

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Clearing the cache on Facebook.

[It's time to talk about Facebook](#)

This week, Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg [unsuccessfully](#) testified before Congress. The issue at hand was Facebook's proposal to create its own cryptocurrency, [Libra](#), which has its own [issues](#) and worrisome national security [implications](#). But the focus of the hearing quickly shifted to what many are calling the [Trump Exemption](#). That exemption says Facebook will not remove inaccurate, misleading, or untrue content posted by 'political leaders' on the platform.

Facebook's refusal to remove disinformation, conspiracy theories, and outright lies on its platform just because they are posted by politicians and political actors poses a unique and potent threat to our democracy and to vulnerable communities around the world. But the issue is much larger than this one policy or its effect on the U.S. political system. Facebook's rapacious appetite for data and irresponsible practices that fail to protect personal information threatens to build a manipulation machine unequalled in human history that undermines the nature of truth and our ability to address common security challenges. **This is not inevitable.** Regulators, civil society, and consumers can and are working to prevent further erosion of democratic norms and institutions and provide protection for all.

MOVED FAST AND BROKE THINGS

Facebook is a platform with 2.3 billion monthly active users generating \$55.838 billion in revenue in 2018. It serves as a marketplace, calendar, messaging system, organizing tool, and public square. But Facebook's relentless tracking of every aspect of its users and its predilection for sharing this information in exchange for revenue has created a platform for politicians, political campaigns, and more to target and surveil followers at an unprecedented level. This power undermines our governing institutions and tears at the often fragile social fabric that binds us.

The Ballot Box and the Newsfeed

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, it became [clear](#) that Facebook had not become just a tool for spreading information about candidates, but also a platform to spread misleading, inaccurate, and inflammatory "news". Facebook has now become a haven for bad actors willing [to do anything to win](#), or worse, those who simply want to [foment chaos, division, and violence](#).

While historically Facebook has provided us with a [constant stream of meaningless apologies](#), the Facebook executives have shifted to refusing to submit to any authority limiting its actions. Facebook rolled out some [moderate reforms](#) to its political advertising policies, but it has also made clear that it

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has [learned very little](#) from the mistakes of the past by [attacking](#) candidates it deems unfriendly. Worse yet, Facebook appears to have [chosen sides](#) in the fractured political landscape of the United States.

Zuckerberg has tried to turn the [blame back on voters themselves](#) by suggesting that the solution is not changing their policies but rather claiming that all voters have the ability to hold their political leaders accountable for inaccurate ads via elections. This completely overlooks the fact that many communities in the United States do not have equal access to elections given gerrymandering and voter suppression schemes – a fact Zuckerberg [conceded in his testimony](#) this week that Facebook would not remove ads that told Black voters the wrong day to vote. It also misses the reality that in many countries around the world there are not free or fair elections that allow voters to hold their leaders accountable, so there is no check on the social damage predatory politicians can do on Facebook.

Click “Like” for Hate

Facebook is also providing a platform for state repression, white supremacist organizing, [and violence](#) — particularly within communities with ethnic, religious, and political divisions.

Facebook’s role in driving the genocide against the Rohingya is [well documented](#). [Evidence](#) also shows that Facebook was used to [fan the fires](#) of hatred in the tragic attacks in [El Paso and Christchurch](#). Facebook has also contributed to political violence globally such as in the [Philippines](#) and [India](#).

Facebook’s focus on user growth at any cost, paired with poor content moderation practices and lack of local experts and language speakers, creates a perfect storm where the [warning signs of violence](#) are often missed or ignored. Time and again, Facebook claims ignorance of the fast-moving situation on the ground, despite [activist’s alerts](#) to the company’s leadership that go ignored.

On the internet ~~no one~~ Facebook knows you’re a dog

There are long-term implications of letting Silicon Valley’s power go unchecked. Facebook collects an [immense amount of data](#) on every one of us with little regulation or oversight, and it [tracks you](#) even if you have never been on Facebook. If you are on Facebook, advertisers can target you based on your perceived interests, political affiliation, neighborhood, relationships, news sources, race, gender, or industry.

