

To: **The Civic Listening Corps**

From: John Schmidt and Kaitlyn Dowling

Subject: July Volunteer Report

Date: August 11th, 2022



The Civic Listening Corps was formed in January 2022 to give communities across the country the tools and training needed to identify and fight the impact misinformation has on the issues we discuss online every day. Our goal is to use the knowledge we gather together to prevent attempts to further undermine our civic discourse. We have created this report to provide a deep dive into key narratives identified over the last two weeks and to share some of the best examples of your efforts.

All of the information presented in this report was made possible by your contributions during our weekly guided monitoring shifts. Thank you so much for all you have done! **If you would like to invite your network to join us and learn more about how to combat online misinformation, they can access all of our materials by signing up here: ati.io/signup**

Want to read our last report? Find it here: [Civic Listening Corps July 27th Volunteer Report.pdf](#)

Table of Contents:

1. [Your Impact By The Numbers](#)
2. [Major Narratives](#)
 - a. [August 2nd Primary](#)
 - b. [Anti-LGBTQ+ Narratives](#)
3. [What You Need to Know to Stop the Next Narrative!](#)
4. [What's Next](#)

Your Impact By the Numbers

Over the last two weeks we have received 604 reports from our CLC volunteer team in the last two weeks! Here is how they broke down by our major misinformation topics (as of August 10th, 2022):

- 259 issues related to **election** misinformation
- 143 issues related to the **FBI**
- 87 issues related to the **january 6th insurrection**
- 77 issues related to **LGBTQ+ identity**
- 58 issues related to **monkeypox**
- 18 issues related to **abortion**
- 40 issues related to **COVID-19**
- 8 issues related to **climate change**
- 7 issues related to **gun violence**
- 4 issues related to **immigration**

