



The Real Facebook Oversight Board

Facebook Quarterly Harms Report **3rd Quarter 2022**

Following the conclusion of Facebook’s third quarter in this financial year, the Real Facebook Oversight Board is publishing our Quarterly Harms Report. The report is a compilation of the harms that investors have facilitated through their ownership of shares – a documentation of the so-called externalities of Facebook’s business, with a focus on human life, privacy, and democracy.

The harm highlights in Q3 were:

- Meta’s continued descent into a platform for right-wing extremism and a vehicle for conservative political voices;
- The abject failure of Facebook to prepare for the 2022 U.S. election midterms;
- Facebook’s alarming flirtation with re-platforming President Trump;
- Meta’s whitewashing of their first ever “human rights” report, which revealed their intent to fully bury an assessment of human rights in India compromised by their platforms.
- The so-called news feed algorithm’s continued prioritization of known disinformation superspreaders and extremists.



As Facebook tallies its Q3 dollars, Facebook shareholders have made a sizable investment in disinformation, destabilization, deceit and denial - and have put the stability of the 2022 election at risk.

Meta’s Failures Compromise 2022 U.S. Midterm Elections

Increasing reports show that Meta is [unprepared and unwilling](#) to take the steps necessary to safeguard the 2022 U.S. Midterm elections. Shareholders need to confront the looming crisis - RFOB and our partners have solutions to offer.

Change The Terms

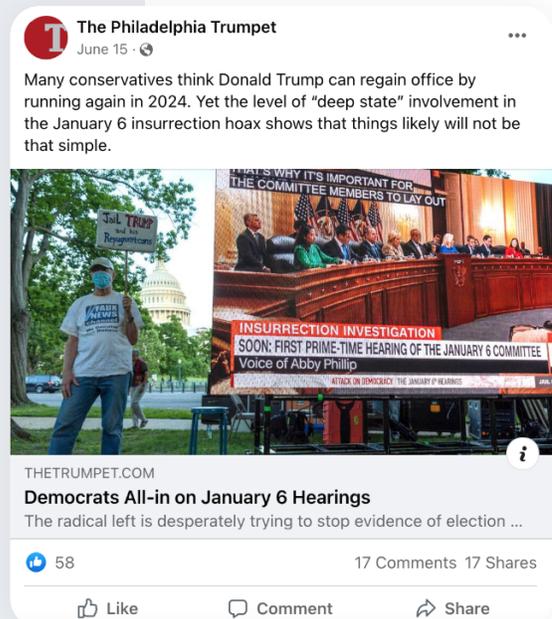
In their recent work, RFOB partners including Free Press, Color of Change, Muslim Advocates, Media Justice and the National Hispanic Media Coalition have been pressing Meta and other platforms to step up before the election as part of the [Change the Terms coalition](#). In a recent letter to Meta, Change the Terms wrote -

We know that hate speech and disinformation will only continue to accelerate in the three months leading up to the U.S. midterm elections. This is why we have particular concerns about [this AP news article](#), which explains that Meta has slashed its election-integrity staff from 300 to 60 people. The article also discusses widespread problems with CrowdTangle, and notes that Meta has fewer public-facing information guides on the election than it has in previous cycles. These findings contradict what you shared with us during our meeting.

Meta was asked to prioritize review of possible harassment of election workers, as seen in the example [above]. Despite Meta’s assurance that this post had been taken down due to violations of its bullying and harassment policies – as well as its disinformation policies under voter or census interference – versions of this content continue to appear across the platform.

This post by the Philadelphia Trumpet spreads the false stolen-election narrative and claims the Jan. 6 insurrection was a hoax, and that the House’s Jan. 6 committee hearings are theater. This post remains up and unlabeled on Facebook, despite its policy that calls for removal of “misinformation that is likely to directly contribute to a risk of interference with people’s ability to participate in [voting or the census].

