

# The Cost of Facebook's Now-Repudiated Censorship

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*History will remember this era as the moment when America's most sacred principles collided with unprecedented institutional power - and lost. The systematic dismantling of fundamental rights didn't happen through military force or executive decree, but through the quiet cooperation of tech platforms, media gatekeepers, and government agencies, all claiming to protect us from "misinformation."*

[Meta's sudden dismantling of its fact-checking program](#) - announced by Zuckerberg as a "cultural tipping point towards prioritizing speech" - reads like a quiet footnote to what history may record as one of the most staggering violations of fundamental rights in recent memory. After eight years of increasingly aggressive content moderation, including nearly 100 fact-checking organizations operating in over 60 languages, Meta is now pivoting to a community-driven system similar to X's model.

In his announcement, Zuckerberg first suggests that the censorship was purely a technical mistake, and then changes his tune near the end and admits what has long been litigated:

"The only way that we can push back on this global trend is with the support of the US government. And that's why it's been so difficult over the past 4 years when even the US government has pushed for censorship. By going after us and other American companies, it has emboldened other governments to go even further."

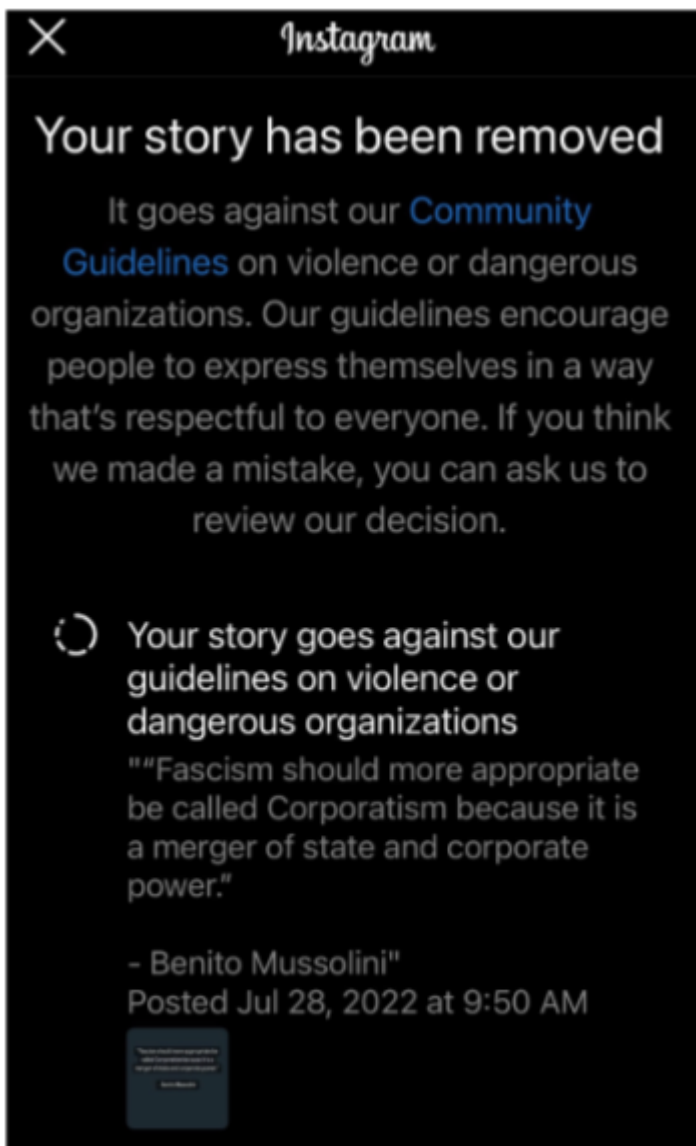
In many court cases costing millions, involving vast FOIA requests, depositions, and discoveries, the truth of this has been documented in 100,000 pages of evidence. [The Murthy v. Missouri case](#) alone uncovered substantial communications through FOIA and depositions, revealing the depth of government coordination with social media platforms. The Supreme Court considered it all but several justices simply could not comprehend the substance and scale, and thus reversed a lower court injunction to stop it all. Now we have Zuckerberg openly admitting precisely what was in dispute: the US government's involvement in aggressive violation of the First Amendment.

