

March 24, 2021

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for your letter of March 11th regarding Facebook's content moderation practices. Please find the answers to your questions below.

**1. As it relates to Facebook's content policies, please answer the following:**

- a. What process does Facebook undertake to determine whether content on its platform violates its policies and is any outside person or third party involved in that process? If so, please identify such outside person or third party and how they are involved.**

We apply our own policies and make independent decisions about how to moderate content based on our Community Standards, which are posted publicly and outline what is and is not allowed on Facebook. Our policies are based on principles of voice, safety, dignity, authenticity, and privacy.

We work with vendor partners to help us review content at scale, 24 hours a day. While full time employees are involved in content review, the majority of those who review content for Facebook work full time for our partners and work at sites managed by these partners.

In certain countries, we work with independent third-party fact-checkers who review and rate the accuracy of stories. These partners have been certified through a non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network, and we list them publicly. Today, we partner with over 80 partners fact-checking content in over 60 languages. For the full list, see

<https://www.facebook.com/business/help/997484867366026?id=673052479947730>.

Once a story is rated as false, altered, or partly false, we show it lower in News Feed. And on Instagram, we make it harder to find by filtering from Explore and hashtag pages and down-ranking it in Feed.

In addition, content across Facebook and Instagram that has been rated false or altered is prominently labeled so people can better decide for themselves what to read, trust, and share. These labels are shown on top of false and altered photos and videos, including on top of Stories content on Instagram and link out to the assessment from the

fact-checker. For content rated partly false or missing context, we'll apply a lighter-weight warning label.

In developing and iterating on our policies, we consult with outside academics and experts from across the political spectrum and around the world, and we provide in-depth examples and explanations of what policy changes would entail. As a matter of practice, we do not share the names of the groups we consult with for a number of reasons, including safety and security concerns—which are especially acute in places around the world where the government may exercise censorship or control—and the fact that groups may not want to be named.

On top of the consultations we have when building and refining our policies, we also receive input from the Oversight Board about our policies and practices. Cases can be appealed to the Oversight Board by Facebook itself, and by people using both Facebook and Instagram. In addition to the binding decision on the case content, the Oversight Board publicly issues recommendations that help us refine our policies and practices.

**b. What process does Facebook undertake to determine whether a user should be deplatformed and is any outside person or third party involved in that process? If so, please identify such outside person or third party and how they are involved.**

Please see the response to your previous question. The consequences for violating our Community Standards vary depending on the severity of the violation and the person's history on the platform. For instance, we may warn someone for a first violation, but if they continue to violate our policies, we may restrict their ability to post on Facebook or disable their profile.

**c. When content is flagged or reported by users, what process does Facebook undertake to determine whether such content violates its policies? Please explain.**

Facebook encourages users to report to us content that may violate our policies. We use a combination of technology, reports from our community, and review by our teams to identify and review content against our standards. If we determine that content or an account violates our policies, we take action—removing the content, disabling the account, or covering content with a warning. Even if user-reported content does not violate our policies, however, users have control over what they see and who they interact with. A user can:

- Block someone, which prevents the other person from seeing things the user posts on his/her profile; starting conversations with the user; adding the user as a friend; tagging the user in posts, comments, or photos; and inviting the user to events or groups.
- Unfriend someone, which prevents the other person from posting on the user's timeline.

- Block someone's messages, which means they will no longer be able to contact the user in Messenger or in Facebook chat. A user can also ignore a Messenger conversation, which automatically moves it out of the user's inbox.
  - Unfollow someone, which means the person's post will not appear in News Feed. On Instagram, a user can prevent someone from commenting on the user's photos and videos and can also block someone from finding the user's profile, posts or story.
- d. Does Facebook have an appeal process to challenge content decisions or decisions to suspend or deplatform users? If yes, please describe such process.**

If someone believes that we have gotten a content moderation decision wrong, that person can generally appeal or is given the option to disagree with our decision. In some cases, we then re-review our decisions on those individual pieces of content.