Here are some examples of disinformation Change the Terms shared with Meta -





Tallying Hate in the States

In an ongoing research series, RFOB partner Global Project Against Hate and Extremism has been [reporting out the ongoing rise in political violence and a dangerous environment of anger and in key battleground states](#). Here's some of what they've found -

- Nationally, activists are members of militias and white supremacist organizations, often working hand-in-hand with far-right organizations to delegitimize election results and election infrastructure. In many cases, these organizations are spreading demonizing language against immigrants, such as the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory, and other marginalized communities, in particular the LGBTQ+ community.
- These activists have also propagandized white supremacist ideas, such as the racist "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory
- In Arizona, activists are using social media to target what ballot drop boxes should be watched and monitored for "fraud."
- In Texas, the State Republican Party's platform calling homosexuality "an abnormal lifestyle choice" was shared extensively on social media.
- In Pennsylvania, hyper-local Facebook groups have been used to organize extremists and threaten and target elected officials. In one example, "Lancaster, PA for Free and Fair Elections," activists targeted State Representatives with election lies, and organized participation in rallies featuring white supremacists.

This is both on and offline, with Meta and its platforms serving as a hub for disinformation.

- In Michigan, Republican officials are openly posting on Facebook about the racist "great replacement" and "great reset" conspiracy theories, and **using Facebook Messenger to target election workers.**

While focused on the broader environment for election violence and disinformation, GPAHE's research makes it clear: the seeds are planted for violence and a flood of election disinformation in the 2022 midterms, and Meta's platforms are being used in various ways to facilitate.

Detroit Clerk Janice Winfrey was sent photos of a dead body with a message to imagine that body as her daughter. Winfrey said a man confronted her outside of her home and also threatened via Facebook Messenger to bomb her residential area.





Our Demands

The Real Facebook Oversight Board is urgently calling on policymakers and advocates to act, and on Meta to enact the following measures months before election day

- 1. Prioritize credible news and information in Newsfeed** by boosting the algorithm tied to “news ecosystem quality” in order to downrank hate and disinformation, as Meta did across its platforms in the weeks following the 2020 election.
- 2. Ensure the Facebook Civic and Integrity Teams recommendations for the 2022 election are implemented**, including dialing back reliance on downstream MSI (meaningful social interactions).
- 3. Do not approve any advertising that delegitimizes election outcomes** at a national, state and local level.
- 4. Remove all posts that incite election violence** and ban violative accounts
- 5. [With reports showing](#)** that Meta’s platforms are still flooded with disinformation in Spanish and other non-English languages, Meta **must make an immediate, urgent investment in non-English language moderation of election content**, using qualified moderators rather than relying on AI.
- 6. Let academic researchers back in**, allowing outside independent scholars to monitor Facebook’s content and algorithms around the 2022 election.
- 7.** As we saw between the 2020 U.S. election and the Jan. 6th insurrection, violative content about the electoral process and democracy writ large does not have an “end” time after an election occurs. **We urge Meta to keep election-integrity efforts in place through at least the first quarter of 2023 and we call on the company to announce its timeline and plans for the 2024 election.** Meta should prioritize review of possible harassment of election workers.

