**UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA**

*October 27, 2020*
*2020 Presidential Election Survey, Facebook*

***Summary***: Researchers at the University of South Florida conducted a statewide survey of 600 Floridians to measure their use of Facebook to engage with the Presidential election, as well as their attitudes regarding the political information they encounter online.  The survey included a representative sample of the state's residents, fielded between October 10th and 17th.  Topline results are reported below with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error +/- 4.

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**Despite Recent Controversies, Floridians Rely Heavily on Facebook to Stay Informed About the Election.**  More than half of Floridians (58%) say that they have relied on Facebook at least a "A Little" to stay informed about the Presidential election, while nearly a third (31%) say they have relied on it "A Lot". More than half say that they collect information about the election on Facebook at least "Once a Week", while just under a quarter (22%) do so "Every Day".

**Despite Their Reliance on Social Media, Most Don't Trust the Information They Encounter There.** Nearly two-thirds of Floridians (63%) say that they are "Not Very Confident" (33%) or "Not at All Confident" (30%) in the accuracy of the political information that they encounter on Facebook.  Only 13% indicated that they are "Very Confident" in this regard.

**When it Comes to Politics, Floridians Describe Social Media as "One-Sided", "Frustrating", "Hateful", and "Offensive".**  When asked how they would describe the political conversations they've encountered on social media, Floridians painted a decidedly negative picture.  The most commonly selected adjectives included "One-sided" (41%), "Frustrating" (40%), "Hateful" (37%), and "Offensive" (35%).  In contrast, 30% said "Informative", while less than 20% said "Thoughtful" or "Constructive".

**Many Floridians Have "Lost Friends" Because of the Election.**  In the past 3 months, more than a quarter of Floridians (29%) have "Unfriended" or "Unfollowed" someone on Facebook because of their political posts.  Another 25% have utilized Facebook's "Snooze" feature to temporarily block someone over their political posts.

**Some Partisan Differences.**  Republicans indicated heavier reliance on Facebook than Democrats and Independents (42%, compared to 29% and 19% respectively).  Republicans were also more likely to report being "Very Confident" in the political information they encounter on Facebook (18.6%, compared to 10.8% and 9.3% among Democrats and Independents).  Additionally, Republicans were slightly more likely to have "Unfriended" or "Unfollowed" someone because of political posts in the past 3 months, though only by a small margin (33% compared to 27% of Democrats).

**Significant Differences in Attitudes and Behaviors by Age.**  Respondents between the ages of 25 and 54 reported a heavier reliance on Facebook to say informed about the election (with 47% saying that they relied on the social networking site "A Lot") compared to only 20% of those between 55 and 64, and 11% of those over 65.  Younger respondents were also much more likely to trust the accuracy of the political information they encounter on Facebook, as well as more likely to have "Unfriended" or "Unfollowed" someone over political posts.  More than a third of those under the age of 54 reported "Unfriending" or "Unfollowing" someone over politics in the past three months, compared to less than 20% of those over the age of 55.

## Summary of Responses

*Which of the following words would you use to describe the political discussions that you've encountered on social media this election season? (Please select all that apply).*

| | Frequency | Percent[†] |
|---|---|---|
| One-Sided | 206 | 40.6 |
| Frustrating | 204 | 40.2 |
| Hateful | 187 | 36.8 |
| Offensive | 177 | 34.8 |
| Angry | 174 | 34.3 |
| Informative | 154 | 30.3 |
| Stressful | 148 | 29.1 |
| Thoughtful | 100 | 19.7 |
| Motivating | 95 | 18.7 |
| Constructive | 92 | 18.1 |

[†]*Respondents were allowed multiple selections, so percentages do not total to 100%.*
*N=508*

*In the past 3 months, have you done any of the following on Facebook?*

| | Frequency (Yes) | Percentage (Yes) |
|---|---|---|
| "Unfriended" or "Unfollowed" someone because of their political posts | 147 | 28.9 |
| Used the "Snooze" feature to temporarily block someone because of their political posts | 125 | 24.7 |

*N=508*

*How much have you relied on Facebook to stay informed about the Presidential race?*

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| A Great Deal | 57 | 11.2 |
| A Lot | 101 | 19.9 |
| A Little | 136 | 26.8 |
| Not at All | 214 | 42.1 |

*N=508*

*On average, how often do you collect information about the Presidential election on Facebook?*

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Every Day | 112 | 22.1 |
| A Few Days a Week | 112 | 22.2 |
| Once a Week | 64 | 12.6 |
| Less Often | 219 | 43.2 |

*N = 507*

*How confident are you in the accuracy of the political information that you encounter on Facebook?*

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Very Confident | 65 | 12.8 |
| Somewhat Confident | 125 | 24.6 |
| Not Very Confident | 166 | 32.7 |
| Not at All Confident | 152 | 29.9 |