In order to request re-review of a content decision we made, users are often given the option to "Request Review" or to provide feedback by stating they "Disagree with Decision." We try to make the opportunity to request this review or give this feedback clear, either via a notification or interstitial, but we are always working to improve.

Transparency in our appeals process is important, so we now include in our Community Standards Enforcement Report how much content people appealed and how much content was restored upon appeal. Gathering and publishing those statistics keeps us accountable to the broader community and enables us to continue improving our content moderation. For more information, see <https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement>.

We have also established an Oversight Board so people in the community can appeal our content decisions to a body that has independent judgment. The Oversight Board uses its independent judgment to decide some of our most significant and difficult cases, and the decisions it makes are binding.

**2. Since January 2020, please list every Republican public official—federal, state, or local—Facebook has suspended or deplatformed.**

We do not in the ordinary course of our operations track or maintain a list of the information you have requested. At Facebook, we are a platform for ideas across the political and ideological spectrum, and when we identify or learn of content that violates our policies, we remove that content regardless of who posted it. The political affiliation of the user generating the content has no bearing on that content assessment. Rather, decisions about whether to remove content are based on our Community Standards, which direct all reviewers when making decisions. We seek to write actionable policies that clearly distinguish between violating and non-violating content, and we seek to make the review process for reviewers as objective as possible.

**3. Since January 2020, please list every Democrat public official—federal, state, or local—Facebook has suspended or deplatformed.**

Please see the response to your previous question.

**4. Since January 2020, as it relates to heads of government and world leaders, please identify each account Facebook has suspended or deplatformed and identify the specific policy for such decisions.**

Freedom of expression is a founding principle for Facebook, and we think it is important that people around the world hear from their elected officials and governmental leaders. All users, including world leaders, are subject to our policies, including our Community Standards, and we strive to enforce our policies consistently, without regard to political affiliation or the country from which a user hails.

When we identify or learn of content that violates our Community Standards, we remove that content, regardless of who posted it. Even if a politician or government official says it, if we determine that content may lead to violence or deprive people of their right to vote, we will take that content down. In 2018, we removed from our platform Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces, and last month we removed the entire Myanmar military—the Tatmadaw. We have also removed content from government officials hailing from a number of countries including Brazil, India, Israel, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Turkey. This content was removed for violating our Community Standards, including our Violence and Incitement policy.

**5. Without disclosing personally identifiable information, please disclose any content removed by Facebook related to Black Lives Matter riots and identify the number of accounts suspended or disabled for posting such content.**

We remove content and track those removals based on which policies in our community standards they violate. We generally do not track content removals based on an incident that the content relates to, and therefore we are unable to identify the information requested in this question. For more information on our tracking of content removals, please see our Community Standards Enforcement Report at <https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement>.

**6. On June 1, 2020, now-Vice President Kamala Harris posted “If you’re able to, chip in now to the Minnesota Freedom Fund to help post bail for those protesting on the ground in Minnesota” and linked to an ActBlue Fund. Please explain how this post does not violate Facebook’s policies.**

We remove content that expresses substantive support—which includes fundraising—or praise for groups, leaders, or individuals involved in terrorist activity, organized hate, mass murder, human trafficking, and organized violence or criminal organizations.

Protesting is not considered organized violence under our policies, and the cited content does not violate our Community Standards.

7. **As it relates to news articles on Facebook, please answer the following:**
- a. **Does Facebook reduce the distribution of every news article pending review by third-party fact checkers? If no, please explain Facebook’s process for determining which news articles should have their distribution reduced.**
  - b. **On October 14, 2020, Facebook decided to reduce distribution of a *New York Post* article titled “Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad” pending review of Facebook’s third-party fact checkers. Please provide an update as to the third-party fact checkers determination.**

In 2019, we announced that, if we identify signals that a piece of content is false, we temporarily reduce its distribution in order to allow sufficient time for our independent, third-party fact-checkers to review and determine whether to apply a rating. Quick action is critical in keeping a false claim from going viral, and so we take this step to provide an extra level of protection against potential misinformation. These temporary demotions expire after seven days if the content has not been rated false by an independent fact-checker.

