

Elon Musk's Twitter mass bans tech reporters

Kevin Reed**16 December 2022**

In an act of blatant retaliation Thursday evening, Twitter suspended the accounts of leading tech journalists who have been reporting on the social media company and its billionaire owner Elon Musk.

Among the purged accounts are those of Ryan Mac of the *New York Times*, Donie O'Sullivan of CNN, Drew Harwell of the *Washington Post*, Matt Binder of Mashable, Micah Lee of the *Intercept* and independent journalists Aaron Rupar, Keith Olbermann and Tony Webster. The account of the open source social media platform Mastodon was also suspended.

No explanation was given by Twitter for the suspensions. NBC News reported that a spokesperson for the *New York Times* said the suspensions were "questionable and unfortunate" and that neither the journalist nor the *Times* organization had received any information about the banning of Mac's account.

"We hope that all of the journalists' accounts are reinstated, and that Twitter provides a satisfying explanation for this action," said Charlie Stadtlander, communications director for the *Times*.

Some tech news sources reported that the shutdowns were connected to the Twitter decision on Wednesday to suspend @ElonJet, the account of 20-year-old Florida college student Jack Sweeney, which tracked the whereabouts of Elon Musk's private jet based on publicly available flight information.

Explaining the decision to terminate Sweeney's account, Musk tweeted on Wednesday, "Any account doxxing real-time location info of anyone will be suspended, as it is a physical safety violation. This includes posting links to sites with real-time location info." Twitter then suspended more than 25 accounts that tracked planes of government agencies, billionaires and others.

However, after his jet tracking account was closed,

Sweeney moved it to Mastodon, a social media competitor of Twitter, and continued to post the jet location information. The journalists who were suspended had shared the Mastodon account information as part of their reporting on Twitter.

In the case of the *Intercept*'s Lee, for example, the journalist said in a text message that before the suspension of his account he had attempted to tweet out a link to the Mastodon account that tracked Musk's jet but was unable to and instead tweeted a screenshot.

Washington Post reporter Harwell described a similar experience when he tweeted about Mastodon being kicked off Twitter. His account was terminated immediately after he posted information about how Twitter had shut down the account of its competitor and was violating free speech rights.

As of this writing, Musk had not responded to requests for comment and Twitter did not respond to email inquiries by news media.

The measures taken by Twitter expose as a fraud Musk's claims that he is a "free speech absolutist" and that his \$44 billion private acquisition of the social media company would result in an increase in the free exchange of ideas on the platform. On April 25, for example, Musk tweeted that he hoped "even my worst critics remain on Twitter, because that is what free speech means."

Meanwhile, in October, Musk said any decision to reinstate the account of Donald Trump—or others permanently banned from the platform since the January 6, 2021, assault on the US Capitol—would be made by a content moderation council. Instead, Musk moved to restore Trump's account several days after the fascistic former president announced his intention to run for the White House in 2024. No content council has ever been convened.



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