



INDEPENDENT

Facebook Announces Oversight Board Members That Can Overrule Mark Zuckerberg

Adam Smith

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Facebook has announced details of 20 members of its oversight board, the moderation committee that will oversee the “most challenging content issues” for the social network.

The board will make decisions over hate speech, harassment, and users’ privacy on both Facebook and Facebook-owned Instagram.

The social media company established the board in an attempt to ensure free expression is protected when it grinds against Facebook’s terms of service.

An infamous example of this includes when Facebook censored an image of a child victim of the Vietnam war under nudity guidelines, with critics claiming Facebook was unable to distinguish between “famous war photographs” and images of child abuse.

In an op-ed in the *New York Times*, the four co-chairs of the committee – Catalina Botero-Marino, Jamal Greene, Michael W. McConnell and Helle Thorning-Schmidt – explained that the oversight board is “independent of Facebook”. Decisions will instead be based on the judgement of the members, rather than those that would be beneficial to the social media giant.

Catalina Botero-Marino is the Dean of the Law School of the University of Los Andes; Jamal Greene is a Dwight Professor of Law; Michael McConnell is a former federal judge; and Helle Thorning-Schmidt is the former Prime Minister of Denmark, between 2011 and 2015.

As well as those chairs, 20 other members are on the board from a number of backgrounds.

These include Alan Rusbridger, the former editor-in-chief of The Guardian during the Edward Snowden revelations, and senior editor Endy Bayuni of the Jakarta Post – a publication from Indonesia which has said Facebook has been part of “the proliferation of fake news, hoaxes, hate speech and incitements to violence of social media content.”

The Indonesian government blocked Facebook and WhatsApp (owned by Facebook) in the past after fake news spread on its platforms resulted in riots and deaths last year.

It also includes a founder of the American libertarian think tank the Cato Institute John Samples which advocates for “strong support for free expression.”

Many high-profile conservatives, including President Trump, has said that right-wing voices have been censored on social media and that companies need to do more to protect them.

Experts have claimed that is not true and left-wing voices have criticised Zuckerberg for too much attention to conservative voices as it was revealed the CEO took secret meetings with right-wing journalists, commentators, and lawmakers.

The oversight board is reportedly funded from a \$130 million trust fund that is completely separate from Facebook, and the board cannot be removed by Facebook.

Board members will serve a maximum three terms of three years. Facebook has also committed to the board's decisions, even those that may contradict the views of its CEO Mark Zuckerberg – who has ensured that he has always had controlling share of the company.

However, the board's decisions will only apply to Facebook and Instagram. The Verge reports WhatsApp will not fall under the board's jurisdiction for “privacy and encryption reasons”.

Facebook announced that it would be launching the oversight board since November 2018, and says that it expects the board to eventually grow to 40 members.

Speaking to Reuters former deputy prime minister Nick Clegg, Facebook's head of global affairs, said: “I don't expect people to say, ‘Oh hallelujah, these are great people, this is going to be a great success’ - there's no reason anyone should believe that this is going to be a great success until it really starts hearing difficult cases in the months and indeed years to come”.