

## **What's worse than an insurrection? In the midterms, Facebook wants to find out.**

On January 7, 2021, Mark Zuckerberg [wrote](#) that Donald Trump “use[d]...our platform to incite violent insurrection against a democratically elected government.”

Yet, rather than redoubling their integrity efforts for the midterms, Facebook has actually *rolled back* numerous safeguards that were in place in 2020.

### **FACEBOOK DISBANDED ITS CIVIC INTEGRITY TEAM**

- **[The Information, 12/3/20](#): Facebook Splits Up Unit At Center of Contested Election Decisions**
- **[TIME, 10/7/21](#): How Facebook Forced a Reckoning by Shutting Down the Team That Put People Ahead of Profits**
  - “Five weeks later, supporters of Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol—after some of them organized on Facebook and used the platform to spread the lie that the election had been stolen. The civic-integrity team’s dissolution made it harder for the platform to respond effectively to Jan. 6”

### **FACEBOOK CUT ITS CORE ELECTION-FOCUSED STAFF BY 80%**

- **[New York Times, 6/23/21](#)**: “Mark Zuckerberg... met regularly with an election team [in 2020], which included more than 300 people from across his company, to prevent misinformation from spreading on the social network... Roughly 60 people are now focused primarily on elections, while others split their time on other projects.”
- **[AP, 8/5/22](#): Meta quieter on election misinformation as midterms loom**
  - “During the 2018 election cycle, the company offered tours and photos and produced head counts for its election response war room. But The New York Times reported the number of Meta employees working on this year’s election had been cut from 300 to 60”

### **FACEBOOK STOPPED BOOSTING AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES IN NEWS FEED**

- **[New York Times, 12/16/20](#): Facebook reverses postelection algorithm changes that boosted news from authoritative sources.**
  - “Facebook confirmed that it has in the past few days rolled back a change that lifted news from authoritative outlets over hyperpartisan sources after November’s election, signaling a return to normalcy for the social network”
  - “After the election, some Facebook employees asked at a company meeting whether the ‘nicer news feed’ could stay, according to several people who attended... ‘This was a temporary change we made to help limit the spread of inaccurate claims about the election,” said Joe Osborne, a Facebook spokesman.”

- [Former Facebook Civic Integrity Chief, Samidh Chakrabarti, 8/18/22](#): "Meta's plans make no mention at all about any temporary ranking changes that will be deployed. That's a big step backwards from 2020 and matters much more than any specific content moderation policy in contributing to that 'shared sense of reality'"

### **FACEBOOK IS KILLING OFF ITS OWN TRANSPARENCY TOOL, CROWDTANGLE, WHICH HAS BEEN CRITICAL TO TRACKING ELECTION MISINFORMATION**

- [New York Times, 7/14/21](#): **Inside Facebook's Data Wars**
  - "One day in April, the people behind CrowdTangle, a data analytics tool owned by Facebook, learned that transparency had limits. Brandon Silverman, CrowdTangle's co-founder and chief executive, assembled dozens of employees on a video call to tell them that they were being broken up."
  - "Mr. Boland, who oversaw CrowdTangle as well as other Facebook transparency efforts, said the tool fell out of favor with influential Facebook executives around the time of last year's presidential election, when journalists and researchers used it to show that pro-Trump commentators were spreading misinformation and hyperpartisan commentary with stunning success."
- [Reuters, 1/28/22](#): **Meta pauses new users from joining analytics tool CrowdTangle**
- [Bloomberg, 6/23/22](#): **Meta Pulls Support for Tool Used to Keep Misinformation in Check**
- [AP, 8/5/22](#): "CrowdTangle, the online tool that the company offered to hundreds of newsrooms and researchers so they could identify trending posts and misinformation across Facebook or Instagram, is now inoperable on some days."

### **FACEBOOK CUT OFF ACCESS TO RESEARCHERS INVESTIGATING JANUARY 6**

- [AP, 8/4/21](#): **Facebook shuts out NYU academics' research on political ads**
  - "Facebook...didn't shut down their accounts until Tuesday, hours after Edelson informed the platform that she and McCoy were studying the spread of disinformation on the platform about the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, the researchers said."
- [WIRED, 8/4/21](#): **Facebook's Reason for Banning Researchers Doesn't Hold Up**

### **ZUCKERBERG NO LONGER SEES SAFEGUARDING ELECTIONS AS A PRIORITY**

- [New York Times, 6/23/21](#): **As Midterms Loom, Elections Are No Longer Top Priority for Meta C.E.O.**
  - "Safeguarding elections is no longer Mr. Zuckerberg's top concern, said four Meta employees with knowledge of the situation. Instead, he is focused on transforming his company into a provider of the immersive world of the metaverse"

- “Mr. Zuckerberg no longer meets weekly with those focused on election security, said the four employees... Instead, they meet with Nick Clegg, Meta’s president of global affairs. Several civil right groups said they had noticed Meta’s shift in priorities. Mr. Zuckerberg isn’t involved in discussions with them as he once was, nor are other top Meta executives, they said.”
- “Companies should be growing their efforts to get prepared to protect the integrity of elections for the next few years, not pulling back,” said Katie Harbath, chief executive of the consulting firm Anchor Change, who formerly managed election policy at Meta. “Many issues, including candidates pushing that the 2020 election was fraudulent, remain, and we don’t know how they are handling those.”

### **FACEBOOK DISBANDED ITS RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION TEAM**

- **Wall Street Journal, 9/8/22: Facebook Parent Meta Platforms Cuts Responsible Innovation Team**
  - “Meta Platforms Inc. has disbanded its Responsible Innovation team, which was once a prominent piece of its effort to address concerns about the potential downsides of its products. The team had included roughly two dozen engineers, ethicists and others who collaborated with internal product teams and outside privacy specialists, academics and users to identify and address potential concerns about new products and alterations to Facebook and Instagram
- **Engadget, 9/8/22: Meta dissolves team responsible for discovering 'potential harms to society' in its own products**

### **FACEBOOK’S NEW TIKTOK-LIKE FEED WILL EXACERBATE MISINFORMATION**

- **The Verge, 6/15/22: Facebook Is Changing its Algorithm to Take On TikTok, Leaked Memo Reveals**
  - “Given the heightened scrutiny on how Facebook’s algorithms already shape discourse, the company starting to lean even more on AI feels bold... Employees I’ve spoken with in recent weeks say that the company’s biggest trust and safety risks already come from the recommendations its systems make”
  - ““For a while, we really leaned into it because it got people to follow more stuff that was new to them, and that really boosted sessions and time spent,’ one current employee who requested anonymity to speak without permission tells me. ‘But it also amplified the Russian IRA and other bad actors and increased the velocity of misinformation spread.””
  - Facebook ended up curtailing a lot of its recommendations after 2016 as scrutiny on misuses of the platform grew, with employees building systems to identify and demote sensitive posts on topics like politics and vaccines. After ‘Stop the Steal’ groups spread on its platform ahead of the attempted January 6th insurrection at the US Capitol, Facebook said early last year that it would stop recommending political groups globally for good.”