by generation:

- Facebook’s high usage patterns are propped up by Millennials (age 23-38) and Gen X (age 39-54) with 60% of Millennials reporting using Facebook multiple times a day, and 58% of Gen Xers reporting the same usage pattern.
- Just one-third (32%) of Gen Z report using Facebook multiple time a day.
- YouTube’s high usage is bolstered by Gen Z and Millennials with 66% of Gen Zers and 56% of Millennials reporting they use YouTube multiple times a day. Just 14% of Boomers report the same level of enthusiasm for YouTube.
- Generational differences are most pronounced on Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok. For those platforms, Gen Z far outpaces other demographic groups.

**Methodology:** This poll was conducted from December 3-7, 2019, among a national sample of 2,200 U.S. adults. The interviews were conducted online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of U.S. adults based on age, race/ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of +/- 2%.