Major Narratives

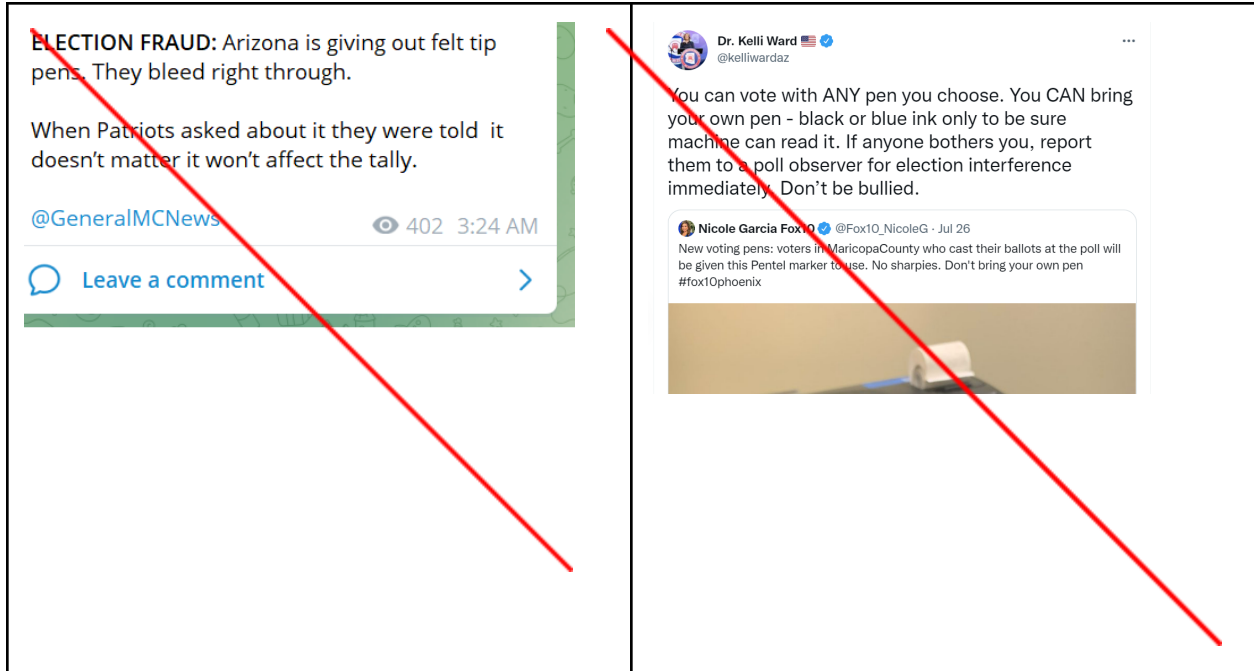
I. Elections: August 2nd Primary

On Tuesday, August 2nd, primaries were held in six states: Arizona, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, and Washington. Several key narratives emerged:

A. Claims that Felt Tip Pens in Arizona Threatened Election Integrity

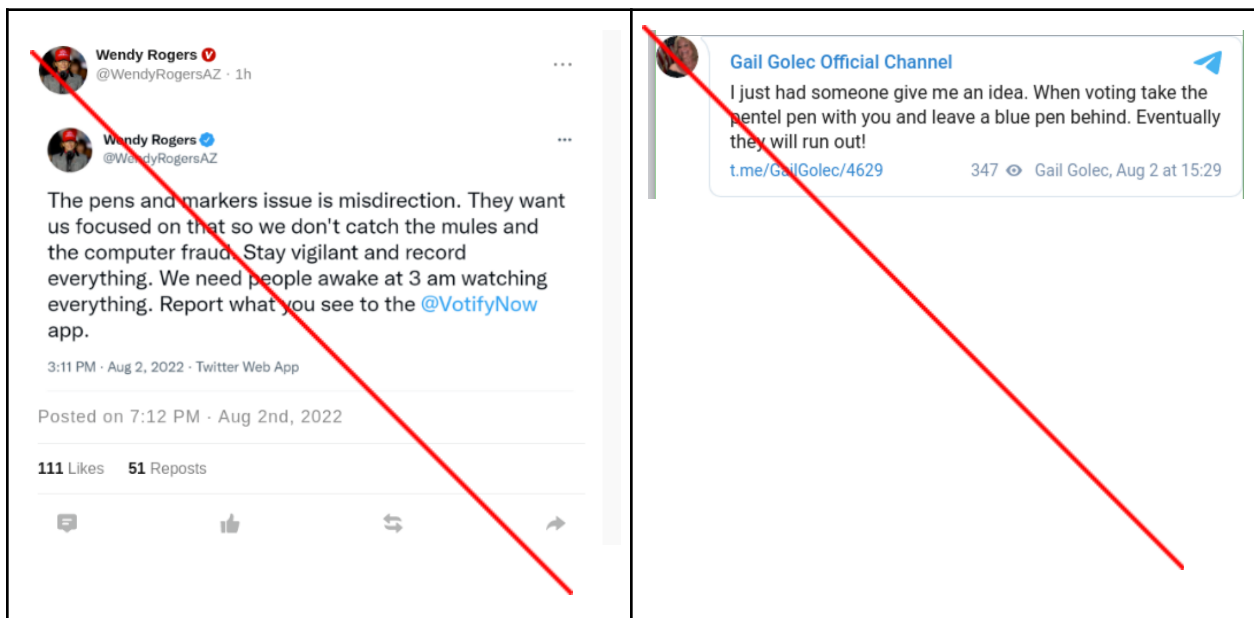
Once again, pens in Arizona have incited election controversy. In the aftermath of [“Sharpiegate”](#) during the 2020 presidential election, the Maricopa County Board of Elections issued a statement encouraging [the use of felt pens](#) on Election Day. They warned that the use of ball point pens take longer to dry, and could impact the machine’s ability to scan the ballots.

