

FAIR ELECTION FUND REPORT

CORPORATE INFLUENCE & ELECTION INTEGRITY CONCERNS WITH MICROSOFT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 BACKGROUND
- 1.2 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

2. POLITICAL BIAS

- 2.1 LEADERSHIP
- 2.2 PAC POLICIES

3. ELECTION-RELATED INITIATIVES

4. CONTROVERSIAL PARTNERSHIPS

5. CENSORSHIP PRACTICES

- 5.1 LINKEDIN CONTENT MODERATION
- 5.2 CODE OF CONDUCT
- 5.3 DATA PRIVACY AND AI MISUSE

6. CHINA-RELATED PRACTICES

- 6.1 HISTORICAL TIES AND INVESTMENTS
- 6.2 TRADEOFFS
- 6.3 CENSORSHIP IN CHINA
- 6.4 CENSORSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES
- 6.5 THREATENING U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

8. CONCLUSION

9. APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A: DETAILED CONTRIBUTION DATA
- APPENDIX B: CONTENT MODERATION STATISTICS
- APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fair Election Fund is dedicated to safeguarding fair, secure, and transparent elections. Much has been written about the tech industry's bias against conservatives. However, one of the world's most powerful and enduring tech companies has largely escaped this scrutiny and subsequent investigative efforts: Microsoft.

This report, prompted by Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Chairman Andrew Ferguson's longstanding efforts to root out censorship and his August 2025 letter to Microsoft and other American tech companies, uncovers and highlights Microsoft's role in shaping public discourse and elections, revealing troubling patterns of political bias, censorship, and potential privacy violations that threaten free speech and democratic integrity.¹

The FTC's letter cautions against censoring Americans or weakening data security under foreign government pressure, citing potential violations of the FTC Act's prohibition on unfair and deceptive practices. These warnings appear to directly implicate Microsoft's aggressive censorship on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in and out of China and its use of China-based engineers for sensitive U.S. federal contracts.²

While Microsoft is engaged in censorship *on behalf of* the CCP, the company is also censoring conservatives in ways that could influence the democratic process. For years, Microsoft has attempted to silence and suppress conservative voices, putting their finger on the scale during major elections. Under President Trump, Microsoft's anti-conservative bias has, if anything, become more pronounced. These actions undermine American citizens' privacy and free expression - core pillars of fair elections.

This report's key findings include numerous examples of Microsoft's efforts to undermine voter trust and electoral fairness:

- Microsoft's "Defending Democracy" and "Democracy Forward" programs, led by DNC member Dave Leichtman, risk partisan bias due to its leadership and endorsement by other progressive initiatives that mirror the work of Democrat activist Marc Elias.
- Microsoft has partnered with NewsGuard and the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), which have been criticized for targeting conservative media, voices and viewpoints.
- LinkedIn, a platform owned by Microsoft, has suppressed free speech via so-called "content moderation," including the removal of 147,490 posts for "misinformation" in a single year. LinkedIn's policies may classify conservative voices, viewpoints and good-faith policy positions as "misinformation."
- Microsoft's 2021 opposition to Georgia's voting law, claiming it restricted access, was undermined by record 2022 turnout and a dropped DOJ lawsuit.
- Microsoft's business in China and compliance with CCP law, including censorship and negligent security practices, empowers one of the greatest threats to American democracy.

These findings demand urgent action to ensure Microsoft's practices support democratic principles and ideological fairness, as championed by the Fair Election Fund.

¹ FTC. "FTC Chairman Ferguson Warns Companies Against Censoring or Weakening the Data Security of Americans at the Behest of Foreign Powers," August 21, 2025.

