

# Trump's Pretend War on Social Media Companies

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One of Trump's tweets read, "There is NO WAY (ZERO!) that Mail-In Ballots will be anything less than substantially fraudulent. Mail boxes will be robbed, ballots will be forged & even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed. The Governor of California is sending Ballots to millions of people, anyone....." It is incredible that the president of the self-professed greatest democracy in the world was claiming in this tweet that his country could not hold a free and fair election. Perhaps that prompted Twitter to censure his tweet more than the fact that what he claimed was doubtful. Trump seemed stunned when 'Twitter' attached a notice to this tweet to indicate that what he said about the potential for voting fraud in the upcoming election was not accurate. Twitter is Trump's favorite social media platform for maintaining contact with his 80 thousand followers, which he has used to send tens of thousands of tweets at random times of the night and day. Social media companies such as Twitter have been under increased pressure to censure false or hurtful messages on their platforms since the 2016 election, which witnessed a huge wave of misinformation and added to concerns about the power of social media platforms to cause harm and disturbance through false or offensive information. With the distracting conspiracy theories and fake cures surrounding the Covid-19 crisis call for social media platforms to take action increased more so. Finally, Twitter decided to target US President Trump's tweets with labels warning users that the content of his tweet was not factually correct.

Trump responded by signing an executive order on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May to repeal Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act, which protected companies such as Twitter and Facebook from legal action for harmful content posted on their platforms. However legal experts have concluded that the executive order has no legal effect. In addition, Trump actually benefits from Section 230 because it gives him freedom to use social media without being held accountable for his lies and insults, and so it is clear that his executive order is just a tactic to make social media companies more cautious about censoring future messages. Twitter seems to have understood this, because it then attached a warning on a subsequent tweet in which Trump threatened to shoot people who were rioting and looting in Minneapolis after police had killed an unarmed black man in their custody. Twitter posted a warning on the tweet, saying it "violated the Twitter Rules about glorifying violence."

While tensions are rising between Twitter and Trump, another social media company has excellent relations with Trump. Facebook was instrumental in Trump's 2016 victory and Trump's current election campaign continues to take benefit from Facebook's data collection and add targeting capability to influence susceptible voters. Trump once boasted that Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg congratulated him for being "No. 1 on Facebook." US conservatives who support Trump have often complained along with Trump that social media sites are dominated by liberals who are biased against conservatives when editing or removing offensive posts. However, the advertisement targeting campaigns are run by machine algorithms that are vastly more effective at influencing people than the occasional editing of specific messages. While people argue about why some of Trump's messages will be labelled as inaccurate or misleading by Twitter, Facebook will be targeting thousands of carefully organized messages to specific groups of carefully profiled voters so that each will see only the messages most likely to influence them in a desired direction. Trump is still winning the misinformation war in the US and with each new crisis that besets his country, Americans become more divided and hateful of each other than before and his supporters stay with him.

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