

What Facebook users need to know about the big vote

December 10 2012, by Jessica Guynn

You survived the U.S. presidential election. Now, citizens of Facebook, you are being asked to cast another ballot.

[Facebook users](#) have been getting emails asking them to vote on "global site governance." It sounds complicated, but it really just means that Facebook is proposing changes to how it handles your personal information.

To some [privacy advocates](#) it may be the most important ballot that Facebook users will cast - if not the last.

So you don't have to pop a couple of aspirin or grab a glossary to decipher the policy jargon, here's a voter's guide in plain English.

-Why Facebook is asking you to vote: Facebook opened the polls Monday for its 1 billion plus users to vote on proposed changes to its policies. One of the proposals would abolish the voting system itself. Facebook rolled out the voting system in 2009 to give users a voice in how it handles their personal information to quiet a noisy grass-roots [protest](#) over changes it had made to its terms of service. But Facebook says the [voting system](#) has not worked as intended and isn't appropriate now that it's a publicly traded company subject to oversight by regulators around the world. Facebook is proposing to keep users informed on policy changes with [webcasts](#) on privacy rather than giving users the right to vote on policy changes.

-What you are voting on: Facebook is proposing three main changes. First off, it would like to do away with your right to vote. Second, it wants to be able to share user data with its affiliates such as Instagram. Third, it wants to loosen restrictions on who can message you on Facebook.

-Will your vote count? Unlikely because of turnout. For the vote to be binding, 30 percent of Facebook users must cast ballots. Facebook has held two previous votes, neither of which reached that threshold. Now that Facebook has more than 1 billion users, that means 300 million people around the world would have to vote. To give a sense of scale, that's roughly the population of the United States. As of noon Wednesday, about 300,000 people had voted. The vast majority are not in favor of Facebook's proposals.

-Where's the polling booth? You can't vote from your Facebook page. You have to click on the link that came with the email from Facebook or go to this page: apps.facebook.com/fbsitegovernance. There, you are presented with two sets of thick policy documents, one that governs how Facebook currently handles your information and one that explains how it would like to handle your information in the future. The document is called the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. The acronym is SRR. Facebook also wants to make changes to its Data Use Policy.

-How to vote, step by step:

Go to the "about the vote" page.

Click the green "vote" button.

This lands you on a page with links to Facebook's proposals and to the existing documents.

It then asks you, "Which documents should govern the Facebook site?"

Click next to your choice, either:

"Proposed documents": It would approve Facebook's proposed changes.

Or

"Existing documents": It keeps the current policy and rejects Facebook's proposed changes.

Then click the green "submit vote" button.

-How long until polls close? Voting lasts seven days and ends Dec. 10 at 3 p.m. EST. You can vote early, but you can't vote often. Only one vote per account. But you can spread the word that you voted by clicking the "share with my friends" box below the green "submit [vote](#)" button.

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