

Musk continues to ban from Twitter journalists who criticize him

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In a tweet early Saturday morning, Elon Musk claimed that the accounts of prominent journalists which he suspended on Thursday had been restored. After he ran a Twitter poll and nearly 60 percent of the 3.6 million respondents said the accounts should be unsuspended, Musk cynically tweeted, “The people have spoken.”

While Reuters confirmed that several of the suspended accounts had been restored, others remain shut down. The retaliation of Elon Musk against journalists who criticized his wrecking operation at Twitter took place on Thursday evening. After reports circulated that the journalists had been kicked off the platform, the billionaire owner of Twitter tweeted an acknowledgment of the suspensions.

Responding to others on Twitter, Musk claimed the journalists had been suspended because they violated new rules against sharing location information, or what is known as doxxing, of individuals such as himself.

At 9:12 p.m. on Thursday, Musk tweeted, “Same doxxing rules apply to ‘journalists’ as to everyone else,” and at 10:24 p.m. he tweeted, “7 day suspension for doxxing. Some time away from Twitter is good for the soul ...”

The journalists with Twitter accounts that were shut down on Thursday included CNN’s Donie O’Sullivan, the *New York Times*’ Ryan Mac, the *Washington Post*’s Drew Harwell, Mashable’s Matt Binder, The Intercept’s Micah Lee, as well as independent journalists Keith Olbermann, Aaron Rupar and Tony Webster.

The suspensions also included the shutdown of the Twitter account of a competitor social media platform called Mastodon. Each of the suspended accounts were labeled with a message that said the users had violated Twitter rules.

All of the journalists have maintained that they did not violate any Twitter policies and did not engage in sharing Musk’s location or anyone else’s. There is no evidence that they have done so.

Independent journalist Aaron Rupar said he “didn’t post anything remotely controversial today or anytime recently.” The Intercept’s Lee said his suspension came shortly after he posted on Twitter about the shutdown of Mastodon’s account. Lee also wrote: “While my reporting may not have provided the direct impetus for my suspension, it’s clear Musk was taking aim specifically at journalists who have covered him critically.”

In the case of Olbermann, his suspension occurred shortly after he criticized the shutdown of the Twitter account of some of the other journalists. The *Washington Post*’s Harwell said he did not share information about Musk’s private jet or personal location but simply previously posted a link to the @ElonJet account in his stories. Harwell had also written a report about the resurgence of fascistic QAnon conspiracy theories on Twitter following Musk’s takeover of the company.

The reporters’ suspensions were carried out one day after Twitter shut down more than two dozen accounts that tracked the planes of government officials, billionaires and other high profile people. Among these suspended accounts was @ElonJet, created by 20-year-old Jack Sweeney who persistently tracked the location of Musk’s private jet and published it on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Truth Social, Mastodon as well as Twitter.

Previously, Musk had offered Sweeney \$5,000 to shut down the account which he had set up in June 2020. The @ElonJet account uses publicly available ADS-B flight details about takeoff and landing times

combined with an automated computer program known as a Twitter bot to report Elon Musk's flights.

Although Musk acknowledged the suspensions in his late night tweets, no official statement has been issued by Twitter explaining the action. There has also been no response by the company to demands from the *New York Times* or CNN for a rationale to be provided.

Also, late Thursday evening, Musk defended the suspensions during a Twitter Spaces conference chat hosted by journalist Katie Notopoulos of BuzzFeed. When Musk was asked to explain his decision to ban a "handful of journalists," he maintained the fiction that the journalists had engaged in doxxing.

He said, "There's not going to be any distinction in the future between journalists or so-called journalists and regular people," and added, "Everyone's going to be treated the same." Musk continued, "So no special treatment. You dox, you get suspended. End of story."

Due to a technical glitch, some of the journalists with suspended accounts were able to participate in the Twitter Spaces conference with Notopoulos. When they spoke up to contradict Musk's false claim that they were involved in doxxing, the billionaire abruptly left the call.

Shortly thereafter, the Twitter Spaces conference itself was shut down. Notopoulos tweeted, "Sorry it appears the Space cut out, screen went suddenly blank on my end and everyone got booted." It turned out that the entire Spaces feature of Twitter had been disabled and was not restored until 5:00 p.m. on Friday, when Musk tweeted, "Spaces is back up," with no further explanation of what happened.

On Friday, The Daily Beast published a report about the suspension of *Insider* journalist Linette Lopez's Twitter account. Lopez said she never tweeted anything about the location of Musk's jet but had been writing since 2018 about his hypocrisy over doxxing and targeting private citizens.

She said, "I was just trying to highlight the fact that he talks about bullying and doxxing and all this stuff. ... And he's a pro at it." Lopez continued, "He harassed me back in 2018, he talked s**t about me in the court of law, he sued my source. Like, I've been through the ringer with this guy. Nothing he does surprises me."

Musk's censorship and bogus justification for attacking his liberal critics comes less than a week after he called on Sunday for the prosecution of Dr. Anthony

Fauci, the chief medical advisor to the White House and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). Musk tweeted, "My pronouns are Prosecute/Fauci," in a political environment where fascistic Republicans and paramilitary alt-right elements are calling for violent attacks on Fauci and others within the public health establishment.

His attack on journalists also comes three weeks after Twitter began shutting down the accounts of left-wing journalists and bloggers, who have exposed the activities of fascist and right-wing groups. A report on November 29 by The Intercept noted that Musk had used the posts of right-wing extremist Andy Ngo to identify the accounts of the left-wing journalists Chad Loder, Vishal Pratap Singh and others as "Antifa accounts" and shut them down.

According to Shane Burley, a journalist for Al Jazeera and *The Daily Beast*, "Andy Ngo's bizarre vision of 'antifa' seems to be the metric used to delete the accounts of journalists and publications, most of which engaged in verifiably good journalism and done so completely above board and TOS [terms of service] observant ways."



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