

Meta's Allowance of Hate Speech Is Another Side Effect of Big Tech Monopoly

Mike Ludwig : 11-14 minutes : 1/10/2025

The latest “free speech” proclamation from a Big Tech billionaire has caused both alarm and a collective eyeroll. Digital rights activists say the debate over freedom of speech and content moderation has devolved into a partisan food fight without challenging the virtual monopolies that a few wealthy companies hold over our data and online experience.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg's announced on January 8 that Instagram and Facebook would remove [third-party fact-checking](#) teams and replace them with a “community notes” system similar to that of Elon Musk's X, where users can flag posts for misinformation and clarifying comments are crowdsourced and added with X's approval. Despite lofty talk about “free speech,” Zuckerberg's announcement was quickly pegged by critics as a political move meant to appease Donald Trump, his incoming administration and its very online fan base.

Despite Trump's narrow electoral victory, Zuckerberg is only the latest billionaire mogul to show an [unprecedented level of fealty](#) to the incoming president. As reporters at *Axios* [put it](#), Trump is entering office with “ever-expansive power” as a result. Multiple major tech firms have made large donations to Trump's inauguration fund, with Google, Microsoft, Meta and OpenAI [pledging \\$1 million each](#).

“I don't think you have to be a content moderation expert to be able to look at this and see that Mark Zuckerberg is bending the knee to Trump,” said Evan Greer, director of the digital rights group Fight for the Future, in an interview. “This is frankly what human rights experts have been concerned about for years, when we sort of play this game of working the referees in a game that the public always loses.”

In his announcement, Zuckerberg [promised](#) “more speech and fewer mistakes” on his massive platforms but [admitted](#) that content moderators would now “catch less bad stuff.” The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a nonprofit organization that promotes freedom of speech and digital rights, initially put out a cautiously optimistic [blog post](#) in response to Zuckerberg's move. Meta has in the past controversially blocked content that passes muster according to its own guidelines — just this week it was reported that Facebook [wrongly censored](#) LGBTQ content — and EFF supports good faith efforts to fix the problem. The group said Meta should focus on commonly censored but legitimate content posted by sex worker organizers or political dissidents outside of the United States, for example.

“These are not ‘us’ issues, these are global issues,” said David Greene, EFF's civil liberties director and coauthor of the blog post, in an interview. “A lot of mistakes are made with political dissident speech in other [countries], so these are issues that are problematic all around the world.”

However, the EFF cautioned that Meta's decision to move content moderation teams from California to Texas in order to combat “bias” is clearly more political than practical and raises big questions about Zuckerberg's intentions.

“It's just stupid. That's the most obvious political thing,” Greene said, adding that the change reflects the biases of the U.S. political right. “If anything, what they've done is traded perceived California bias for perceived Texas bias.”

Zuckerberg's announcement was part of a busy week for Meta's public relations, amid concerns — including from its own staff — about recent company changes. Facebook was caught censoring employees on a company forum who were posting jokes and complaints about the decision to add United Fighting Championship CEO Dana White to Meta's Board of Directors. White campaigned for Trump, and Facebook employees pointed to a 2022 video of White [slapping his wife](#) in a nightclub. The posts were taken down for violating community standards, [according](#) to tech reporters at *404Media*. (Despite Zuckerberg's “free speech” rhetoric, *404Media* also says its stories about censorship on Facebook are [censored](#) on the platform. Musk is [also notorious](#) for espousing “free speech” on X.)

Then news broke revealing that Meta was also quietly relaxing hate speech standards, with *The Independent* in

Britain [reporting](#) that Facebook and Instagram users are now allowed to call women “property” and protected groups like transgender people “freaks” on those platforms. According to [Meta](#), dehumanizing or insulting posts that could previously be flagged and removed are now allowed in the context of political debate over “transgender rights, immigration, or homosexuality.” LGBTQ groups [denounced](#) Zuckerberg and warned of widespread harassment and violence. The EFF called the changes “concerning” as researchers rushed to analyze the new policy.

EFF issued a [new statement](#) on Thursday, saying it was a “mistake to formulate our responses and expectations on what is essentially a marketing video for upcoming policy changes before any of those changes were reflected in their documentation.” Instead of taking a closer look at marginalized voices that had been unfairly censored, Meta took the opposite tack, making targeted changes that would “allow dehumanizing statements to be made about certain vulnerable group.”