Misinformation spreaders interpreted this warning as an interference with their ballots, and began encouraging voters to bring their own pens:



Left: Telegram user promotes dual claim that A) the use of felt tip pens bleed through the ballots, and B) voters were told that it would not impact the tally. Right: Arizona GOP Chair Kelli Ward tells voters they can bring their own pens regardless of messaging, and encourages reporting election officials for interference if they are bothered Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org

On the day of the primary itself, reactions among candidates were divided -- some suggested that the pen debate was a distraction from attempts to steal the election via ballot dropboxes while others were encouraging voters to steal pens from precincts:



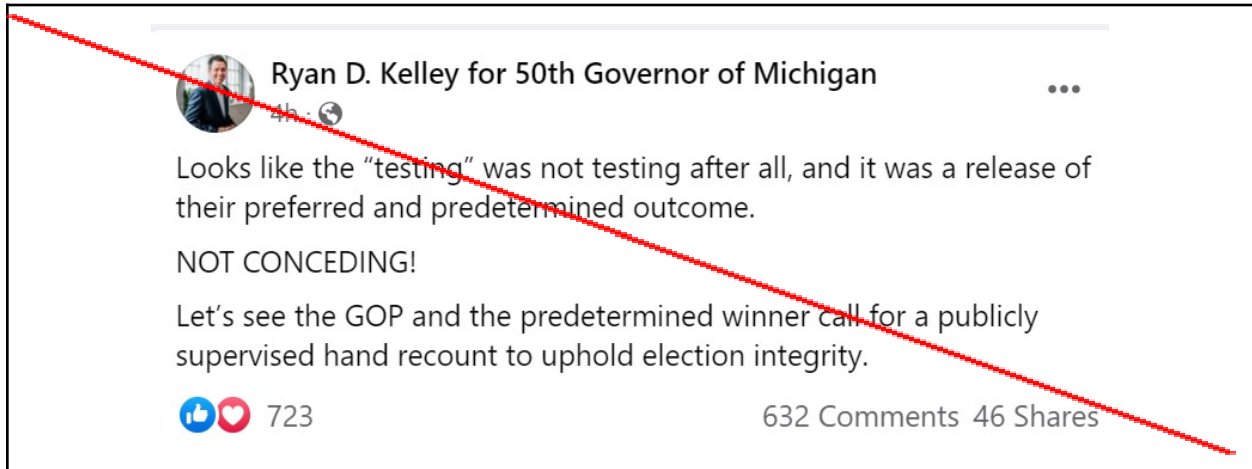
Left: Arizona State Senator Wendy Rogers emphasizes the importance of monitoring drop boxes and computer fraud, referring to the markers controversy as "misdirection". Right: former candidate for

Maricopa County Supervisor Gale Golec uses her Telegram platform to encourage voters to steal the pens offered at precincts.

The concerns that the felt-tip pen controversy would result in fraud claims mostly dissipated as Trump-endorsed candidates secured most major nominations, but could potentially reappear during the more competitive general election.

B. Candidate claims Michigan GOP Gubernatorial Primary Was Stolen

The Republican primary for governor in Michigan has been unstable. Early in the process five GOP candidates were [disqualified](#) due to invalid signatures. Another local politician, Ryan Kelley, was arrested for his participation in the January 6th Capitol Insurrection (you can read about the arrest in our [June report](#)). After Kelley earned a distant fourth place in the primary, he refused to concede and insisted that the election was stolen. In the statement, he references [accidentally published](#) election data from a local news source as proof that there was a predetermined candidate.



Pictured: Candidate Kelley refuses to concede. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org

So far, his claims have not gained traction, and the state GOP [called his refusal](#) to concede “absolutely irresponsible.”

II. “Grooming” Accusations and Homophobic Monkeypox Claims Continue to Spread

Content warning: Sexual content, homophobia

A. Chris Rufo promotes “radical gender theory”

Accusations of grooming and pedophilia in the LGBTQ+ community have continued to spread this week, with signs that this narrative will continue to be [promoted](#) for the foreseeable future.

One of the main proponents of this narrative is conservative operative Chris Rufo, who [gained prominence](#) last year for pushing the misleading idea that critical race theory (CRT) is taught to children in American public schools. In reality, [CRT](#) is a “framework for legal analysis” that broadly holds that racism is embedded in legal and public policy practices-and not taught below the university level.