² Dudley, Renee. #1. "A Little-Known Microsoft Program Could Expose the Defense Department to Chinese Hackers," ProPublica, July 15, 2025. see also; Moynihan, Lydia. "Revealed: How Microsoft in China censors truth about Uyghur 'genocide,'" New York Post, February 8, 2024. See also; Aitken, Peter. "Bing censored more search results in China than did domestic rival platforms, new study finds," Fox News, April 28, 2023. See also; Knockel, Jeffrey; Ruan Lotus. "Bada Bing, Bada Boom: Microsoft Bing's Chinese Political Censorship of Autosuggestions in North America," CitizenLab, May 19th, 2022.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Fair Election Fund is committed to safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes by addressing threats to free and fair elections. As a global technology titan, Microsoft wields immense influence through content moderation across AI, platforms like LinkedIn and Bing, as well as its election-related initiatives. However, well-founded concerns about political bias, censorship, and corporate overreach have cast a shadow over its role in public discourse.

This report investigates Microsoft's activities from 2018 to 2025, exploring how its actions may undermine voter trust and electoral fairness. As Microsoft Vice Chair Brad Smith once stated, "A healthy community requires that everyone have the right to vote conveniently, safely, and securely".³ Yet, Microsoft's practices suggest a disconnect between its rhetoric and reality.

1.2 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This report offers what may be the first comprehensive analysis of Microsoft's political activity, partnerships, censorship practices, election initiatives, and privacy concerns. Data is drawn from public records (e.g., OpenSecrets, FEC, etc.), news reports, Microsoft's own statements and X posts. The methodology includes:

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Tracking donation patterns and content moderation statistics.
- **Qualitative Review:** Assessing partnerships, censorship cases, and election programs.
- **Case Studies:** Highlighting controversies like the Georgia voting law and LinkedIn's content removals.
- **Recommendations:** Proposing actionable steps to restore trust and neutrality.

³ Smith, Brad. "Why We Are Concerned About Georgia's New Election Law," Microsoft, March 31, 2021.

2. POLITICAL BIAS

2.1 LEADERSHIP

Microsoft founder Bill Gates contributed \$50 million to elect Kamala Harris in 2024, according to *The New York Times*.⁴ Gates donated the money to a “dark money” political action group, Future Forward USA Action, that was backing Vice President Kamala Harris’s presidential bid. Microsoft President Brad Smith and his wife Kathy Surace-Smith also hosted a fundraiser in 2023 with contributions going to the Biden Victory Fund. Smith was a top fundraiser for Democrats during Biden’s first term in office.

Bill Gates Privately Says He Has Backed Harris With \$50 Million Donation

Mr. Gates said in a statement to The Times that “this election is different,” reflecting a significant change in his political strategy.

Private citizens can support elected officials of their choice within the law. However, the appearance of bias of Microsoft’s leadership trickles down into the company’s interactions with the Trump Administration.

When asked about his absence from President Trump’s inauguration, Microsoft President Brad Smith told a European journalist he had “better places to be,” by which he meant the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos.⁵ On the eve of President Trump’s inauguration, Microsoft warned of “polarizing times” and committed to be a leader in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.⁶ Microsoft even ceased working with a law firm that pledged pro bono support to the Trump Administration and instead hired a firm actively fighting the White House.⁷

LinkedIn co-founder and Microsoft Board member Reid Hoffman, who has donated to numerous left-of-center organizations, faced calls to resign after wishing President Trump would become an “actual martyr” days before the July assassination attempt.⁸

⁴Schleifer, Theodore. “Bill Gates Privately Says He Has Backed Harris With \$50 Million Donation,” New York Times, October 22, 2024.

⁵Kleinman, Zoe. “A few thoughts from Microsoft President Brad Smith who I interviewed at the firm’s Redmond HQ ahead of its 50th birthday.” LinkedIn, 2025.

⁶McIntyre, Lindsay. “Doing the work: Intention, inclusion, and impact,” LinkedIn, December 20, 2024.

⁷McIntyre, Lindsay. “Doing the work: Intention, inclusion, and impact,” LinkedIn, December 20, 2024. See also; Scarcella, Mike; Hals Tom. “Microsoft swaps law firms in shareholder case, hiring Trump target,” Reuters, May 2, 2025.

⁸Vincent, Isabel. “Reid Hoffman facing call to resign from Microsoft board after Trump ‘martyr’ comment,” New York Post, July 17, 2024.

