# Advocates, Experts, Human Rights Activists to Facebook: Stop Enabling Trump, Dictators

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New Research Shows How Facebook Emboldens and Empowers Dictators and Drives Far-Right Extremism; Policies Began With Trump Have Spread Worldwide; (17) Orgs Issue Letter to FB and Twitter Demanding Action on Authoritarian Rule

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Facebook is enabling dictators across the world, 17 organizations, led by the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE) and the Real Facebook Oversight Board said today calling on Facebook and Twitter today to take immediate action to end their enabling of far-right extremist political leaders, dictators and authoritarian leaders. The letter to the tech giants came as a response to GPAHE's damning new report, Democracies Under Threat: How Loopholes for Trump's Social Media Enabled the Global Rise of Far Right Extremism.

The report shows that although Facebook finally suspended Trump from its platform, it is still enabling authoritarian dictators around the world. The Real Facebook Oversight Board fears that an imminent decision by Facebook's Oversight Board will restore to Trump to the platform with repercussions for leaders who misuse the social media platform across the world and are today urging Facebook to make the ban permanent.

"We continue to see a complete refusal by the tech world, especially Facebook, to acknowledge how their platforms have been co-opted and manipulated to malignant ends," said Heidi Beirich Co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer with the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism. "The willful naiveté and arrogance of social media leaders has cost lives and damaged democracy. Violence linked to far-right political figures' use of social media is not a matter of opinion."

The demands were released as part of a press event featuring human rights and free speech activists from Poland and The Philippines who have battled the effects of Facebook's reckless policies. In their letter, organizations including the Anti-Defamation League, Free Press, Media Matters, Muslim Advocates, National Hispanic Media Coalition and Sum Of Us "wrote with a collective voice" demanding Facebook and Twitter act immediately on the recommendations in GPAHE's report. The groups urged a permanent ban of former President Donald Trump, transparent policies outlining how a user's account is banned, and most critically that both platforms assess major world leaders' accounts against these policies, and make this assessment transparent and public.

"We've already witnessed an attempted coup in the United States, unthinkable only years ago," the organizations wrote. "The time to act is now. Human lives depend on it."

At the press event, Filipino journalist Maria Ressa, CEO of the digital news outlet Rappler, recounted how she was targeted by the misinformation spread by the authoritarian Duterte government — enabled by Facebook. Ressa has previously spoken about this harrowing experience fighting Facebook's embrace of far-right dictators.

"It's very emotional for me," Ressa says. "I have real skin in the game. If they don't fix this, this is how the government will normalize the possibility of jailing me. I could go to jail because [Facebook] refuses to address these problems that they created."

Participants also heard from Polish Professor and expert on neo-facism in Europe Rafal Pankowski, who has spoken passionately about the rise of anti-semitism on social media platforms. Panelists urged action on the reports countless examples — from Bolsonaro in Brazil to Orbán in Hungary to Duterte in The Philippines.

"What we're seeing is terrifying," said Wendy Via, Co-founder and President of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism. "Far-right extremist politicians cannot build their constituencies without demonizing individuals and communities with vitriolic rhetoric, and social media is the most effective way to disseminate disparaging messages and disinformation. Social media, and Facebook in particular, continue to have a horrifically damaging effect on democracies, societies, and vulnerable populations around the world, all in the name of profit."

GPAHE's report goes into detail about the fundamental role social media has played in the rise of far-right and authoritarian politicians and governments, driving increased division, hate, and sometimes violence in the following countries and region.

- **United States:** Trump dictated the terms and took advantage of loopholes to incite violence, and spread misinformation and conspiracy theories.
- **Brazil:** Facebook's WhatsApp helped to get violent and bigoted President Jair Bolsonaro elected.
- **Germany:** Facebook fueled the rise of anti-Muslim party the Alternative fur Deutschland (AfD).
- **Hungary:** The ruling party, Fidesz, and its leader Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, have maximized Facebook engagement tools and weaponized Facebook against opponents.
- **Poland:** The Polish government has introduced legislation that would make it illegal for social media companies to delete content or accounts that do not violate Polish law, even if they violate the companies' community standards.
- **Balkans:** Very little research exists in a fragile region with heavy social media use by politicians and moderation is severely lacking.
- **India:** Facebook has contributed to the dangerous force of Hindu nationalism and the rise of anti-Muslim Narendra Modi.
- **Netherlands:** Racist political leaders have risen to power by harnessing social media.
- **Philippines:** Facebook has uplifted President Rodrigo Duterte, a serial human rights violator.

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