Election Communications in the Disinformation Era

Megan Gilbertson | Communications Director | Maricopa County Elections Department
Fowl play? Social media users falsely claim Arizona ballots were destroyed in chicken farm fire

Posts falsely claim Arizona county ‘lost’ nearly 300K Election Day votes

Facebook posts: “The Arizona forensic audit found over 17,000 duplicates of votes.”

PolitiFact rating: False

Here’s why: After five months, Florida-based firm Cyber Ninjas released results from its GOP-backed audit of ballots in Maricopa County, Ariz., and found no significant differences from the official vote count.

Nevertheless, in a presentation before the Arizona State Senate, officials involved with the audit put forth a wide range of unproven allegations about the election. Some of these allegations gave rise to claims on social media, which were presented without context as evidence that the 2020 election was rigged against Donald Trump.

Arizona Republicans hunt for bamboo-laced China ballots in 2020 ‘audit’ effort

Among the conspiracy theories driving the exercise in Maricopa county is one that suggests 40,000 ballots were flown in from Asia

All votes counted in Maricopa County, despite online claims

Fact-check: Tucker Carlson wrong about people not being able to vote in Arizona’s Maricopa County

Tucker Carlson stated on Nov. 8, 2022, in election night coverage on Fox News:

“Electronic voting machines didn’t allow people to vote” in Maricopa County, Arizona.
Maricopa County Voters

- **Democrats**: 733,968 voters | 29.80%
- **Republicans**: 20,563 voters | 8.00%
- **Libertarians**: 20,563 voters | 0.80%
- **Independents**: 34.80% | 733,968 voters

January 31, 2023 Maricopa County Active Voters | Maricopa County Recorder’s Office
Oversight of Elections in Maricopa County

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**
- 5-member elected board
- Responsible for 50 county departments, including elections
- Oversees in-person voting and tabulation

**COUNTY RECORDER**
- Countywide elected official
- Responsible for voter registration, early voting, and provisional voting
- Shares oversight of elections with the Board of Supervisors

**ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT**
- Oversees the facilitation of elections under the direction of the elected offices
- ~60 full-time staff and 3,000 temporary staff
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Elections Command Center

**ONE UNIFIED VOICE**

- Unified command center modeled after emergency management Joint Information Centers
- Allow for quick triaging of media requests
- Quicker response times
- Pre-bunking mis-, dis-, and mal-information
- Immediate starting point for crisis communications
By the Numbers

16 press conferences

550+ Media inquiries triaged between Sept. 26 & Nov. 12 leading to more than 600+ articles

700+ Social media posts

84K Views of the canvass board meeting
@MaricopaCounty vs @MaricopaVote

Maricopa County @maricopacounty - Nov 8, 2022
Any ballots placed into the door 3 slot will be tabulated securely at the downtown election center under watch of the political parties.

Find locations & see estimated wait times at Locations.Maricopa.Vote

https://twitter.com/maricopacounty/status/1590025502827634688

Bill Gates @billgatesaz - Nov 8, 2022
If you're at a polling place experiencing an issue with a tabulator, you have three options & your vote will be counted in each. 1) stay where you are and wait for tabulator to come online 2) drop your ballot in the secure slot (door 3) on tabulator 3) go to a nearby vote center

https://twitter.com/billgatesaz/status/1589999051298439170

Maricopa County @MaricopaVote
Here is a message from Chairman Bill Gates and Recorder Stephen Richer with an update for @maricopacounty voters on Election Day.

https://twitter.com/MaricopaVote/status/1590009384377384961

Maricopa County Elections Department @MaricopaVote
Advice for Voters: If a tabulator is not working at a site, you can still vote! You have the option to cast your ballot and place it into the secure ballot box. The poll workers on site at the voting location are best equipped to help you ensure your ballot cast.

https://twitter.com/MaricopaVote/status/1590087915992125440

https://twitter.com/MaricopaVote/status/1589999051298439170
Debunking Misinfo.

@MaricopaCounty vs @MaricopaVote

BOMBSHELL: We've noticed that election misinformation seems to spread more widely when there's incendiary language & out-of-context graphics, pictures, or videos. So we are going to EXPOSE the UNBELIEVABLE facts as election workers are CAUGHT IN THE ACT following the law.

2:54 PM - Nov 18, 2022

5,601 Retweets 684 Quote Tweets 22.4K Likes

https://twitter.com/maricopacounty/status/1593724333540655104

The signature verification claim that 40K ballots were illegally counted because of signature mismatches is false. We compare signatures to all exemplars on file, not just 1.

3:27 PM - Feb 2, 2023 - 77.8K Views

https://twitter.com/MaricopaVote/status/1621274253810352128
@MaricopaCounty vs @MaricopaVote

Voters: All legal votes will be counted. Your vote will count equally whether it is reported first, last, or somewhere in between. Thank you for participating.

1:26 PM - Nov 12, 2022

6,863 Retweets 1,403 Quote Tweets 44.2K Likes

Maricopa County
@maricopacounty

SOCIAL MEDIA BOTS: Your disapproval is duly noted but your upvotes and retweets will not be part of this year’s totals. This is not meant as an affront to your robot overlords, it’s just not allowed for in Arizona law.

https://twitter.com/maricopacounty/status/1591527776921976832

Maricopa County Elections Depart...

The last day for voters to cure signature issues & have their ballot counted is Wed at 5 p.m. Our team continues to call voters to help cure the signature & have the voter’s ballot counted. We also text, email and have sent a letter! Check your status at BeBallotReady.Vote.

https://twitter.com/MaricopaVote/status/159189308238460204

Maricopa County and 2 others

Votantes, el miércoles a las 5 p.m. es el último día para resolver problemas con su firma y que su voto sea contado. Nuestro equipo continuará llamado votantes para verificar firmas. También enviaremos texto, correo electrónico y carta por correo. Verifique estado: TengaBoletaLista.Voto

https://twitter.com/MaricopaVote/status/159189308238460204