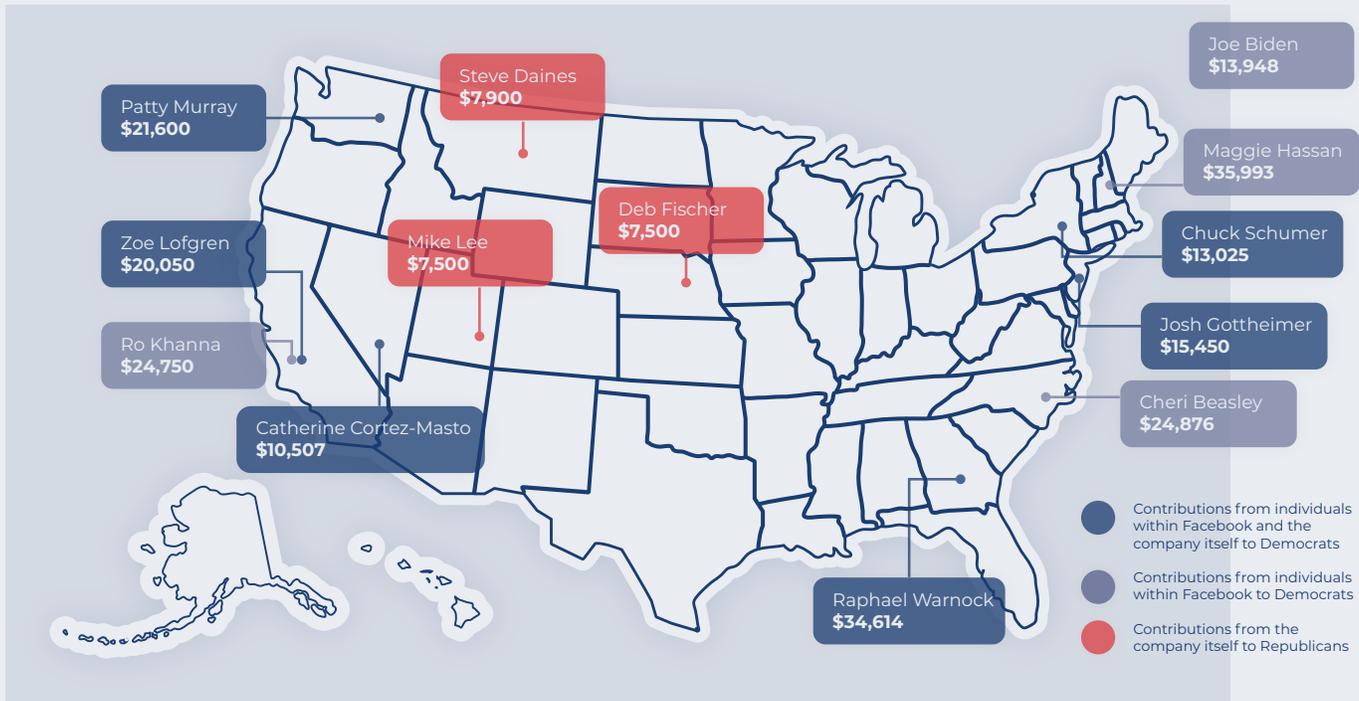
Meta has shown through its “break glass” actions in 2020 that it can act aggressively to limit election denial on its platforms, if it so chooses.

For democracy and our future, we urgently demand that Meta act.



New Research: Candidates on Facebook's Payroll

Campaign Contributions by Facebook in the 2022 Midterm Cycle



Facebook spends thousands of dollars on candidates for office across the country. Ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, we sourced data from [OpenSecrets](#) to determine how many candidates are on Facebook's payroll. Contributions from Facebook include those from individuals and from the company directly to the campaign. While small dollar employee donations may occasionally be included in this data, this strategy is ideal for the company because contributions don't appear as directly from the company but could be from a high level executive such as Mark Zuckerberg. We have selected some of the Democrats who received over \$10,000 in contributions and Republican candidates who received direct contributions from the company at \$7,500.

Of note is the donation in this cycle from this company to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY). Schumer is [reportedly](#) the man standing between the Senate and a vote on the slate of antitrust bills that resulted from years of investigation into anticompetitive practices of Big Tech companies, including Facebook. Schumer's [daughters also work for Facebook and Amazon](#).

Others include Zoe Lofgren who has received over \$100,000 from Big Tech companies since she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994. She received \$20,050 from Facebook this cycle.

Facebook will try and exert whatever influence they can to get in bed with politicians from both parties to prevent legislation that would regulate core parts of their business model or even break up the company. According to our records from the previous, 2020 election, Facebook spent money in 49 states for Republicans and Democrats. We will only really know how much Facebook spent on campaign contributions after the 2022 midterms. For now, we can safely say: **these politicians are on Facebook's Payroll.**

(This project was done in partnership with Facebook Receipts, a new project of The Citizens designed to specifically track Facebook's global lobbying footprint. Stay tuned for more from the Facebook Receipts!)



Facebook Flirts with Re-Platforming President Trump

After its muddled decision to ban President Trump, sort of, until 2022 and punt their decision back to Meta, the Facebook Oversight Board had to know this would happen. Meta’s President of Global Affairs, Nick Clegg, winked at putting Trump back on the platform last month, [saying on a panel](#): “We’ve been very open. That temporary suspension is a two-year suspension, through early January of next year. We’ll look at all the signals we should do, about what we think may or may not affect the risks of real world harm.”

Meta, though, now knows more than ever about Trump’s abuse of their platforms, and the extent to which Facebook and Instagram were used to plan and incite the January 6th riot. On his own social platform, Truth Social, Trump continues to make untruthful, antisemitic and extremist postings, spreading the ‘big lie,’ threatening communities and undermining trust in our democracy. Trump recently sent a signal to his followers to commit violence if he is indicted by the Department of Justice.

