

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 28, 2020

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg  
CEO  
Facebook, Inc.  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to request that Facebook take immediate steps to ensure the safety and fairness of the upcoming elections. Specifically, we ask you to actively and consistently enforce the rules you have already created to curb election suppression activities by white supremacist and other hate groups; to stop the spread of election-related misinformation on your platforms; and to make adequate investment in staff with expertise in dealing with white supremacist groups.

Last month, President Trump stated that he plans to deploy law enforcement officers to patrol polling places—a move that has been compared to a prior program held by a federal court to be unlawful voter intimidation designed to suppress turnout by Black and Latinx voters.<sup>1</sup> When asked if he would leave office following an electoral defeat, President Trump has repeatedly refused to commit to the peaceful transition of power,<sup>2</sup> setting the stage for civil unrest.

The President's actions have emboldened white supremacists, neo-Nazis, right-wing militia groups, and their supporters, who often turn to Facebook to spread rumors and misinformation about the election.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Homeland Security's recently released draft reports state

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Post, "Trump's suggestion of deploying law enforcement officials to monitor polls raises specter of voting intimidation," (Aug. 21, 2020) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trumps-suggestion-of-deploying-law-enforcement-officials-to-monitor-polls-raises-specter-of-intimidation/2020/08/21/4ff6407a-e3bb-11ea-8dd2-d07812bf00f7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trumps-suggestion-of-deploying-law-enforcement-officials-to-monitor-polls-raises-specter-of-intimidation/2020/08/21/4ff6407a-e3bb-11ea-8dd2-d07812bf00f7_story.html) ("In an interview Thursday with Fox News host Sean Hannity, Trump described law enforcement officers as part of a phalanx of authorities he hopes will monitor voting in November. "We're going to have everything," the president said. "We're going to have sheriffs, and we're going to have law enforcement, and we're going to hopefully have U.S. attorneys and we're going to have everybody, and attorney generals. But it's very hard.")

<sup>2</sup> Washington Post, "Trump declines to say whether he will accept November election results," (July 19, 2020) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-declines-to-say-whether-he-will-accept-november-election-results/2020/07/19/40009804-c9c7-11ea-91f1-28aca4d833a0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-declines-to-say-whether-he-will-accept-november-election-results/2020/07/19/40009804-c9c7-11ea-91f1-28aca4d833a0_story.html); AP News, "Trump won't commit to peaceful transfer of power if he loses" (Sept. 23, 2020) <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-virus-outbreak-voting-elections-voting-fraud-and-irregularities-8bb28627b03474a3a5ce2454ae3d1639>

<sup>3</sup> ADL, "Hateful and Conspiratorial Groups on Facebook," (Aug. 3, 2020) <https://www.adl.org/blog/hateful-and-conspiratorial-groups-on-facebook>; Tech Transparency Project, "White Supremacist Groups Are Thriving on Facebook," (May 21, 2020) <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/white-supremacist-groups-are-thriving-on-facebook>

that “white supremacist extremists (WSEs) will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland through 2021.”<sup>4</sup>

With the election less than 40 days away, the lack of concerted action by Facebook to address this threat to our democracy is a grave concern. While Facebook recently announced the platform’s additional actions to enhance election security,<sup>5</sup> Facebook has been remiss and inconsistent in enforcing the platform’s existing policies—especially as applied to the President and to white supremacist groups.<sup>6</sup> Members of Facebook’s own staff have resigned, expressing concerns over the company’s “repeated failures to confront the hate and violence occurring and being organized on the platform”<sup>7</sup> and a “slapdash and haphazard” tendency to prioritize public relations risks over careful, systemic interventions.<sup>8</sup>

Hate groups have already used Facebook and its family of apps to organize violent events, which have resulted in the deaths of racial justice protesters in some cases. Most recently, two people in Kenosha, Wisconsin were murdered after a militia made plans to commit violence against protesters using a Facebook Events page that Facebook did not take down despite numerous calls to do so.<sup>9</sup>

In short, we are at the precipice of a democratic crisis, and Facebook must take all immediate steps within Facebook’s power to avert this crisis. We therefore request that Facebook immediately take the following actions:

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<sup>4</sup> Politico, “DHS draft document: White supremacists are greatest terror threat,” (September 4, 2020) <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/04/white-supremacists-terror-threat-dhs-409236>

<sup>5</sup> *But see* ProPublica, “Facebook’s Political Ad Ban Also Threatens Ability to Spread Accurate Information on How to Vote,” (Sept. 4, 2020) <https://www.propublica.org/article/facebook-political-ad-ban-also-threatens-ability-to-spread-accurate-information-on-how-to-vote> (“Facebook this week said it would bar political ads in the seven days before the presidential election... But rather than responding with glee, election officials say the move leaves them worried...Included in the ban are ads purchased by election officials — secretaries of state and boards of elections — who use Facebook to inform voters about how voting will work. The move effectively removes a key communication channel just as millions of Americans will begin to navigate a voting process different from any they’ve experienced before.”)

