

NASS 2020 IDEAS Award

VoteSure: A Public Education Campaign Encouraging Voters to be Vigilant of Election Misinformation

California Secretary of State's Office

Subject Area of Nomination: Cybersecurity

Cyber threats to our elections are the new normal. In 2016, federal intelligence officials were unanimous in their conclusion that foreign actors interfered in the U.S. Presidential Election. In response, with the support of California's Governor and Legislature, the California Secretary of State's office developed innovative safeguards, including a public education campaign, to secure our elections. Launched in October 2018, VoteSure counteracted misinformation, provided public education resources, and bolstered confidence in our elections. VoteSure was the first-of-its-kind public education initiative launched by a Secretary of State's office.

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VoteSure: A Public Education Campaign Encouraging Voters to be Vigilant of Election Misinformation

Background

For the first time in the history of California, the Legislature and Governor approved a public education and outreach budget for the California Secretary of State's office, specifically designated for communicating accurate election information to California voters. This came at a critical time when federal intelligence agencies were unanimous in their assessment that foreign governments targeted California and other states with sophisticated misinformation campaigns on social media that were confusing to voters.

This funding approved in fiscal year 2018-2019 enabled the California Secretary of State's office to employ additional tools and resources necessary to identify misinformation and create content to provide voters, particularly in hard-to-reach communities, access to information about California Secretary of State programs via verified websites. The target population, of these educational campaigns, was estimated at 19.4 million at the last report of registration.

Our office identified email communication with California voters as one of the primary areas where we could be effective in addressing misinformation as well as providing proactive accurate, reliable and verified information. As such, we secured a contract with Granicus to ensure that we had the ability to email and distribute, as well as text message, all registered voters in California that provided email addresses in their voter registration forms. While not all registered voters provide emails and/or phone numbers, a vast majority do.

Having the ability to email voters statewide should a major incident occur is essential to our responsibility as the state's chief elections office. For example, if there is a coordinated misinformation campaign that targets a county or precinct, we are now able to use an email management system to communicate accurate information to voters.

In addition to these outreach and educational tools, the Offices of Election Cybersecurity and Enterprise Risk Management were created to develop strategies for communicating elections information and mitigating potential risks to the California Secretary of State security infrastructure.

The Office of Election Cybersecurity created VoteSure, which was a first-of-its-kind public education initiative to promote trusted, accurate, and official sources of election information on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The goal of VoteSure was to increase voter awareness about election misinformation online and provide official, trusted election resources.

The Office of Election Cybersecurity utilized Facebook, Instagram and Twitter's software to communicate accurate information to voters across the state, which increased and enhanced the outreach and civic engagement by the Secretary of State's office ahead of Election 2018. The software and analytics provided by these social media channels enabled the Secretary of State's office to provide real-time reports and data, which helped fine tune our target messaging more appropriately for our communication and outreach efforts.

Election security continues to be a top priority for the Secretary of State's office, and we are continuing to work around the clock to protect the integrity of our systems ahead of Election 2020 and to combat misinformation through our Office of Election Cybersecurity.

The Campaign: VoteSure

Public Education:

The VoteSure campaign included paid advertisements on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. These paid advertisements included graphics about misinformation and official Election Day information. A series of videos encouraged voters to report misinformation at cybersecurity.sos.ca.gov and to visit VoteSure.sos.ca.gov to obtain official election information straight from the source. The new VoteSure.sos.ca.gov portal was created to inform the public about efforts being taken to protect elections. It included links to help voters look up their voter registration status, find their polling place and early voting opportunities, and learn about their rights as voters.

On Election Day, November 6, 2018, the #VoteSure hashtag was included alongside several informational graphics that encouraged early voting and a link to the Voter Bill of Rights on Facebook and Twitter.

Statewide Outreach:

As part of the VoteSure initiative, around 6 million voters who included an email address with their voter registration received an email communication with election information directly from the California Secretary of State's office. This electronic campaign was the first time the California Secretary of State's office directly emailed registered voters. Due to the very positive feedback, the California Secretary of State's office plans on making this a standard method for disseminating information.

Monitoring and Countering Misinformation:

The Office of Election Cybersecurity worked with state, local, and federal agencies to share information about cyber threats, develop emergency preparedness plans, and recommend ways to protect election infrastructure. This included piloting a new social media monitoring effort in the days leading up to and on Election Day. Posts spreading false information such as "vote online," "provisional ballots don't count," or "Democrats vote on 7/6 and Republicans vote on 7/7," were reported to officials at Facebook and Twitter.