This should, at least, make it easier to find redress as the cases proceed. Still, it is frustrating. Tens of millions have been spent to prove what he could have admitted years ago. But back then, the censors were still in charge, and Facebook was guarding its relationship with the powers that be.

The timing of the shift is telling: [a Trump ally joining the board](#), [Meta's president of global affairs being replaced by a prominent Republican](#), and a new administration preparing to take control. But while Zuckerberg frames this as a return to free speech principles, the damage of their experiment in mass censorship can't be undone with a simple policy change.

The irony runs deep: private companies claiming independence while acting as extensions of state power. Consider our own experience: posting Mussolini's definition of fascism as "the merger of state and corporate power" - only to [have Meta remove it as "misinformation."](#) This wasn't just censorship; it was meta-censorship - silencing discussion about the very mechanisms of control being deployed.

While tech platforms maintained the facade of private enterprise, their synchronized actions with government agencies revealed a more troubling reality: the emergence of exactly the kind of state-corporate fusion they were trying to prevent us from discussing.



[As we've covered before](#), we didn't just cross lines - [we crossed sacred Rubicons created after humanity's darkest chapters](#). The First Amendment, born from revolution against tyranny, and the Nuremberg Code, established after World War II's horrors, were meant to be unbreakable guardians of human rights. Both were systematically dismantled in the name of "safety." The same tactics of misinformation, fear, and government overreach that our ancestors warned against were deployed with frightening efficiency.

This systematic dismantling left no topic untouched: from discussions of vaccine effects to debates about virus origins to questions about mandate policies. Scientific discourse was replaced with approved narratives. Medical researchers couldn't share findings that diverged from institutional positions, as seen in the removal of [credible discussions of Covid-19 data](#) and policy. Even [personal experiences were labeled "misinformation"](#) if they didn't align with official messaging – a pattern that reached absurd heights when [even discussing the nature of censorship itself](#) became grounds for censorship.

The damage rippled through every layer of society. At the individual level, careers were destroyed and professional licenses revoked simply for sharing genuine experiences. Scientists and doctors who questioned prevailing narratives found themselves professionally ostracized. Many were made to feel isolated or irrational for trusting their own eyes and experiences when platforms labeled their firsthand accounts as "misinformation."

The destruction of family bonds may prove even more lasting. Holiday tables emptied. Grandparents missed irreplaceable moments with grandchildren. Siblings who had been close for decades stopped speaking. Years of family connections shattered not over disagreements about facts, but over the very right to discuss them.

Perhaps most insidious was the community-level damage. Local groups splintered. Neighbors turned against neighbors. Small businesses faced blacklisting. Churches divided. School board meetings devolved into battlegrounds. The social fabric that enables civil society began unraveling – not because people held different views, but because the very possibility of dialogue was deemed dangerous.

The censors won. They showed that with enough institutional power, they could break apart the social fabric that makes free discourse possible. Now that this infrastructure for suppression exists, it stands ready to be deployed again for whatever cause seems urgent enough. The absence of a public reckoning sends a chilling message: there is no line that cannot be crossed, no principle that cannot be ignored.

True reconciliation demands more than Meta's casual policy reversal. We need a full, transparent investigation documenting every instance of censorship – from suppressed vaccine injury reports to blocked scientific debates about virus origins to silenced voices questioning mandate policies. This isn't about vindication – it's about creating an unassailable public record ensuring these tactics can never be deployed again.

Our Constitution's First Amendment wasn't a suggestion – it was a sacred covenant written in the blood of those who fought tyranny. Its principles aren't outdated relics but vital protections against the very overreach we just witnessed. When institutions treat these foundational rights as flexible guidelines rather than inviolable boundaries, the damage ripples far beyond any single platform or policy.

Like many in our circles, we witnessed this firsthand. But personal vindication isn't the goal. Every voice silenced, every debate suppressed, every relationship fractured in service of "approved narratives" represents a tear in our social fabric that makes us all poorer. Without a full accounting and concrete safeguards against future overreach, we're leaving future generations vulnerable to the same autocratic impulses wearing different masks.