Most recently, Rufo spearheaded the discussion around what he’s [dubbed](#) “radical gender theory,” describing it as a “catch-all for queer theory, trans ideology, neo-pronouns, and gender identity activism.” Much of Rufo’s [engagement](#) with the [topic](#) has [centered](#) around his own “[investigations](#)” into the [DEI](#) (diversity, equality, and inclusion standards) and LGBTQ+ policies of public schools, frequently [referring](#) to such policies and programs as “grooming.” Rufo has been public about his plans and ideas, stating explicitly that he plans to continue [publishing](#) these “investigations” weekly through the summer.



Pictured: commentator Chris Rufo summarizes current efforts to push anti-LGBTQ+ narrative. Image courtesy of Junkipedia.org

Rufo’s crusade has been amplified by [Fox News](#) and other predominantly conservative [outlets](#) and [commentators](#). He has appeared on [Tucker Carlson’s](#), [Sean Hannity’s](#), and [Laura Ingraham’s](#) shows to discuss LGBTQ+ policies in public schools in the last several months.



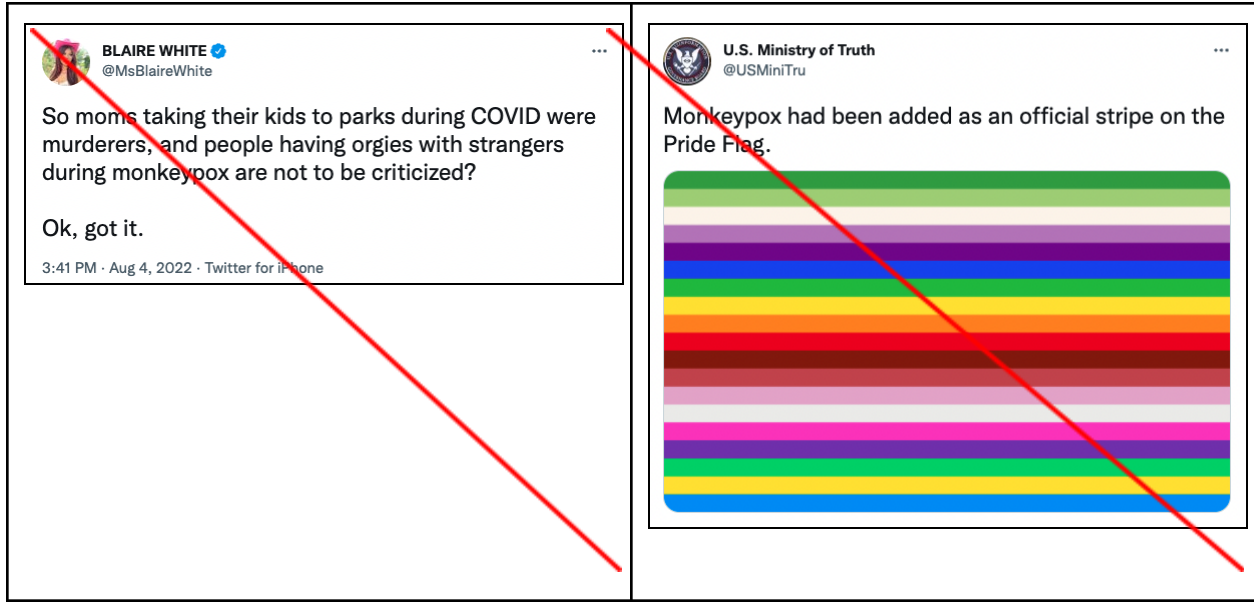
Pictured: Rufo shares a segment from Hannity where he is interviewed on his investigation of San Diego Unified School District. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org

Given Rufo’s large audience, past success in promoting false claims regarding public schooling, and promotion by major media networks, we expect this narrative to continue through the fall.

