

## **Twitter—further supplementary written evidence (FE00126)**

### **House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry into Freedom of Expression Online**

Thank you for your letter (22 June 2021) and further questions. On January 8, 2021, President Donald J. Trump Tweeted:

*"The 75,000,000 great American Patriots who voted for me, AMERICA FIRST, and MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, will have a GIANT VOICE long into the future. They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!"*

Shortly thereafter, the President Tweeted:

*"To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th."*

After close review of recent Tweets from the @realDonaldTrump account and the context around them - specifically how they were being received and interpreted on and off Twitter - we permanently suspended the account due to the risk of further incitement of violence. We shared our analysis publicly.<sup>1</sup> This determination was based on a number of factors, including:

- President Trump's statement that he would not be attending the Inauguration was being received by a number of his supporters as further confirmation that the election was not legitimate and seen as him disavowing his previous claim made via two Tweets by his Deputy Chief of Staff, Dan Scavino, that there would be an "orderly transition" on January 20th.
- The second Tweet may also have served as encouragement to those potentially considering violent acts that the Inauguration would be a "safe" target, as he would not be attending.
- The use of the words "American Patriots" to describe some of his supporters was also being interpreted as support for those committing violent acts at the US Capitol.
- The mention of his supporters having a "GIANT VOICE long into the future" and that "They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!" was being interpreted as further indication that President Trump did not plan to facilitate an "orderly transition" and instead that he planned to continue to support, empower, and shield those who believe he won the election.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/suspension](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/suspension)

- Plans for future armed protests had already begun proliferating on and off-Twitter, including a proposed secondary attack on the US Capitol and state capitol buildings on January 17, 2021.

We have not shared publicly any equivalent analysis of a world leader's Tweets where we did not take action for violating our rules.

As we have noted, statements by world leaders on Twitter receive a heightened level of attention and often provoke public debate. It is our hope that Twitter provides a forum where people can openly and publicly respond to leaders and hold them accountable. Indeed, we have publicly called on the government of Iran to allow its own citizens this right.

Our policies with regards to world leaders presently state that direct interactions with fellow public figures, comments on current affairs, or strident statements of foreign policy on economic or military issues are generally not in violation of the Twitter Rules. A salient distinction here: where such statements are directed at governments/administrations/regimes of other countries, we will err on the side of keeping such content up, due to the public interest in doing so.

We are reviewing our approach to world leaders right now, however, and, crucially, we believe Twitter should not be making these decisions on its own - which is why we have run a public consultation asking the public, officials and researchers how they think we should moderate content from world leaders.

Regarding our public consultation, we opened our call for responses on 19 March 2021 to a public survey that will help inform the development of our policy framework. The deadline for responses was 12 April 2021. Nearly 49,000 people from around the globe took time to share their feedback on how content from world leaders should be handled on our service. During this process, we've also engaged experts, including NGOs, governments, academics, and civil society, to ensure we're hearing as many diverse and thoughtful perspectives as possible. As our teams review and distill the data, we've been looking for key themes, new ideas, and creative thinking so we can begin to develop an update to our approach and consider next steps. However, some initial findings include:

- As we currently recognise with our existing public interest approach, our long-term solution needs to be broader than world leaders.
- We heard clearly the importance of preserving content, but also the risk of offline harm.
- Transparency is a key part of this work, from a clear policy approach to transparency around enforcement.
- We are working to craft a framework that captures these issues, which we are working to have **in place before the end of the year.**

Thank you again for inviting Twitter to participate in this inquiry.

*9 July 2021*