The reality is that the United States’ [history of unquestionably celebrating technology](#) and innovators has allowed us to excuse the abuses of tech companies. [Uber](#), [Twitter](#), [Google](#), and [Reddit](#), among others, have been given a pass despite causing direct and indirect harm to individuals and communities because we’re in awe of the latest innovation. The tech community gladly cultivates this image in an attempt to evade public criticism and regulatory scrutiny.

As individuals, we’ve accepted the terms of use that erode our privacy so we can play games or stay connected with old friends. But in our digitally-connected world, not everyone is given the choice to opt in. The calls to violence, the casually shared disinformation, and the damaging viewpoints that

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spread on Facebook hurt everyone and are an incredibly high cost to bear. **You do not have to be on Facebook to be hurt by Facebook.**

BRAVE NEW WORLD

The good news is we have agency and power. Congress is finally [coming around](#) to the idea that tech companies' missions may not benefit the public. As citizens we must support Congress's efforts and realize that Facebook may have too much concentrated power and needs to be broken into [manageable pieces](#).

Don't forget: we've done this to [communication companies](#) in the past. We already heavily regulate campaign advertising on television, radio, and mail, and it might be time to [more seriously apply those standards](#) to digital platforms as well. We should look to places like the European Union which has created [digital privacy rights](#) and protections for individuals from the [excesses of the internet](#) for inspiration.

Finally, as activists, communicators, and just regular users, we need to start holding Facebook accountable for the way it does business. We must not let our passivity and desire for convenience take the front seat. We must act to protect people who face violence and oppression because of Facebook's business model here at home and around the world. Along with policy makers, civil society can and must [act as a check](#) on invasive and harmful technology.

We need to stop excusing our own complicity in the harmful digital ecosystem that has grown around us. That is a bitter pill to swallow, but the longer we put it off, the worse the consequences will be. Maybe, just maybe, we can free ourselves from the notion that some kind of surveillance state dystopia is inevitable, and take back our own agency to build our digital future in a way we want.

WINNING THE INTERNET

Here are immediate steps we can all take:

- [Take action](#) against the damaging "Trump Exemption" that allows politicians to lie and spread hate on Facebook.
- [Protect yourself and your own data](#). We know that you already know this, but we also know that most of you never get around to actually doing it. Take 10 minutes to do it today. Better yet, do it, and then pass it along to your friends.
- Follow and lift up the folks that are working to hold Facebook and all tech companies accountable like [Fight for the Future](#), [EPIC](#), [Demand Progress](#), [Equality Labs](#), [Media Justice](#), and [Media Matters](#) to name just a few.

IN TRIBUTE

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This week Baltimore Congressman Elijah Cummings laid in state at the U.S. Capital. A giant among lawmakers, Cummings fought his way to Congress from poverty and the endemic racism of his childhood. Cummings always urged his colleagues to do better for the sake of his constituents and future generations. Please see [this moving tribute](#) from his hometown newspaper to learn more about his incredible life and work.

BURIED LEDES

Diplomacy marches on [without the U.S.](#) as **Afghan leaders agree to meet in China** to continue failed U.S. peace talks.

[Inhumane policies](#) continue in Gaza pushing the **poverty and unemployment rates to almost 75 percent.**

No one is surprised...that Saudi Arabia [has left loopholes](#) in its new laws to allow the continuation of **curtailing the movement for women's rights.**

Racism lives on in the small town of Orania in South Africa where only white people are [allowed to live.](#)

A [recent cyberattack](#) by **Russian hackers pretending to be Iranian spies** has exposed the lack of cybersecurity protections in 35 countries, including the U.S.

With approximately 200,000 troops still stationed abroad, **it's clear that Trump's promise to end endless wars is [hollow.](#)**

Why are we [housing](#) **nuclear weapons in Turkey** again?

Someone needs to [remind](#) Mike Pompeo that **#swagger is not happening.**

Trump apparently [forgot](#) about New Mexico when claimed he was building a wall in Colorado.

40 organizations from across the progressive movement [told](#) Congress **hell no to a "Skinny" NDAA.**

The **Secret Service investigated rapper Eminem** for his [lyrics](#) about Trump and Ivanka.

And finally, **No. John Bolton is NOT going to be the "[hero of the Resistance](#)".**