

Meta

Ending Suspension of Trump's Accounts With New Guardrails to Deter Repeat Offenses

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Takeaways

- We will be ending the suspension of Mr. Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts in the coming weeks.
- We've put new guardrails in place to deter repeat offenses.
- The public should be able to hear what politicians are saying so they can make informed choices.

Social media is rooted in the belief that open debate and the free flow of ideas are important values, especially at a time when they are under threat in many places around the world. As a general rule, we don't want to get in the way of open, public and democratic debate on Meta's platforms — especially in the context of elections in democratic societies like the United States. The public should be able to hear what their politicians are saying — the good, the bad and the ugly — so that they can make informed choices at the ballot box. But that does not mean there are no limits to what people can say on our platform. When there is a clear risk of real world harm — a deliberately high bar for Meta to intervene in public discourse — we act.

Two years ago, we took action in what were extreme and highly unusual circumstances. We indefinitely suspended then-US President Donald Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts following his praise for people engaged in violence at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. We then referred that decision to the Oversight Board — an expert body established to be an independent check and balance on our decision-making. The Board upheld the decision but criticized the open-ended nature of the suspension and the lack of clear criteria for when and whether suspended accounts will be restored, directing us to review the matter to determine a more proportionate response.

In response to the Board, we imposed a time-bound suspension of two years from the date of the original suspension on January 7, 2021 — an unprecedented length of time for such a suspension. We also clarified the circumstances in which accounts of public figures could be restricted during times of civil unrest and ongoing violence, and introduced a new Crisis Policy Protocol to guide our assessment of on and off-platform risks of imminent harm so we can respond with specific policy and product actions. In our response to the Oversight

Board, we also said that before making any decision on whether or not to lift Mr. Trump's suspension, we would assess whether the risk to public safety has receded.

The suspension was an extraordinary decision taken in extraordinary circumstances. The normal state of affairs is that the public should be able to hear from a former President of the United States, and a declared candidate for that office again, on our platforms. Now that the time period of the suspension has elapsed, the question is not whether we choose to reinstate Mr. Trump's accounts, but whether there remain such extraordinary circumstances that extending the suspension beyond the original two-year period is justified.

To assess whether the serious risk to public safety that existed in January 2021 has sufficiently receded, we have evaluated the current environment according to our Crisis Policy Protocol, which included looking at the conduct of the US 2022 midterm elections, and expert assessments on the current security environment. Our determination is that the risk has sufficiently receded, and that we should therefore adhere to the two-year timeline we set out. As such, we will be reinstating Mr. Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts in the coming weeks. However, we are doing so with new guardrails in place to deter repeat offenses.

Like any other Facebook or Instagram user, Mr. Trump is subject to our Community Standards. In light of his violations, he now also faces heightened penalties for repeat offenses — penalties which will apply to other public figures whose accounts are reinstated from suspensions related to civil unrest under our updated protocol. In the event that Mr. Trump posts further violating content, the content will be removed and he will be suspended for between one month and two years, depending on the severity of the violation.

Our updated protocol also addresses content that does not violate our Community Standards but that contributes to the sort of risk that materialized on January 6, such as content that delegitimizes an upcoming election or is related to QAnon. We may limit the distribution of such posts, and for repeated instances, may temporarily restrict access to our advertising tools. This step would mean that content would remain visible on Mr. Trump's account but would not be distributed in people's Feeds, even if they follow Mr. Trump. We may also remove the reshare button from such posts, and may stop them being recommended or run as ads. In the event that Mr. Trump posts content that violates the letter of the Community Standards but, under our newsworthy content policy, we assess there is a public interest in knowing that Mr. Trump made the statement that outweighs any potential harm, we may similarly opt to restrict the distribution of such posts but leave them visible on Mr. Trump's account. We are taking these steps in light of the Oversight Board's emphasis on high-reach and influential users and its emphasis on Meta's role "to create necessary and proportionate penalties that respond to severe violations of its content policies."

There is a significant debate about how social media companies should approach content posted on their platforms. Many people believe that companies like Meta should remove much more content than we currently do. Others argue that our current policies already make us overbearing censors. The fact is people will always say all kinds of things on the

internet. We default to letting people speak, even when what they have to say is distasteful or factually wrong. Democracy is messy and people should be able to make their voices heard. We believe it is both necessary and possible to draw a line between content that is harmful and should be removed, and content that, however distasteful or inaccurate, is part of the rough and tumble of life in a free society.

We publish our Community Standards publicly so that everyone can see where we draw that line. Our policies sometimes require reconsideration and revision — as the introduction of our Crisis Policy Protocol and the additional elements announced today reflect. We are highlighting these rules today because we anticipate that should Mr. Trump choose to resume activity on our platforms, many people will call for us to take action against his account and the content he posts, while many others will be upset if he is suspended again, or if some of his content is not distributed on our platforms. We want to be as clear as possible now about our policies, so that even in those instances where people will disagree with us, they still understand the rationale for our responses.

We know that any decision we make on this issue will be fiercely criticized. Reasonable people will disagree over whether it is the right decision. But a decision had to be made, so we have tried to make it as best we can in a way that is consistent with our values and the process we established in response to the Oversight Board's guidance.