*N=508*

***In the past 3 months, have you done any of the following on Facebook?***

|  | Frequency (Yes) | Percent (Yes) |
|---|---|---|
| "Liked" a post by a political candidate | 213 | 42.0 |
| Posted your own thoughts on the Presidential election | 200 | 39.4 |
| "Liked" a campaign's official webpage | 192 | 37.9 |
| Clicked a link to fill out a political survey | 146 | 28.8 |
| Clicked a link to sign a political petition | 118 | 23.2 |
| Advocated for a candidate or referendum | 90 | 17.8 |
| Joined a political/campaign group | 81 | 16.0 |
| Participated in a Debate "Watch Party" | 78 | 15.4 |

*N=505 – 508*

**Partisan Differences**

*Party Affiliation of Registered Voters in Sample*

|  | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Democrats | 255 | 45.8 |
| Independents | 105 | 18.9 |
| Republicans | 196 | 35.2 |

*N=557*

*Reliance on Facebook BY Party ID.*

Reported as percentage of column totals

|  | Democrats | Independents | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| A Great Deal | 9.0 | 7.0 | 16.9 |
| A Lot | 19.8 | 11.6 | 25.4 |
| A Little | 30.2 | 36.0 | 16.9 |
| Not at All | 41.0 | 45.3 | 40.7 |

*N = 475*

*Confidence in Political Information on Facebook BY Party ID.*

Reported as percentage of column totals

|  | Democrats | Independents | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Very Confident | 10.8 | 9.3 | 18.6 |
| Somewhat Confident | 27.4 | 17.4 | 23.2 |
| Not Very Confident | 35.8 | 37.2 | 26.0 |
| Not at All Confident | 25.9 | 36.0 | 32.2 |

*N = 475*

*"Unfriending" and "Unfollowing" BY Party ID.*

Reported as percentage of column totals

|  | Democrats | Independents | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 27.4 | 20.9 | 33.3 |
| No | 72.6 | 79.1 | 66.7 |

*N=475*

## Generational Differences

*Reliance on Facebook BY Age*

Reported as percentage of column totals

|  | 18-24 | 25-54 | 55-64 | 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Great Deal | 6.4 | 17.9 | 4.3 | 4.2 |
| A Lot | 12.8 | 29.1 | 15.2 | 6.8 |
| A Little | 48.9 | 25.1 | 28.3 | 20.3 |
| Not at All | 31.9 | 27.9 | 52.2 | 68.6 |

*Confidence in Political Information on Facebook BY Age*

Reported as percentage of column totals

|  | 18-24 | 25-54 | 55-64 | 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very Confident | 6.4 | 22.3 | 3.3 | 2.5 |
| Somewhat Confident | 27.7 | 29.9 | 25.0 | 11.9 |
| Not Very Confident | 46.8 | 25.9 | 37.0 | 38.1 |
| Not at All Confident | 19.1 | 21.9 | 34.8 | 47.5 |

***"Unfriending" and "Unfollowing" BY Party ID.***

*Reported as percentage of column totals*

|  | **18-24** | **25-54** | **55-64** | **65+** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 38.3 | 34.3 | 17.4 | 22.9 |
| No | 61.7 | 65.7 | 82.6 | 77.1 |

**Survey Information**

For this survey, 600 residents of Florida were surveyed via an online web-panel using Prodege MR, an industry leading market research provider. The survey was fielded from October 10th through October 17th, and the results are reported with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of +/-4.

Survey respondents were selected via a stratified, quota sampling approach in order to ensure a representative sample of Florida's population. Quotas for gender, age, race, and ethnicity were calculated based on population estimates provided by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) and the U.S. Census Bureau. Table A1 below summarizes the USF survey sample in comparison to BEBR's 2019 population estimates.

**Table A1**
**Sample Comparison**

|  | USF Survey Sample | 2019 BEBR Estimates |
|---|---|---|
| *Gender* | | |
| Female | 51% | 51% |
| Male | 49% | 49% |
| | | |
| *Age* | | |
| 18-24 | 10% | 11% |
| 25-54 | 47% | 47% |
| 55-64 | 18% | 17% |
| 65+ | 25% | 25% |
| | | |
| *Race* | | |
| Black/African American | 17% | 17% |
| White/Caucasian | 75% | 77% |
| Other | 8% | 6% |
| | | |
| *Ethnicity* | | |
| Hispanic | 27% | 26% |
| Non-Hispanic | 73% | 74% |

The sample was also stratified by region of the state to ensure geographical representativeness: [Northwest Florida/Panhandle-8%; Northeast Florida-12%; Central Florida-24%; West Coast-22%; Southeast Florida-34%].

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**About our Research Team**

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**Elizabeth Strom** is Associate Professor in the School of Public Affairs at the University of South Florida. She holds a PhD in Political Science from the City University of New York (1996), a Masters in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1985), and a BA from Swarthmore College (1980). Dr. Strom has published on urban politics and development and affordable housing issues in such journals as the *Urban Affairs Review*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, and *Housing Policy Debates*. She is also interested in the role of arts and tourism in urban development and more generally in local and state level policy and politics. She serves as co-leader of the Florida Chapter of the Scholars Strategy Network. Dr. Strom can be contacted by email at **estrom@usf.edu**