The question isn't whether we can restore what was lost – we can't. The question is whether we'll finally recognize these rights as truly inviolable, or continue treating them as

inconvenient obstacles to be swept aside whenever fear and urgency demand it. Benjamin Franklin warned that those who would surrender essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety. Our answer to this challenge will determine whether we leave our children a society that defends essential liberties or one that casually discards them in the name of safety.

Here is the full transcript of Mark Zuckerberg's announcement, January 7, 2024:

Hey, everyone. I wanna talk about something important today because it's time to get back to our roots around free expression on Facebook and Instagram. I started building social media to give people a voice. I gave a speech at Georgetown 5 years ago about the importance of protecting free expression, and I still believe this today. But a lot has happened over the last several years.

There's been widespread debate about potential harms from online content, governments and legacy media have pushed to censor more and more. A lot of this is clearly political, but there's also a lot of legitimately bad stuff out there. Drugs, terrorism, child exploitation. These are things that we take very seriously and I wanna make sure that we handle responsibly. So we built a lot of complex systems to moderate content, but the problem with complex systems is they make mistakes.

Even if they accidentally censor just 1% of posts, that's millions of people. And we've reached a point where it's just too many mistakes and too much censorship. The recent elections also feel like a cultural tipping point towards once again prioritizing speech. So we're gonna get back to our roots and focus on reducing mistakes, simplifying our policies, and restoring free expression on our platforms. More specifically, here's what we're gonna do.

First, we're gonna get rid of fact-checkers and replace them with community notes similar to X starting in the US. After Trump first got elected in 2016, the legacy media wrote nonstop about how misinformation was a threat to democracy. We tried in good faith to address those concerns without becoming the arbiters of truth, but the fact-checkers have just been too politically biased and have destroyed more trust than they've created, especially in the US. So over the next couple of months, we're gonna phase in a more comprehensive community note system. Second, we're gonna simplify our content policies and get rid of a bunch of restrictions on topics like immigration and gender that are just out of touch with mainstream discourse.

What started as a movement to be more inclusive has increasingly been used to shut down opinions and shut out people with different ideas, and it's gone too far. So I wanna make sure that people can share their beliefs and experiences on our platforms. Third, we're changing how we enforce our policies to reduce the mistakes that account for the vast majority of censorship on our platforms. We used to have filters that scanned for any policy violation. Now we're gonna focus those filters on tackling illegal and high severity violations.

And for lower severity violations, we're going to rely on someone reporting an issue before we take action. The problem is that the filters make mistakes and they take down a lot of content that they shouldn't. So by dialing them back, we're gonna dramatically reduce the amount of censorship on our platforms. We're also going to tune our content filters to require much higher confidence before taking down content.

The reality is that this is a trade-off.

It means we're gonna catch less bad stuff, but we'll also reduce the number of innocent people's posts and accounts that we accidentally take down. Fourth, we're bringing back civic content. For a while, the community asked to see less politics because it was making people stressed. So we stopped recommending these posts, but it feels like we're in a new era now and we're starting to get feedback that people want to see this content again. So we're gonna start phasing this back into Facebook, Instagram and Threads while working to keep the communities friendly and positive.

Fifth, Fifth, we're gonna move our trust and safety and content moderation teams out of California and our US-based content review is going to be based in Texas. As we work to promote free expression, I think that will help us build trust to do this work in places where there is less concern about the bias of our teams. Finally, we're gonna work with President Trump to push back on governments around the world that are going after American companies and pushing to censor more. The US has the strongest constitutional protections for free expression in the world. Europe has an ever increasing number of laws institutionalizing censorship and making it difficult to build anything innovative there.

Latin American countries have secret courts that can order companies to quietly take things down. China has censored our apps from even working in the country. The only way that we can push back on this global trend is with the support of the US government. And that's why it's been so difficult over the past 4 years when even the US government has pushed for censorship. By going after us and other American companies, it has emboldened other governments to go even further.

But now we have the opportunity to restore free expression, and I am excited to take it. It'll take time to get this right. And these are complex systems. They're never gonna be perfect. There's also a lot of illegal stuff that we still need to work very hard to remove.

But the bottom line is that after years of having our content moderation work focused primarily on removing content, it is time to focus on reducing mistakes, simplifying our systems, and getting back to our roots about giving people voice. I'm looking forward to this next chapter. Stay good out there and more to come soon."

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