2.2 PAC POLICIES

Microsoft decided to “suspend contributions for the duration of the 2022 election cycle to all members of Congress who voted to object to the certification of electors.” The company added that they “will also suspend contributions for the same period for state officials and organizations who supported such objections or suggested the election should be overturned.”

This meant that Microsoft employees were barred from making donations via their PAC to 147 Republicans in Congress.⁹ These include Senators Cruz and Hawley, Speaker Johnson, House Majority Leader Scalise and most other members of the House Republican leadership, and state officials across the country.

Changes to political giving

Feb 5, 2021 | [Microsoft Corporate Blogs](#)



Editor's Note: Today, Fred Humphries, Corporate Vice President of U.S. Government Affairs, sent this email to our PAC community.

Last month, in the aftermath of the effort to overturn the Presidential election, we [halted political giving](#) to consider the implications of the events. Since that time, we have assessed these issues and over the past two weeks have held six listening sessions with interested employees to have a dialogue and listen. Given the fact that the PAC is funded by voluntary donations from more than 3,000 Microsoft employees, shareholders, and family members, we wanted to accommodate every employee who wanted to participate, in a small group meeting. We're gratified that approximately 300 employees – both PAC members and non-members – chose to attend.

Today we are sharing details on changes we have decided to make:

First, we will suspend contributions for the duration of the 2022 election cycle to all members of Congress who voted to object to the certification of electors. We will also suspend contributions for the same period for state officials and organizations who supported such objections or suggested the election should be overturned.

While only Republicans were blocked from receiving campaign contributions in 2022, Democrats who had previously objected to the certification of electors in 2000, 2004, or 2016 faced no such ban. In fact, Microsoft's PAC donated a total of \$24,000 in the 2018 and 2020 election cycles to some of the House members who objected to the 2016 election certification after President Trump's victory.¹⁰

⁹Yourish, Karen; Buchanan, Larry; Lu, Denise. "The 147 Republicans Who Voted to Overturn Election Results," The New York Times, January 7, 2021

¹⁰Williams, Brenna. "11 times VP Biden was interrupted during Trump's electoral vote certification," CNN, January 7, 2017. See also; FEC.

3. ELECTION-RELATED INITIATIVES

Microsoft’s election programs, such as “Defending Democracy” and “Democracy Forward,” aim to enhance electoral security but risk perceptions of partisanship.

Launched in 2018, “Defending Democracy” focuses on securing political campaigns and combatting disinformation, yet its leadership raises concerns about neutrality.¹¹ Dave Leichtman leads the division of Corporate Civic Responsibility at Microsoft. According to the American Association of Political Consultants, Leichtman is deeply entrenched in the Democrat Party:

“As part of the company’s Democracy Forward program, he [Dave] runs civic engagement efforts and works with elections officials worldwide to address tech and security needs. Dave also leads the company’s internal US and international election strategy.

Previously, Dave held leadership roles at several progressive tech firms. He served as a Vice-chair of the Democratic Party of Virginia and is now a statewide representative to the DNC.”

This connection fuels concerns about biased execution within Microsoft’s “Democracy Forward” program.

Microsoft’s 2021 opposition to Georgia’s “Election Integrity Act”, led by Brad Smith, further illustrates this risk.¹³ Smith publicly criticized the voting law multiple times, claiming it restricted voting access for communities of color, a stance echoed by Democrat operative Marc Elias’ Democracy Docket.¹⁴ Smith penned a public letter to Microsoft employees saying that, “this new law has important provisions that unfairly restrict the rights of people to vote legally, securely, and safely.”