In the weeks leading up to the election, the Director of National Intelligence, the Head of the FBI, and the bipartisan leaders of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence reminded Americans about the threat posed by foreign influence operations emanating from Russia and Iran. Along with their public warnings, and as part of the ongoing cooperation that tech companies established with government partners following the 2016 election, the FBI also privately warned tech companies to be on high alert for the potential of hack-and-leak operations carried out by foreign actors in the weeks leading up to November 3rd. We took these risks seriously.

In the case of the October 14 *New York Post* story, we were not able to verify whether the content was part of a foreign influence operation. Given the concerns raised by the FBI and others, we took steps consistent with our policies to slow the spread of suspicious content and provide fact-checkers the opportunity to assess it. However, at no point did we take any action to block or remove the content from the platform. People could—and did—read and share the Post’s reporting while we had this temporary demotion in place. Consistent with our policy, after seven days, we lifted the temporary demotion on this content because it was not rated false by an independent fact-checker.

8. **Does Facebook have a process to communicate, consult, and coordinate with law enforcement to address illicit content? If so, please explain.**

We have a long history of working successfully with the Department of Justice, the FBI, state and local law enforcement, and other government agencies to address a wide variety of threats to our platform. We have been able to provide support to authorities around the world. We reach out to law enforcement when we see a credible threat of imminent harm. We contact federal, state, or local law enforcement depending on the specific circumstances of a threat. We also have robust processes in place to handle government requests we receive, and we disclose account records in accordance with

our terms of service and applicable law. We have law enforcement response teams available around the clock to respond to emergency requests.

Leading up to the 2020 election, we met regularly with federal, state and local law enforcement officials and the intelligence community to allow us to better understand and respond to election-related concerns or threats. In connection with the events of January 6, we have also provided law enforcement with around-the-clock assistance, including real-time response during the Capitol attack and extensive support in identifying the insurrectionists so they can be brought to justice.

**9. Does Facebook have a process to preserve evidence of illegal content on its platform to assist law enforcement? If so, please explain.**

We will take steps to preserve account records in connection with official criminal investigations for 90 days pending our receipt of formal legal process. Law enforcement may submit formal preservation requests through Facebook's Law Enforcement Online Request System (<https://www.facebook.com/records>) or by mail.

**10. Does Facebook coordinate with Google and Twitter on any content decisions? If so, please identify the categories of such content decisions.**

We make independent decisions on individual pieces of content or accounts according to our Community Standards.

Our Community Standards outline what is and is not allowed on Facebook. We base our policies on principles of voice, safety, dignity, authenticity, and privacy. We also publish our quarterly Community Standards Enforcement Report to give visibility into how we are doing at enforcing the Community Standards. Google and Twitter have their own content moderation policies and make content moderation decisions based on those policies.

As it relates to the events at the Capitol, we have been engaging with law enforcement and also discussing threats we are seeing on the platform with other industry participants to help keep our community safe. This is consistent with our practice of sharing terrorist threats and hashed content with Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), which was designed to foster technical collaboration among member companies, advance relevant research, and share knowledge with smaller platforms. Since 2017, GIFCT's membership has expanded beyond the founding companies to include over a dozen diverse platforms committed to cross-industry efforts to counter the spread of terrorist and violent extremist content online. GIFCT is one way in which we manage communication with other companies about potential threats, including terrorism. Importantly, however, we do not coordinate on what actions to take. Each company makes those decisions for themselves.

**11. Does Facebook coordinate with Google and Twitter on any decisions related to suspending or deplatforming users? If so, please explain.**

Please see the response to your previous question.

**12. As it relates to former-President Trump, please answer the following:**

- a. Did Facebook coordinate with Google, Twitter, or any other tech company to make content decisions about his posts? If so, please explain.**
- b. Did Facebook coordinate with Google, Twitter, or any other tech company to suspend or remove his account? If so, explain.**

Facebook did not coordinate with any other companies when deciding to place a feature block on former President Trump's page for 24 hours, when extending that action indefinitely.

We made the decision on our own, and consistent with our Community Standards, which inform how we moderate content. In this extraordinary case, we determined that former President Trump's posts, on balance, contributed to, rather than diminished, the risk of ongoing violence.