B. Monkeypox spread leads to misleading, homophobic claims

Increases in [monkeypox cases](#) and resulting news coverage have led to many false claims about the disease and communities it has affected. Reporting on monkeypox frequently [cites statistics](#) showing the illness has, thus far, mostly affected men who have sex with men. However, public health officials have been quick to [affirm](#) that monkeypox is not a “gay disease” and that anyone who comes in close contact with an infected person is at risk, regardless of sexual orientation.

This has not stopped many anti-LGBTQ+ accounts from promoting [homophobic narratives](#) around monkeypox, including that the gay community is not doing enough to [slow the spread](#) of sexual transmission. Others have stated opposition to lockdowns or other social distancing measures, claiming their sexual orientation means they aren’t at risk for the disease.



Left: right wing YouTuber Blaire White makes the false comparison between COVID lockdown measures and monkeypox. Right: Account named Ministry of Truth (parody account for the Disinformation Governance Board) suggests adding a Monkeypox stripe to the Pride flag, Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org

A problematic theme has emerged implying that children exposed to monkeypox may have been sexually abused. Recently, children at an Indiana daycare facility were [exposed](#) to monkeypox by an infected worker. CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said these [exposures](#) could be “traced back” to the “men who have sex with men community,” a snippet of which has spread in some groups. However, these children were exposed via normal interactions at their daycare; there is absolutely no evidence the children were exposed via sexual contact. Some have even [called](#) for criminal investigations into adult men who may have had contact with infected children.



Left: online commentator Tim Young calls for the criminal investigation of every adult male in a young monkeypox case on the assumption that it is only spread through men who have sex with men. Right: doctored footage on Telegram claims there is proof that monkeypox is spread through pedophilia. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org

III. What You Need to Know to Stop the Next Narrative!

Mis- and disinformation spread by preying on our lack of knowledge about a subject. New stories – especially emergent ones with lots of open questions – provide fertile ground for false information to spread. Trustworthy, fact-based reporting helps fill in that gap with good information. Here, we've collected excellent reporting from a variety of sources on the day's most pressing (and often confusing) issues:

- **What is going on at Mar-a-Lago and will it start a civil war?** Former President Trump's Mar-a-Lago property in Florida was [raided by the FBI](#) on Monday, resulting in a firehose of claims on social media. The raid was reportedly related to sensitive documents Pres. Trump may have kept after leaving office. We've seen an uptick in mentions of "civil war" on social media related to the raid. But BBC disinformation reporter Shayan Sardarizadeh points out some [important context](#): "civil war" spikes in usage pretty regularly.
- **How do election officials know if my signature is correct?** Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer shares how [signature verification](#) works on mail-in ballots.
- **Why do I keep hearing about Chris Rufo?** [The New Yorker](#) profiled Rufo's efforts around CRT last year and [New York magazine](#) added additional reporting around his tactics. And for even more context, the [New York Times](#) asks, "Are parents really that upset with what's being taught in their schools?" (hint: no).
- **Why are there so many outbreaks of serious illness recently?** Duke University's Global Health Institute says there's evidence pandemics are [more likely](#) than we realize. Gavi focuses on [globalization](#) in outlining why pandemic outbreaks are increasing. And The Atlantic takes a look at how climate change's effects on humans and [animals](#) is a driver of infection.
- **Do I need to be worried about monkeypox?** A [University of Pennsylvania](#) poll shows that many are worried, but few know what's true. The [CDC](#) answers frequently asked questions and [The Atlantic](#) warns of the U.S. mishandling another public health emergency.
- **Keeping an eye on:** Possible community spread of [polio](#) in New York.
- **Following up on:** What's going on with [paxlovid rebound](#)? Why am I still hearing concerns about [fertility and Covid-19](#) vaccines?

What's Next?

Thank you for everything you have done! If you would like to join us on a shift to fight misinformation like this you can sign up here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0e4dada728a2fece9-august>

For the rest of August we will focus on:

- **The rest of this month's primaries**, including competitive races in Alaska, Wyoming and Florida
- **The claim that the FBI is being weaponized against political opponents** in the aftermath of the FBI executing a search warrant at Mar A Lago
- **Continued efforts to harass members of the LGBT+ community**