“There wasn’t a need to sort of a refine their hate speech policy,” Greene said. “It does lend a lot of support to the idea that this was more of a primarily political capitulation than it was an earnest attempt to revise pressing problems with content moderation.”

Democrats and liberals responded with outrage to Zuckerberg’s apparent appeasement of conservatives, who have attacked social media companies for years with [debunked claims](#) that moderators combatting misinformation, hate speech and harassment are biased against them. However, some activists say Facebook was not doing a great job to protecting users and marginalized voices to begin with. They also argue that social media CEOs have proven to be politically malleable, adjusting their content moderation policies based on which U.S. party is in power and prioritizing profit over protecting users.

Greer said that the intensely partisan nature of the debate over content moderation obscures the bigger problem.

“As long as we have these Big Tech companies that dominate so much of our information space ... they are always going to kowtow to governments, whether the U.S. or others, in ways that impact people’s expression,” Greer said in an interview. “What bums me out is that it feels like people are sort of happy to go along with that when the party they support is in power, and only get concerned about it when the party they don’t support is in power.”

Greer worries that too much time and effort from digital activists is spent fighting over content moderation policies while true freedom of speech will remain elusive as long as a tiny handful of surveillance platforms run by self-interested capitalists have a stranglehold on the online spaces where we hold important discussions.

Liberals typically say they want more moderation from private companies while conservatives generally want less, but Greer says this seemingly endless debate misses the point: Instead of trying to work the referees, Greer says, it would be better to demand lawmakers address structural issues, including privacy legislation that would limit the monopolies on surveillance technology and personal data collection and that have allowed social media companies to grow so big and destructive in the first place. Big Tech thrives off of sucking up and selling our personal data, and social media giants can simply copy innovations made by competitors and kill them off with sheer control over the market, Greer said.

Such legislation is “not going to turn the internet into a utopia, but it would get us on a path toward healthy online spaces where people can express themselves, and users have more tools to curate their own online experience rather than having done for them by politically motivated billionaires,” Greer said.

With Republicans in control Congress for at least the next two years, Greer is not expecting sweeping privacy protections or antitrust reforms to come out of Washington D.C. anytime soon. However, Fight for the Future is planning to push for legislation at the state level. Greer pointed to the digital privacy law [California passed in 2018](#), which is not perfect but points in the direction policymakers should be heading.

Such policies would make more room for alternatives to the big platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X. There has been an explosion in use of competitors, including Mastodon and Bluesky, particularly as left-leaning users leave X in protest of Musk’s censorship and [right-wing outbursts](#) in support of Trump. Social media is set up to make leaving a platform difficult, especially for people who have built a large following or business that cannot be transferred to another site. Giving users ownership over their own followers and data [could be key](#) to breaking Big Tech’s stranglehold on social media.

Still, the movement toward alternatives is lighting a path forward.

“People are remembering that social media is kind of us, when it’s not woefully distorted and stultified in the

interest of monopolists and capitalists, and we can have alternatives,” Greer said.

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Trump is busy getting ready for Day One of his presidency – but so is *Truthout*.

Trump has made it no secret that he is planning a demolition-style attack on both specific communities and democracy as a whole, beginning on his first day in office. With over 25 executive orders and directives queued up for January 20, he’s promised to “launch the largest deportation program in American history,” roll back anti-discrimination protections for transgender students, and implement a “drill, drill, drill” approach to ramp up oil and gas extraction.

Organizations like *Truthout* are also being threatened by legislation like HR 9495, the “nonprofit killer bill” that would allow the Treasury Secretary to declare any nonprofit a “terrorist-supporting organization” and strip its tax-exempt status without due process. Progressive media like *Truthout* that has courageously focused on reporting on Israel’s genocide in Gaza are in the bill’s crosshairs.

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We’re preparing right now for Trump’s Day One: building a brave coalition of movement media; reaching out to the activists, academics, and thinkers we trust to shine a light on the inner workings of authoritarianism; and planning to use journalism as a tool to equip movements to protect the people, lands, and principles most vulnerable to Trump’s destruction.

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