

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 1, 2024

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The United States faces increased risk of political violence as the 2024 presidential election approaches. Given this threat, it is essential that social media platforms disclose the measures they have in place to prevent their services from being exploited to threaten public safety in the days, weeks, and months following November 5<sup>th</sup>. Transparency and accountability in this effort are critical to ensuring the integrity of our electoral process and keeping the American people safe.

We are living in a time of heightened political violence. Just this year, two attempts were made on the life of former President Donald Trump. Meanwhile, violence against elected officials has escalated, to include an assault on former Speaker Pelosi's husband in 2022. In 2023, the U.S. Capitol Police opened over 8,000 threat investigations, a sharp rise from 902 in 2016.<sup>1</sup> This disturbing trend follows other tragic events, such as the violence perpetrated by white supremacists in Charlottesville in 2017. Many of the individuals involved in these attacks used social media to organize or were influenced by inflammatory content online.

In addition to these events, the January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol is a tragic example of how platforms can be exploited to facilitate political violence. This attack highlighted the devastating consequences of failing to address political rhetoric that incites violence. Over the past four years, Congress has investigated these failures, but social media companies have been resistant to the efforts of lawmakers and outside researchers to evaluate platforms' safety measures. In February 2023, a former Twitter safety policy team member testified before the House Committee on Oversight & Accountability, emphasizing the need for platforms to implement proactive safety measures and maintain transparency in how policies are enforced, especially in emergency situations.<sup>2</sup>

Meta (then Facebook) implemented “Break the Glass” measures ahead of the 2020 election, temporarily adjusting algorithms and restricting certain features to prevent the spread of violent rhetoric.<sup>3 4</sup> However, it has been reported that deactivation of these measures before January 6<sup>th</sup> contributed to the spread of calls to violence, including those from former President Donald Trump, that inspired and propelled the attack.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Meta's shutdown of CrowdTangle—a key tool for tracking violent narratives—has raised concerns about its ability to maintain transparency and monitor emerging threats. Although Meta promotes its Content Library as an alternative, the Content Library does not include many key functionalities critical to meaningful research. Meta also restricts access to select researchers and nonprofits, leaving

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<sup>1</sup> [USCP Threat Assessment Cases for 2023 | United States Capitol Police](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.techpolicy.press/transcript-house-oversight-hearing-with-former-twitter-executives/>

<sup>3</sup> [A Gumshoe Reporter's Revealing Behind-the-Scenes Look at Facebook | Lawfare](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/3tzzh18d/production/8442d8daf710582225b8c7fcd5171877b51d277d.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/3tzzh18d/production/8442d8daf710582225b8c7fcd5171877b51d277d.pdf>

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many journalists and independent analysts without critical insights into the spread of violent rhetoric before and after the election.<sup>6</sup>

Adding to these challenges, reporting as recent as October 29<sup>th</sup>, one week before election day, indicates that users on platforms like X are being fed increasingly politicized content – reflecting marked shifts in algorithmic curation on a platform that serves as a major aggregator of political information and public discourse.<sup>7</sup> Layoffs at various social media companies have also disproportionately impacted trust and safety teams, raising concerns about their capacity to manage crises effectively during this election cycle. These developments underscore the urgent need for platforms to engage in and provide transparency around emergency preparedness measures in the lead-up to, during, and following next week’s election.

## Questions for Platforms:

### 1. Preparedness and Emergency Measures:

- Have you implemented, or do you plan to implement, “Break the Glass” or similar emergency measures during and in the follow-up to the 2024 election cycle?
- If such features have not been built, why not?
- Have these measures been built into various sub-products across your platform, such as search, recommendations, and other engagement tools?
- What criteria or indicators will trigger the deployment of these measures?
- What indicators or thresholds are used to determine when to implement these features?

### 2. Learnings from Past Elections:

- Have you deployed similar safety features in other elections this year? If so, what lessons have informed your preparations for the U.S. election?
- How have your platforms addressed gaps identified during the January 6th attack? How

### 3. Transparency and Collaboration:

- How are you ensuring transparency around platform activity, particularly in light of the removal of tools like CrowdTangle and the decision to place access to X’s API behind a paywall?
- What steps are you taking to coordinate with other platforms and stakeholders to detect, mitigate, and de-escalate violent rhetoric effectively?

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<sup>6</sup><https://techcrunch.com/2024/08/15/meta-shut-down-crowdtangle-a-tool-for-tracking-disinformation-heres-how-its-replacement-compares/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/x-algorithm-feeds-users-political-contentwhether-they-want-it-or-not-28f2dadd?mod=googlenewsfeed>

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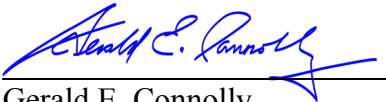
## 4. Trust and Safety Capacity:

- In light of staffing reductions, what resources have been allocated to ensure that your platform is not exploited to facilitate political violence in the days, weeks, and months following the election?
- How will you ensure that algorithmic changes do not amplify harmful narratives during and after the election?

While we recognize that sharing the finer details of emergency preparedness measures may carry some risks, we strongly believe that transparency with Congress, other platforms, and researchers is essential. In an era marked by escalating political violence, this level of accountability is necessary to ensure platforms are taking appropriate steps to safeguard public safety, uphold democratic integrity, and prevent the failures we have witnessed in the past.

We ask that you provide answers to the above questions no later than November 4th. These accountability efforts are essential to preventing future harm and protecting the democratic process. Political violence is never acceptable. Our request reflects a genuine commitment to preventing such violence, irrespective of the election's outcome, to ensure public safety for all Americans.

Sincerely,



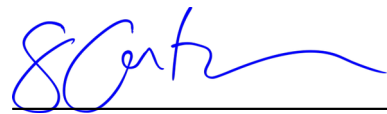
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