

# Can Facebook Ever Be Fixed?

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## Introduction

- Facebook has had 20+ scandals of 2018
- An actual spyware app that the company paid users to download
- Disastrous security practices such as “Storing Hundreds of Millions of User Passwords in Plain Text for Years”, between 200M to 600M passwords that could be looked up and exposed to 20K Facebook employees
- Mark Zuckerberg, “Four Ideas to Regulate the Internet”,
  - Harmful Content
  - Election Integrity
  - Privacy
  - Data Portability

## Zuckerberg’s Proposal

- **First:** Asking governments to clarify what counts as harmful content online, so FB can take them down
- **Second:** How does political interference occur on FB, which are often focused narrowly on elections
- **Third:** Standardize privacy regulations across the world, making it easier for companies like FB to apply the European regulations GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) to all users
- **Fourth:** Making it easier for users to move their data from one service to another

## The Problems

- Good portion of what Zuckerberg has proposed is already occurring and will be mandated by regulators
- For example, GDPR already helps with “data portability” and is being implemented in the EU
- Germany, China, Australia already forcing tech giants to invest more in removing harmful content

The proposal contains none of which demonstrate that FB is willing to forego some future benefit to make up for past sins.

## What's So Bad About Helping Facebook?

Facebook's interest diverge majorly from the interest of its users.

- **First:** The business model, the need to monetize user's data, and hence keep them on the platform as long as possible
  - Time
  - Attention
  - Data
  - FB users come for services seeking meaningful social connections, news, entertainment.
  - Thus it makes claims like, “a social infrastructure ... to build a global community that works for all of us”
  - Language like this masks' FB's need for your time, attention and data
- **Second:** Scale, with 3B+ users, 200M+ businesses, 1B+ stores per day, 100B+ messages as of 2021\*, 68,177 (September 30, 2021), that means 44,003+ users, 2,934+ business, 14,667+ stores, 1,466,770+ messages per employee
- **Third:** Cultural problem. Facebook making privacy and security missteps such as “*requests for sensitive data*” (‘Beyond Sketchy’: Facebook Demanding Some New Users’ Email Passwords), to “*violations of user privacy*” (Apple removed Facebook’s Onavo from the App Store for gathering app data)

It's only recently that we've begun to appreciate all the risks inherent in our adoption of digital technologies. From the growing range of internet-connected objects to our nearly complete reliance on software in finance, aviation, and many other areas, the range of threats to our privacy and our security has become systematic.

The problems are of a society that adopted a technology too quickly, without understanding its downsides or its risks, as written about in HBR (“Improving Cybersecurity Means Taking More Care with What We Digitize”) and elsewhere.

This means we must carefully craft new legislation that increases the privacy and security standards of all software systems, which will in turn slow the pace of adoption of digital technology.

This might mean literally desegregating Facebook's services and physically separating businesses like WhatsApp from others like Instagram and more.

In short term the company is far from target. Zuckerberg's latest proposals merely form another small episode in a much longer struggle.

## References

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