Voters could also participate with monitoring by reporting suspicious content or election misinformation found on social media directly to a VoteSure email inbox. These posts would be reviewed by the Office of Election Cybersecurity and in most cases reported to the social media company so they could be removed.

Results

In total, the VoteSure initiative targeted all Californians over the age of 18 and made 46 million impressions on Facebook and Twitter. Using the election portal, VoteSure.sos.ca.gov, voters were able to easily verify their registration status, find their polling place or report election misinformation.

The Office of Election Cybersecurity discovered nearly 300 erroneous or misleading social media posts that were identified and forwarded to Facebook and Twitter to review and 98 percent of those posts were

promptly removed for violating the respective social media company's community standards.

Voters turned out to the polls on Election Day in record numbers. Approximately 12 million Californians cast their ballot on November 6, 2018. That's a 60 percent turnout— the highest level of participation in a midterm election since 1982.

Supporting Documents: Social Media Graphics and Posts



CA SOS Vote @CASOSvote Follow

If you're in line by 8:00 pm when the polls close, **STAY IN LINE**. Poll workers are required to stay until everyone that is in line at 8:00 pm has the chance to cast their ballot! Check out the Voter Bill of Rights for more info: sos.ca.gov/elections/vote... #VoteCalifornia #VoteSure

VOTER BILL OF RIGHTS
www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-bill-rights
 #VoteCalifornia

7:30 PM - 6 Nov 2018

105 Retweets 94 Likes

1 Like 105 Retweets 94 Likes

California Secretary of State November 2, 2018

MYTH: If I leave something blank on my ballot, my ballot won't be counted. WRONG! The truth is, that if a voter doesn't make a choice for a particular contest, no vote is recorded for that contest only. The rest of the ballot counts. Get the facts. #VoteCalifornia #VoteSure

#VoteSure #VoteCalifornia

VoteSure
VoteSure.sos.ca.gov
 A public service announcement brought to you by the California Secretary of State.

60 Likes 3 Comments 73 Shares

Like Comment Share

Supporting Documents: VoteSure Email and Website



**Tuesday
November 6, 2018**

Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day!

OFFICIAL ELECTION EMAIL FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE

Dear California Voter,

Tuesday, November 6, 2018, is the General Election in California. Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. This email includes important and official voter resources from the California Secretary of State to prepare you to cast your ballot this election.

Voter Information Guide Online
To research statewide propositions and candidates, visit: VoterGuide.sos.ca.gov

Check Your Voter Registration Status
Registered voters can check their voter registration status and voter preferences using the "My Voter Status" tool at VoterStatus.sos.ca.gov

Find Your Polling Place or Vote Center on Election Day
Registered voters can look up their polling place or vote center at <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place/>

Early Voting Locations
Any registered voter can visit their county elections office in person to drop off their vote-by-mail ballot or request to vote a vote-by-mail ballot on or before Election Day. To find early voting or ballot drop-off locations in your county, visit: CaEarlyVoting.sos.ca.gov

Voters with Disabilities
County Voter Information Guides describe how persons with disabilities can vote privately and independently. For more information, visit: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/voters-disabilities/>

Quick Guide to Propositions
Review the Secretary of State's official "Quick Guide to Propositions" tool at <http://quickguidetoprops.sos.ca.gov/propositions/2018-11-06>

Voter's Choice Act - Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo Counties
All registered voters in Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo counties receive their ballots in the mail before the election. Voters can vote-by-mail, drop off their ballots at a designated county dropbox, or vote in-person at a vote center. Vote centers are open for 11 days, up to and including, Election Day. To learn more, visit: VotersChoice.sos.ca.gov

Download the Vote California Smart Phone App
Get connected with important election information for the November 6, 2018 General Election. Use it to check your voter status, find your polling place or review our Quick Guide to Propositions. Search "Vote California" in the Apple Store or on Google Play.
For more information visit: sos.ca.gov/elections/

California Secretary of State | 1500 11th Street, Sacramento, California 95814
www.sos.ca.gov

OFFICIAL ELECTION EMAIL FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE
EOS.CA.GOV








You received this email because you provided your email address when you registered to vote.



Home » Elections and Voter Information

VoteSure

Voting Resources

 Check Voter Status	 Find My Polling Place	 Early Voting Information	 Voting in California
 Vote By Mail	 Voter Information Guide	 Voter Bill of Rights	 Frequently Asked Questions
 March 3, 2020 Election Information	 Contact Your Election Official	 Election Cybersecurity	 Report Misinformation

Informational Videos



VoteSure California- 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOWhM_qYBo4



VoteSure California- 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51t04qr1Yiq>