

Facebook deploying teams with advanced censorship tools in advance of the US election

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26 October 2020

The social media platform Facebook is preparing an aggressive program of censorship for the US presidential election next week. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* on Sunday, teams of Facebook employees have been formed to deploy specially developed software tools previously used to “calm election-related conflict” in “at-risk” countries.

The *Journal* report, based on comments from anonymous sources, says that the “emergency measures include slowing the spread of viral content and lowering the bar for suppressing potentially inflammatory posts.” The methods have been used previously during civil unrest in Sri Lanka and Myanmar and are “part of a larger tool kit developed by Facebook to prepare for the U.S. election.”

Among the other features of the censorship tools are “across-the-board slowing of the spread of posts as they start to go viral,” the ability to tweak “the news feed to change what types of content users see” and lowering “the threshold for detecting the types of content its software views as dangerous.”

The *Journal* sources also said that Facebook “needs to be prepared for all possibilities” and use the tools to “alter what tens of millions of Americans see when they log onto the platform, diminishing their exposure to sensationalism, incitements to violence and misinformation, said the people familiar with the measures.”

Policy Communications Manager at Facebook, Andy Stone, responding to questions about the *Journal* report, issued a statement which said, “We’ve spent years building for safer, more secure elections. We’ve applied lessons from previous elections, hired experts, and built new teams with experience across different areas to prepare for various scenarios.”

Among the preparations that Facebook has made for the 2020 elections is a deeper collaboration with the

Democratic Party and its faction of the US intelligence apparatus. Among the pre-election censorship measures carried out by Facebook have been the shutdown of pages and groups accused without any proof of “trying to mislead Americans and amplify division.”

Facebook has also worked with the pro-imperialist Bipartisan Policy Center to set up a Facebook Voting Information Center and placed fact checking labels on the posts of the Trump campaign.

Speaking to the *Financial Times* in September, Facebook Vice President for Global Affairs and Communications Nick Clegg reported that the social media company had “drawn up plans” for unprecedented outcomes including the possibility of violence arising from the November elections. Clegg said that there were some “break-glass options” that would only be used in the event of extreme chaos and civil unrest.

Buzzfeed News reported recently that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg addressed a companywide meeting on October 15 and said that content rules banning hate and conspiracy theories were implemented because of the US presidential elections. The report said Zuckerberg claimed that the recent changes to its content policies were made “to address the unstable situation around the US election and its aftermath” and “there has been no change in the way the company operates.”

Zuckerberg further stated, based on a BuzzFeed transcript of the audio of his speech, “Once we’re past these events, and we’ve resolved them peacefully, I wouldn’t expect that we continue to adopt a lot more policies that are restricting of a lot more content.”

So, in other words, the censorship measures that are now in place at Facebook will not be lifted regardless of what happens on November 3 and there may well be more stringent suppression of speech implemented, especially if the election results in violence.

Speaking about the experiences of Facebook in

suppressing speech in other countries, Zuckerberg said, “We’ve had ongoing work in a number of countries that we consider at risk—countries at risk of ongoing civil conflict, places like Myanmar, or Sri Lanka, or Ethiopia—where the determination that we’ve made alongside human rights groups and local groups on the ground is that a wider band of speech and expression would lead potentially to more incitement of violence or different issues.”

The view that stopping “a wider band of speech” among the public is preferred for the ruling political and media establishment is a deeply reactionary and undemocratic position that is now being implemented in the US and around the world.

Zuckerberg also expressed support for the policy announced at Google that employees are not permitted to talk publicly about the recently filed federal and state government antitrust lawsuit. Calling the policy “prudent,” Zuckerberg said, “anything that any of you say internally is, of course, available to be subpoenaed or used in any of these investigations, I just think we should make sure that people aren’t just, you know, mouthing off about this and saying things that may reflect inaccurate data, or generally just are kind of incomplete.”

He also said, after noting that Facebook stood for free expression, “You shouldn’t be emailing about these things and you shouldn’t really be discussing this in non-privileged forums across the company.”

No confidence can be placed in reassurances from the billionaire Zuckerberg that the censorship measures that have been put in place prior to November 3 will not be extended or strengthened in the period after the elections.

The *Wall Street Journal* report makes clear that preparations for social unrest in the US and its suppression by the state are well advanced. Facebook’s 2020 election censorship measures for the purpose of silencing speech on its platform are connected to the historically developing crisis of capitalist rule in the US and throughout the world.



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