**13. Did Facebook coordinate with Google, Twitter, or any other tech company to make content decisions related to Black Lives Matter riots? If so, please explain.**

Please see the response to your Question 10.

**14. Did Facebook coordinate with Google, Twitter, or any other tech company to suppress the October 14, 2020 *New York Post* article titled "Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad"? If so, please explain.**

Please see the response to your Question 10.

**15. Does Facebook alter its algorithms to drive certain content or narratives based on the political leaning of such content? If so, please explain.**

At Facebook, we are a platform for ideas across the political and ideological spectrum, and we moderate content according to our published Community Standards to help keep users on the platform safe, reduce objectionable content, and ensure users participate on the platform responsibly. We are clear and transparent about what our standards are, and we seek to apply them to all of our users consistently.

We frequently make changes to the algorithms that drive News Feed ranking in an effort to improve people's experience on Facebook. For example, in 2018, we responded to feedback from our community that public content—posts from businesses, brands, and media—was crowding out the personal moments that lead us to connect more with each other. As a result, we moved from focusing only on helping users find relevant content to helping them have more meaningful social interactions. This meant that users began seeing more content from their friends, family, and Groups. We also reduce the distribution of some problematic types of content, including content that users may find

spammy or low-quality, such as clickbait headlines and links to low-quality webpages like ad farms.

As we said last month, we're listening to users who have told us they are seeing too much political content and are looking at how to support user choice while improving the experience on Facebook.

**16. Please explain any efforts Facebook has undertaken to support local news and traditional media.**

We at Facebook care a great deal about making sure that a sustainable news and journalism ecosystem can thrive because it is important to the societies and communities we serve. We invest in products, programs and partnerships to connect people to diverse sources of news and information that educate and entertain them. These investments serve communities on and off Facebook.

We are proud that news publishers derive significant value from our site. We have a free platform and custom-built tools that derive unique value to publishers and journalists of all sizes, helping them build sustainable business models. This is why so many publishers voluntarily post their own content to Facebook with links to their news stories. That engagement links directly back to the publisher's site and generates revenue opportunities for those publishers. And in October 2019, we announced the U.S. launch of Facebook News—a dedicated news destination within the Facebook app. We invested millions of dollars to obtain access to new stories for this surface.

In addition to the value the site drives to publishers who choose to use it, we support local news and traditional media in other ways as well. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we announced a \$100 million investment (<https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/coronavirus-update-news-industry-support>) to support the news industry—\$25 million in emergency grant funding for local news through the Facebook Journalism Project, and \$75 million in additional marketing spend to move money over to news organizations around the world.

We have a long record of investment in this space. In January 2017, we announced the Facebook Journalism Project, an initiative to establish stronger ties between Facebook and the news industry. Over the past three years, this project has invested more than \$425 million to help the journalism industry by developing news products; providing grants, training, and tools for journalists; and working with publishers and educators on how we can equip people with the knowledge they need to be informed readers in the digital age. Since launching the Facebook Journalism Project, we have met with more than 2,600 publishers around the world to understand how they use our products and how we can make improvements to better support their needs.

This investment includes support for organizations like the Pulitzer Center, Report for America, the Knight-Lenfest Local News Transformation Fund, the Local Media Association and Local Media Consortium, the American Journalism Project, NewsMatch, and the Community News Project.



Also through the Facebook Journalism Project, in February 2018, we launched our Local News Subscriptions Accelerator, a pilot program designed to help news publishers grow their digital subscription revenues with the help of professional training and grant funding to accelerate innovation. In August 2018, we introduced our Membership Accelerator, another program designed to help non-profit news organizations and local, independent publishers with membership models to build sustainable businesses by providing supporters access to exclusive content and experiences through memberships. These programs have generated millions of dollars in recurring, sustainable revenue for local publishers.

In January 2019, we increased our investment in these programs in the United States and expanded the Accelerator training model globally. Hundreds of publishers around the world are now leveraging these resources to transform their businesses.

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Thank you for the opportunity to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Facebook, Inc.