<sup>6</sup> *See* MIT Technology Review, “Why Congress should look at Twitter and Facebook,” (July 27, 2020) <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/07/27/1005648/why-congress-should-look-at-twitter-and-facebook/> (“While Twitter publishes full archives of account sets it has removed, Facebook posts blogs about takedowns without providing significant access to data for auditing.”)

<sup>7</sup> Washington Post, “Resignation Letter from Facebook Engineer,” (Sept. 8, 2020) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/resignation-letter-from-facebook-engineer/0538edee-7487-4822-956a-e880c2024324/?itid=lk\\_inline\\_manual\\_3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/resignation-letter-from-facebook-engineer/0538edee-7487-4822-956a-e880c2024324/?itid=lk_inline_manual_3)

<sup>8</sup> BuzzFeed News, ““I Have Blood on My Hands”: A Whistleblower Says Facebook Ignored Global Political Manipulation,” (Sept. 14, 2020) <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/facebook-ignore-political-manipulation-whistleblower-memo>

<sup>9</sup> BuzzFeed, “How Facebook Failed Kenosha,” (Sept. 3, 2020) <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/facebook-failed-kenosha?scrolla=5eb6d68b7fedc32e19ef33b4>

- Consistently enforce your company’s existing policies banning voting interference for all Facebook users—including for the President of the United States and other elected officials;<sup>10</sup>
- Immediately remove posts, groups and event pages that are planning or promoting white supremacist violence, voter suppression or misinformation;
- Ban white nationalist and hate groups from using your platform to organize events promoting violence, election interference, or voter suppression. In particular, this ban should also prohibit the use of events pages to engage in intimidation at polling stations;<sup>11</sup>
- Rigorously enforce the existing ban on calls to action to bring weapons to places such as polling places, and locations used to count votes or administer an election – including enforcement of the policy for Facebook events pages; and
- Hire specialists in white supremacist violence and hate groups to Monika Bickert’s content policy team.

Civil rights organizations have consistently and repeatedly made these requests – many of which are echoed in Facebook’s own Civil Rights Audit. There is no time to spare.

For the long term, we also ask you to make the structural changes recommended in Facebook’s own Civil Rights Audit. We are concerned that white supremacist groups will continue to use Facebook after election season to continue inciting and orchestrating violence and intimidation against communities of color.

Lastly, we recognize that the federal government must take clear and decisive action to better regulate the conduct of social media platforms—self-regulation alone will not yield safer platforms or fair competition that fosters innovation. This, however, does not negate Facebook’s responsibility to prevent harm on its own platforms. To prevent further loss of life, the

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<sup>10</sup> Accountable Tech, “Election Integrity Roadmap for Social Media Platforms,” <https://accountabletech.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Election-Integrity-Roadmap-for-Social-Media-Platforms.pdf> (“And Facebook’s deeply unpopular fact-checking exemption for politicians must be reversed for posts about voting, election integrity, and election results.”); see Facebook Community Standards Section 3, “Coordinating Harm and Publicizing Crime,” [https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/coordinating\\_harm\\_publicizing\\_crime](https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/coordinating_harm_publicizing_crime); Facebook Community Standards Section 21, “False News,” [https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/false\\_news](https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/false_news)

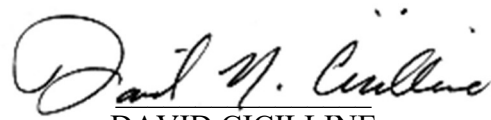
<sup>11</sup> See “Facebook’s Civil Rights Audit – Final Report” (July 8, 2020) <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Civil-Rights-Audit-Final-Report.pdf> (“Facebook’s events policy provides another illustration of the need for focused study and analysis on particular manifestations of hate. Facebook policy prohibits both calls to bring weapons to houses of worship (including mosques) and calls to bring weapons to other religious gatherings or events to intimidate or harass people. Civil rights groups have expressed ongoing concern that Facebook’s enforcement of its events policy is too slow ... The Auditors believe having an effective expedited review process to remove such content quickly is critical given its potential for real-world harm, and that such post-incident analysis assessments are vital to that end.”)

suppression of Black, Indigenous and People of Color voters and communities, and the further corrosion of democracy, Facebook must act now.

We request that you respond to this letter no later than October 12, 2020.

Sincerely,

  
PRAMILA JAYAPAL  
Member of Congress

  
DAVID CICILLINE  
Member of Congress