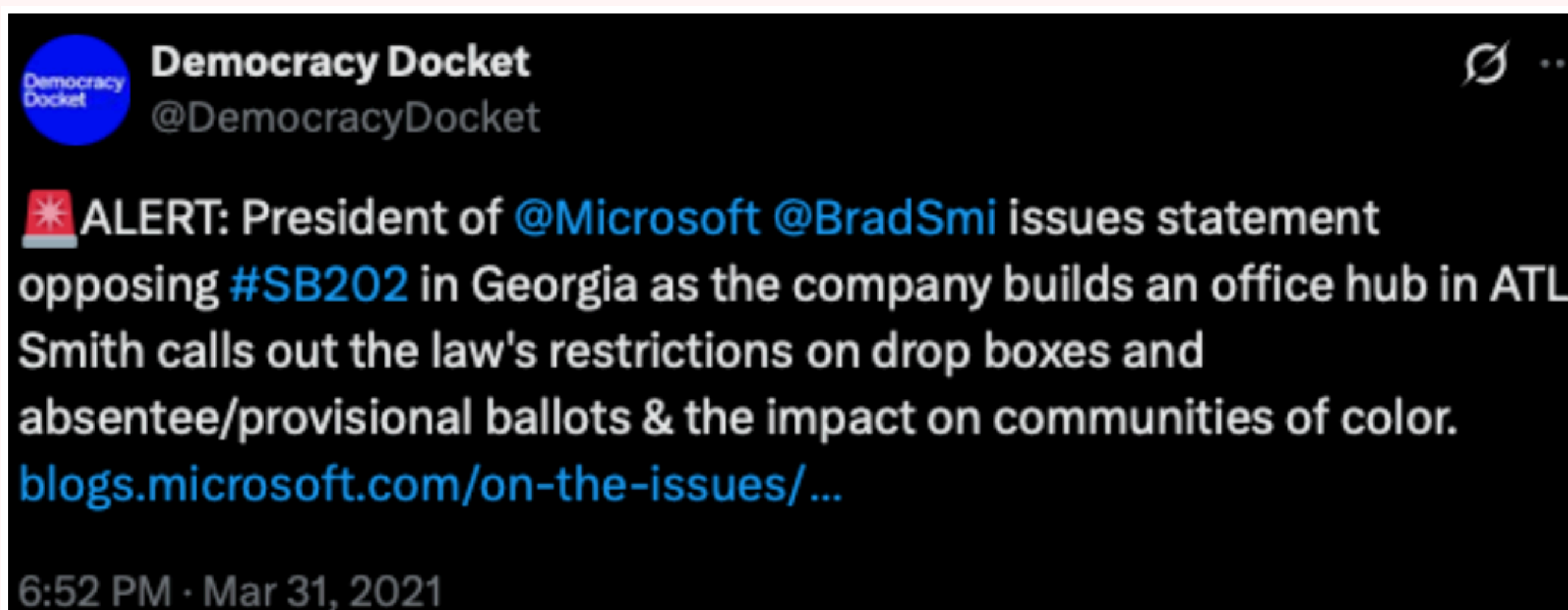
¹¹Burt, Tom. “Announcing the Defending Democracy Program,” Microsoft, April 13, 2018.

¹²Leichtman, Dave. AAPC, Accessed June 25, 2025.

¹³GA SB202: “<https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/legislation/document/20212022/201498>”.

¹⁴Smith, Brad. “Why We Are Concerned About Georgia’s New Election Law,” Microsoft, March 31, 2021. See also; Democracy Docket.

“<https://x.com/DemocracyDocket/status/1377393344226205708>”, X, March 31, 2021.



Why we are concerned about Georgia's new election law

Mar 31, 2021 | [Brad Smith - Vice Chair & President](#)



Just last month, Microsoft shared its decision to invest substantially in Atlanta. As I [announced](#) together with Georgia's Governor and Atlanta's Mayor, our company is making significant investments that will put Atlanta "on the path toward becoming one of Microsoft's largest hubs in the United States in the coming decade, after Puget Sound and Silicon Valley." We are creating thousands of new jobs, and we are proud to become a rapidly growing member of Atlanta's important business community.

That's why we are concerned about many aspects of Georgia's new "Election Integrity Act." Two things are clear to us. First, the right to vote is the most cherished aspect of democracy. And second, this new law has important provisions that unfairly restrict the rights of people to vote legally, securely, and safely. That's why we [voiced concern](#) about this legislation even before it was passed.

We are concerned by the law's impact on communities of color, on every voter, and on our employees and their families. We share the [views of other corporate leaders](#) that it's not only right but essential for the business community to stand together in opposition to the harmful provisions and other similar legislation that may be considered elsewhere.