Clegg has said that “if we think there is content on our platform which will lead to real-world harm –physical harm –then we feel we have a clear responsibility to act against it.” The signs are there. Shareholders must stand firm.

The reputable information ecosystem on Facebook is still riddled with known disinformers

While showing some improvement from previous quarters, our Q3 analysis of Kevin Roose’s Top 10 data aggregation, critical trends highlighted by the RFOB last quarter persists, illustrating a continuing inability for Facebook to control its platform - particularly alarming this close to the election.

Our research showed:

29% - nearly one in three - top ten posts were from known disinformers

30% of #1 posts in Q3 2022 were from known disinformers.

Conversely, the share of top ten posts shared by reputable sources was only 13%, with the share of #1 posts also at 13%. This shows the share of disinformation still far outranking reputable sources.

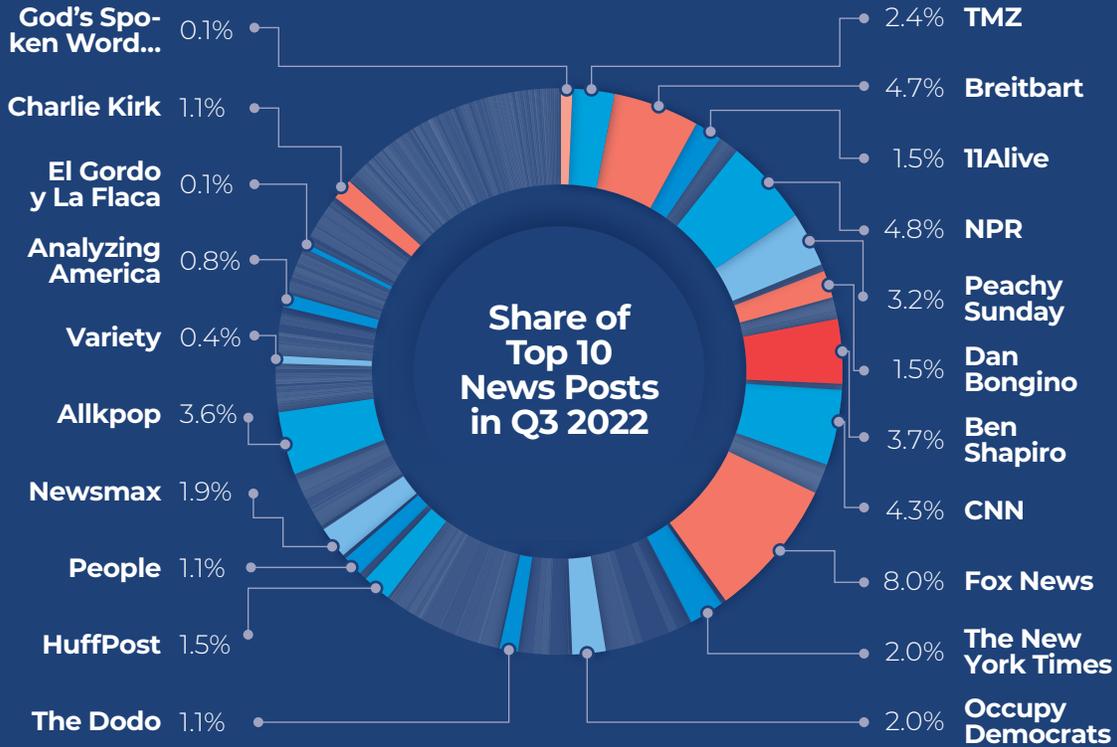
And for a platform that is a primary news source for so many, for only 13% of top ten posts for an entire quarter to be from reputable sources reflects an environment heavily skewed to disinformation.

Known disinformers - including election deniers - like Dan Bongino, Candace Owens, Ben Shapiro and Brietbart News regularly were among Facebook’s top ten posts each week in Q3.

