

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Friday June 12, 2020

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to express deep concern regarding Facebook's standards and practices on hate-speech and paid political disinformation. We have found your company's response, and refusal to address the incitement of violence and political micro-targeting, to be extremely troubling. We request that Facebook immediately revise its policies governing these practices and respond to my enclosed questions.

On May 29, 2020, in your function as CEO, you articulated Facebook's determination not to remove a post which other social media platforms, and a large number of Facebook employees, agreed incited violence and directly violated Facebook's "Community Standards." Further, we understand that hundreds of your employees, uncomfortable with your inaction, organized a walkout on Monday June 1, 2020. We share their disappointment with your response. This highlights a possible negligent obfuscation of responsibility to your team, your shareholders, and your users. It also underscores a likely pattern of practice in failing to appropriately balance free speech against public safety and the general welfare of users.

This failing is also reflected in Facebook's practices around microtargeting and misinformation. We understand that your company allows advertisers to micro-target users based upon attributes (i.e. demographics, behaviors, interests), activities, personally identifiable information, and through "lookalike" targeting.^[3] Micro-targeting on Facebook enables political operatives to strategically segment voters and deliver focused advertisements that promote inconsistent or misleading messages. This allows disinformation to covertly spread quickly through particularly vulnerable groups, like minority communities. The narrow targeting of the advertisement prevents opportunities for critique, correction or counterargument.^[4] Adding to the concerns, micro-targeting on Facebook has also enabled political advertisers to direct different messages to narrow subsets of users in order to reinforce and amplify partisan, group, and identity conflicts.^[6] The precision with which individuals and groups can be targeted on Facebook uniquely allows

^[3] <https://www.ccs.neu.edu/home/amislove/publications/Targeting-ConPro.pdf>

^[4] <https://internetpolicy.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Fake-news-recommendations-Wajeeha-MITs-IPRI.pdf>

^[6] <https://internetpolicy.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Fake-news-recommendations-Wajeeha-MITs-IPRI.pdf>

advertisers to exploit ideological and cultural divisions.^[7] Micro-targeting empowers advertisers to exploit such division by 1) allowing them to profile and target users who are most sensitive to particular identity threats, 2) enabling targeted messages to travel in an environment with few checks, 3) allowing targeted ads to land in media spaces where their claims and messages are less likely to be challenged, and 4) interfacing on a platform that is designed in ways to favor the spread of information triggering quick and emotionally intensive responses.^[8]

Research has demonstrated that Facebook increases both the extremism and the variability of ideological positioning of candidates and that the messages that candidates include in their Facebook advertisements are more easily identifiable as partisan and more clearly ideological than those they include in TV spots.^[9] Contrary to a Facebook executive's memo that "changing the platform's rules, even in an ostensibly neutral way, would amount to tipping the scales," We are of the belief that Facebook's failure to limit political micro-targeting already works to the favor of those who pay your company to run hyper-partisan and divisive advertisements regardless of their factual accuracy. Further, Facebook's failure to adhere to its own rules in removing content undercuts the very premise of that memo.

Ellen Weintraub of the Federal Election Commission, and other policymakers, have put forward public commentary on basic changes Facebook could adopt to stem the harms of paid false advertisements that Facebook is unfortunately committed to running. It is our hope that Facebook will revise its recent practices and policies governing hate speech and micro-targeted political advertisements, immediately.

We request a response within 30 days on any additional changes to Facebook's policies on hate speech and political ads currently under consideration and all related information concerning the projected date of implementation for those changes.

We also request timely responses to the following questions:

- Will Facebook address its failure to adhere to its own community standards in communication to its shareholders?
 - If yes, how exactly do you intend to address this issue and what do you intend to say?
 - If no, why not?
- As CEO, will you commit to address any demands made by employees who participated in the Monday, June 1, 2020 walkout in an open and transparent process?
 - If yes, how and do you plan to do this?
 - If no, why not?

^[7]

https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_working_paper_social_media_disinformation_and_electoral_integrity_august_2019.pdf

^[8] https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DS_Digital_Influence_Machine.pdf

^[9] https://web.stanford.edu/~gjmartin/papers/Ads_Online_and_Offline_Working.pdf

- Will you commit to protecting employees who engaged in the walkout from any penalty or reprisal?
 - If yes, how and do you plan to do this?
 - If no, why not?
- What public outreach did Facebook conduct with public officials and non-profit stakeholders prior and relevant to the January 2020 political advertisement policy announcement?
 - What feedback did Facebook receive regarding political micro-targeting?
- What internal or external research has Facebook conducted or financed that supports Facebook’s decision to refrain from making changes to its political micro-targeting policy?
 - What ongoing research or data collection is Facebook conducting or financing regarding the impact of paid political micro-targeting?
- What internal deliberation occurred regarding Facebook’s micro-targeting decision and at what level(s)?
- To what extent do Facebook’s algorithms give preference to political advertisements believed to be more “relevant” to particular users?
 - Can the content of an advertisement alone affect which users Facebook will show a political advertisement to?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response and continued dialogue on this issue.

Sincerely,



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
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Stephen F. Lynch
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Juan Vargas
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Barbara Lee
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Jahana Hayes
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Danny K. Davis
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Katie Porter
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Denny Heck
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Wm. Lacy Clay
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Ayanna Pressley
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