While trying to sway sentiment internally, calling it, "essential for the business community to stand together in opposition to the harmful provisions and other similar legislation that may be considered elsewhere," Smith's claims did not come to fruition when Georgia broke voting turnout records for a midterm election and were #1 in turnout in the Southeast in 2022.¹⁵ The Justice Department later dropped a lawsuit against the law in 2024, calling it "commonsense reforms", suggesting Microsoft's position may have been premature or ideologically driven.¹⁶

¹⁵Georgia, Secretary of State, "Georgia Voters Lead Southeast in Engagement, Turnout" May 17, 2023. See also; Niese, Mark. "Turnout in Georgia reached new high of nearly 5.3M voters," Atlanta Journal Constitution, November 7, 2024

¹⁶USA Today. "Justice Department Drops Lawsuit Against Community Against Georgia Voting Law," October 18, 2024.

4. CONTROVERSIAL PARTNERSHIPS

Microsoft's partnerships with organizations like NewsGuard and the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) have drawn scrutiny for their impact on free speech.

An examination of NewsGuard indicates that its leadership and editorial direction consistently align with left-leaning perspectives, raising legitimate questions about its political neutrality. For starters, its co-founder Steve Brill and his wife, Cynthia, are known as prolific Democrat donors. Another advisor, Michael Hayden, signed a letter in 2020 stating President Trump was unfit to serve another term, and endorsed Joe Biden. Hayden also signed a letter that said the Hunter Biden laptop story “has all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation”.¹⁷ In 2025, President Trump revoked Hayden's security clearance.

Furthermore, Senator Ted Cruz called out NewsGuard's “inconsistent and biased rating system” in 2025, leading Microsoft to publicly distance itself from NewsGuard's media literacy program.¹⁸ Currently, NewsGuard is under investigation by the FTC for colluding to shut down conservative outlets.¹⁹

As of this report's release, and despite Microsoft's claim that its support of NewsGuard was a single donation in 2018, Microsoft's Search Coach tool continues to recommend NewsGuard to students as a “reliable” and “reputable, objective organization” for “evaluations of [web]sites' reliability”.²⁰ Microsoft includes Search Coach in its widely-used suite of education products, such Teams for Education, to provide “context and guidance for students to ask effective questions and discover reliable sources.”

What fact checking sites are reliable?

With the amount of misinformation on the internet, this is a great question! Two reputable, objective organizations have evaluated fact checking sites - there are lots of good options!

1. The International Fact-Checking Network of the Poynter Institute in Florida has examined hundreds of fact-checking sites worldwide. [Here is a list of sites that passed their rigorous evaluation.](#)
2. [NewsGuard](#), which is embedded in Search Coach to share evaluations of sites' reliability, has created a list of trustworthy fact checking sites:

¹⁷Pickett, Kerry. “51 Biden laptop deniers in danger of losing security clearances; letter falsely accused Russia,” Washington Times, November 13, 2024

¹⁸Cruz, Sen.Ted. Press Release: <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/6801E8CD-60A1-421D-86A2-8B9104AE27EB>, February 9, 2025.

¹⁹Ferrechio, Susan. “News rating agencies under federal scrutiny for colluding to shut down conservative outlets,” Washington Times, June 6, 2025

²⁰Microsoft Support. “Customize”: https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/customize-cce3cff5-3bac-4711-a22e-fb28baa8b467#id0edd=fact_check. Accessed September 18, 2025.

