

Facebook removed these posts. Would you?

A new oversight board created by Facebook is seeking public comment on challenges to six posts that were removed

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One showed a picture of a dead child lying on a beach. Another showed multiple photos of women's breasts, uncovered.

These images were part of Facebook posts that the social-media company removed for violating its standards, and now the company's new oversight board wants to know what you think about the cases. The board is accepting public comment through Tuesday on five cases it is reviewing, and you have until Thursday to comment on another case added this week.

The oversight board, formed this year, has been described as a sort of supreme court for challenges to posts that were removed or restricted. Facebook CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg said when announcing the board, "Facebook should not make so many important decisions about free expression and safety on our own."

The company has been under fire in the U.S., both for what it chooses to remove and what it allows on the platform. Conservatives such as Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee are among the company's loudest critics, saying the company disproportionately silences conservative voices.

But the oversight board is tasked with a much bigger job than considering how posts play in the United States. Facebook is the world's largest social-media platform with more than 2.7 billion monthly users worldwide, many of whom live in countries where free speech is seen differently from how it is viewed in the U.S.

The first 20 members of the board, announced earlier this year, include people from Denmark, Taiwan, Hungary, Australia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Yemen, among other nations.

Four are from the United States: John Samples, vice president of the Cato Institute; Pamela Karlan, a Stanford Law School professor; Evelyn Aswad, professor and chair at the University of Oklahoma College of Law; and Jamal Greene, a professor at Columbia Law School.

The board will ultimately have 40 members; the rest will be announced next year, USA Today reported. And Zuckerberg has promised that the board will have real power. It has the authority to overturn decisions made by the company's moderators, and even Zuckerberg himself.

Of course, it might not help unhappy Facebook users if a post is taken down and not restored until three months later. (The oversight board has 90 days to make a decision.) Even in cases

deemed urgent by Facebook, an expedited review process might take up to a month. Also, the board will only consider what has been removed from the platform, not what stays up.

Critics of the system, who note the first cases are being heard 2 years after the board's formation was first announced, were quick to mock the process, with one group starting what it called "The Real Facebook Oversight Board."

But others have lauded Facebook for creating an independent governing body and say they are optimistic about what this move represents.

"For all its faults, the board still represents an unprecedented move to devolve some of a tech giant's power back to the people that, on some level, it represents," Casey Newton wrote on The Verge.

"Yes, it will serve to give Facebook public relations cover during controversies. But it also enshrines the principle that citizens of a platform have a right to redress their grievances. However much justice the board offers them in the future will likely be more than they are getting today," Newton wrote.

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Here's a synopsis of the cases that are now before the review board, as provided by the oversight board in its own wording, including the policies they were said to violate. More details and hyperlinks to forms for public comment can be found here.

Violation of policy on hate speech — "A user posted two well-known photos of a deceased child lying fully clothed on a beach at the water's edge. The accompanying text (in Burmese) asks why there is no retaliation against China for its treatment of Uyghur Muslims, in contrast to the recent killings in France relating to cartoons. The post also refers to the Syrian refugee crisis."

Violation of policy on hate speech — "A user posted alleged historical photos showing churches in Baku, Azerbaijan, with accompanying text stating that Baku was built by Armenians and asking where the churches have gone. The user stated that Armenians are restoring mosques on their land because it is part of their history. The user said that the 'т.а.з.и.к.и' are destroying churches and have no history. The user stated they are against 'Azerbaijani aggression' and vandalism."

Violation of policy on adult nudity and sexual activity — "A user in Brazil posted a picture to Instagram with a title in Portuguese indicating that it was to raise awareness of signs of breast cancer. Eight photographs within the picture showed breast cancer symptoms with corresponding explanations of the symptoms underneath. Five of the photographs included visible and uncovered female nipples. The remaining three photographs included female breasts, with the nipples either out of shot, or covered by a hand."

Violation of policy on dangerous individuals and organizations — "A user in the U.S. was prompted by Facebook's 'On This Day' function to reshare a 'Memory' in the form of a post the user made two years ago. The user reshared the content. The post is an alleged quote from

Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany, on the need to appeal to emotions and instincts, instead of intellect and on the unimportance of truth.”

Violation of policy on violence and incitement — “A user posted a video and accompanying text within a Facebook group related to COVID-19. In the video and text, there is a description of an alleged scandal about the Agence Nationale de Sécurité du Médicament (the French agency responsible for regulating health products) purportedly refusing authorization for use of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin against COVID-19, but authorizing promotional mail for Remdesivir. The user criticizes the lack of a health strategy in France and states that ‘(Didier) Raoult’s cure’ is being used elsewhere to save lives.”

Violation of policy on violence and incitement — “A user posted a photo in a Facebook group, depicting a man in leather armor holding a sheathed sword in his right hand. The photo has a text overlay in Hindi that discusses drawing a sword from its scabbard in response to ‘infidels’ criticizing the prophet. The photo includes a logo with the words ‘Indian Muslims’ in English. The accompanying text, also in English, includes hashtags calling President Emmanuel Macron of France ‘the devil’ and calling for the boycott of French products.”