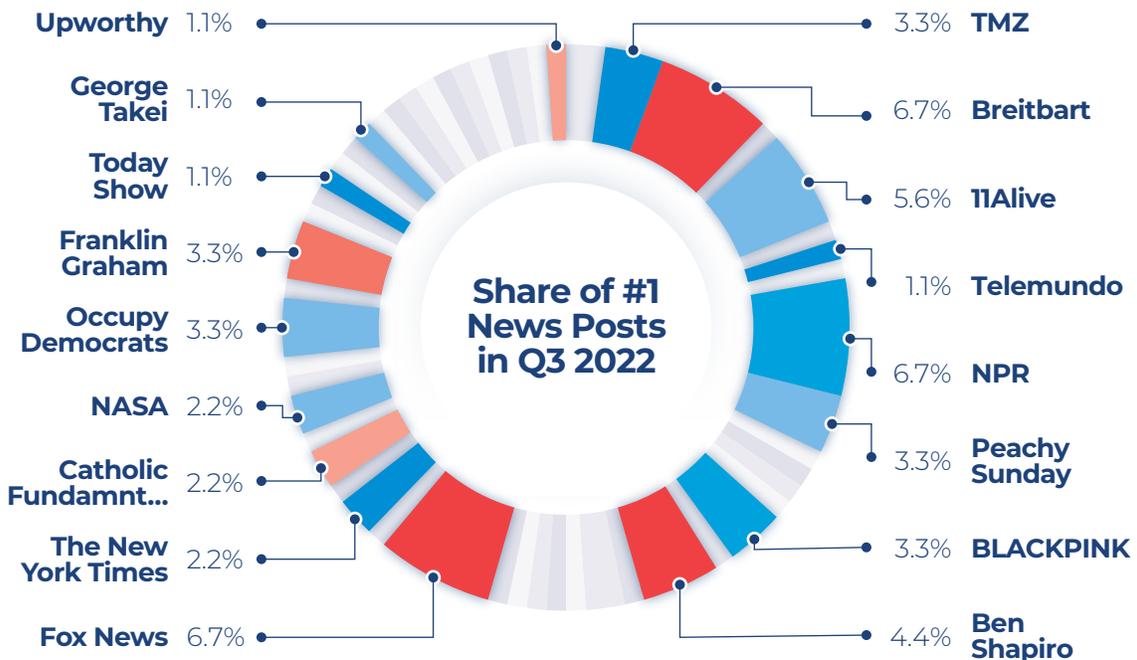
Dan Bongino
Fox News pundit & former Republican congressional candidate



Ben Shapiro
Editor of conservative website [Daily Wire](#)



The Real Facebook Oversight Board repeats its demand that Facebook:
Uprank quality news sources by reprioritizing reputability in the news algorithm





Facebook Whitewashes Human Rights Record, Betrays Harassment Victims in India

In August 2020, Facebook announced it would [commission](#) an independent Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) for India to assess its role in the spread of hate online. After nearly a two year wait, in July this year, it [released](#) a “highly summarized” and watered down version of this report, drawing sharp criticism from civil society organizations.

Facebook handed this job to a law firm called Foley Hoag, which produced detailed findings about Facebook’s shortcomings in India based on interviews with 40+ civil society representatives. But Facebook has not made this report available, instead strategically releasing a 4-page summary of their choosing, which civil society actors have labeled a “cover up” and “whitewashing”. At the time, the Real Facebook Oversight Board also released a [statement](#), calling this out as a PR stunt: “a master class in spin and obfuscation.”

Not only did Facebook not detail the findings, it also failed to disclose the recommendations that the law firm made to it in response to their discoveries. Instead, the company gave a list of measures they claim to have already implemented in India.

The commissioning of this HRIA report came in the light of the deadly 2020 Delhi riots/pogrom. Since the violent unfoldings in early 2020, civil society stakeholders have continued to raise alarms over [Facebook’s role](#) in the violence. But Facebook did not give out any details on Foley Hoag’s assessments in regard to this crucial event. Instead they simply [state](#) that “assessors did not assess or reach conclusions about whether such bias existed”; making this whole thing a rather fruitless exercise.

Time and again, despite the growing number of reports pointing to their failure to tackle anti-Muslim hate speech, along with concerns regarding them colluding with the BJP in India (the Hindu nationalist party in power), Facebook has failed to take any appropriate action.



And in the one instance it did promise to act (that is, produce this “independent” human rights report), it has failed to come through. As of today, civil society organisations are still demanding the HRIA - and waiting for transparency from Meta.