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December 23, 2024

Mr. Satya Nadella
Chief Executive Officer
Microsoft Corporation
One Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052

Dear Mr. Nadella,

It has come to my attention that Microsoft is actively promoting and funding NewsGuard's so-called "Media Literacy" tool, which is being rolled out to schoolchildren across the country.¹ Given growing concerns about NewsGuard's ideological bias and its efforts to manipulate young minds, I ask for transparency regarding Microsoft's involvement in and financing of this Orwellian censorship project. Your company's financial support for NewsGuard is especially troubling given Microsoft's purported commitment to protecting free expression online.²

NewsGuard, which touts itself as an "apolitical" "news rating" organization,³ has been under increasing scrutiny for its bias against conservative viewpoints.⁴ Specifically, NewsGuard has labeled conservative outlets, such as *the Federalist*, *the Daily Wire*, and *Newsmax*, as "unreliable" based on a subjective, opaque, and inconsistent rating system, while flagging their accurate reporting as misinformation.⁵ In contrast, NewsGuard rates left-leaning outlets like

¹ *Media Literacy*, NEWSGUARD, <https://www.newsguardtech.com/industries/media-literacy/> (noting that "NewsGuard's Media Literacy Programs are made possible thanks to generous support from Microsoft") (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

² *Human Rights*, MICROSOFT, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/human-rights> (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

³ *News Reliability Ratings*, NEWSGUARD, <https://www.newsguardtech.com/solutions/news-reliability-ratings/> (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

⁴ MAJORITY STAFF, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, INTERIM STAFF REPORT: GARM'S HARM: HOW THE WORLD'S BIGGEST BRANDS SEEK TO CONTROL ONLINE SPEECH 3 (2024) (*Judiciary GARM Report*); Jonathan Turley, Opinion, *The Most Chilling Words Today: I'm from NewsGuard and I Am Here to Rate You*, THE HILL (July 27, 2024), <https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/4795501-newsguard-censorship-conservative-speech/>; Letter from Brendan Carr, Comm'r, FCC, to Sundar Pichai, CEO, Alphabet Inc., et al. (Nov. 13, 2024), <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/DOC-407732A1.pdf>.

⁵ MAJORITY STAFF, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS, INTERIM STAFF REPORT: INSTRUMENTS AND CASUALTIES OF THE CENSORSHIP-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX 42-50 (2024) (*Small Business Censorship Report*); Brent Scher, *NewsGuard Runs Cover for Terrorists in 'Fact-Check' of Ben Shapiro*, DAILY WIRE (Oct. 27, 2023), <https://www.dailywire.com/news/newsguard-runs-cover-for-terrorists-in-fact-check-of-ben-shapiro>.

Jacobin, *the Atlantic*, and *the New Republic* as highly credible even when they have peddled deceptive and sensational headlines and articles that were factually incorrect.⁶

The organization's "Media Literacy" program, which is actively marketed to schools, has faced criticism for pushing a left-wing ideological agenda while censoring conservative perspectives and news outlets.⁷ NewsGuard's marketing of its services to schools appears to be less about education and more about ideological conformity. Instead of encouraging critical thinking, NewsGuard's extreme bias limits young minds from questioning authority and forming independent opinions. This *distorts* media literacy by limiting the range of ideas to which students are exposed.

NewsGuard has found a willing partner in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), with whom it has entered into a licensing agreement to provide "the AFT's 1.7 million members, tens of millions of kids they teach, and their families" with "free, real-time 'traffic light' news ratings and detailed 'Nutrition Label' reviews, via a licensed copy of NewsGuard's browser extension, whenever they search the web for news and information."⁸

America is unique amongst democracies for enshrining in its constitution a foundational respect of the right of free men and women to communicate with each other without government censorship. Whether being done by Big Government or Big Tech, the censorship of ideas and speech is antithetical to this tradition and our shared cultural values. Given Microsoft's significant influence in America's tech and education sectors, it is crucial that the company takes responsibility for the tools it promotes, especially when those tools have the potential to influence young minds in ways that limit intellectual diversity and the free flow of ideas.

The Standing Rules of the Senate provide the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation the authority to "review and study, on a continuing basis" matters related to communications and technology.⁹ Please provide written answers to the following questions no later than January 10, 2025:

1. Please describe all agreements between Microsoft and NewsGuard, both in relation to NewsGuard's Media Literacy programs and otherwise, including the terms, conditions, funding amounts, and start and end dates of these agreements.
2. Please describe any internal resources, such as staff time, software, and infrastructure, Microsoft has dedicated in support of NewsGuard's services, both in relation to NewsGuard's Media Literacy programs and otherwise.

⁶ *Small Business Censorship Report*, *Id.*

⁷ John Tillman, *NewsGuard Primes Children in Public Schools for Life of Leftist Activism*, WASH. TIMES (May 27, 2024), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/may/27/newsguard-primes-children-in-public-schools-for-li/>.

⁸ Press Release, American Federation of Teachers, AFT Partners with NewsGuard to Combat Misinformation Online (Jan. 25, 2022), <https://www.aft.org/press-release/aft-partners-newsguard-combat-misinformation-online>.


⁹ S. Rules XXV(1)(f), XXVI(8).

3. Please describe all examples of integration of NewsGuard resources, data, and ratings into Microsoft services.
4. How much total funding has Microsoft provided to NewsGuard for its “Media Literacy” programs?
 - a. How much of that total funding has gone towards elementary (K-5) schools?
 - b. How much of that total funding has gone towards middle and upper (6-12) schools?
 - c. How much of that total funding has gone towards universities?
 - d. How much of that total funding has gone towards public libraries?
 - e. How much of that total funding has gone towards older populations?
5. Is Microsoft aware of the evidence of NewsGuard’s censorship and bias? Please answer with “yes” or “no” before providing a further answer.
 - a. If yes, please explain why Microsoft continues to support NewsGuard despite evidence of its bias and censorship.
6. Does Microsoft recognize the potential dangers of promoting NewsGuard’s “Media Literacy” tool in public schools? Please answer with “yes” or “no” before providing a further answer.
 - a. If yes, please explain why Microsoft nevertheless decided to support NewsGuard’s Media Literacy programs.
7. Will Microsoft ensure that its financial support of NewsGuard aligns with its stated commitment to protecting free expression online?¹⁰ Please answer with “yes” or “no” before providing a further answer.
 - a. If yes, please explain, in detail, how Microsoft will do so.

I look forward to your response and a clearer understanding of how Microsoft plans to address these concerns.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Ted Cruz
Ranking Member

¹⁰ *Human Rights*, MICROSOFT, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/human-rights> (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

5. CENSORSHIP PRACTICES

5.1 LinkedIn Content Moderation

LinkedIn, a social media company owned by Microsoft and used by 30% of adults, has pursued content moderation practices that have sparked controversy for stifling free speech, particularly targeting conservative voices and critical reporting, undermining open political discourse during elections.²¹

Data from LinkedIn's transparency reports highlights a stark increase in content moderation from 2019-2020 – the last years of the first Trump Administration – to 2021-2024, encompassing COVID-19 pandemic and the Biden Administration.

Misinformation:

<i>"Misinformation" Posts Removed by LinkedIn Since 2020</i>			
Year	Jan - Jun	Jul - Dec	Total
2019	0	0	0
2020	22,846	157,108	179,954
2021	147,49	207,522	355,012
2022	172,387	137,988	310,375
2023	85,216	53,793	139,009
2024	30,497	62,236	92,733

Data from LinkedIn's transparency reports shows a significant surge in "misinformation" removals tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the first year of the pandemic, LinkedIn removed 179,954 posts labeled as misinformation, which escalated to a peak of 355,012 in 2021 (a 97.28% increase), before declining to 92,733 in 2024.

This spike correlates with the rollout of LinkedIn's COVID-19 Misinformation Policy, which mandates removal of content contradicting the World Health Organization (WHO), including alternative views on masks, treatments, or lockdowns.²² The policy's broad application likely drove the 2020–2022 peak, censoring dissenting opinions regardless of evidence.

²¹Gottfried, Jeffrey. "Americans' Social Media Use," Pew Research Center, January 31, 2024.

²²LinkedIn Content Terms. False or Misleading: "<https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a1340752/>" Accessed September 18, 2025.

Hateful or Derogatory Speech:

<i>"Hateful or Derogatory" Posts Removed by LinkedIn Since 2019</i>			
Year	Jan - Jun	Jul - Dec	Total
2019	1,637	500	2,137
2020	2,588	13,815	16,403
2021	18,337	14,81	33,147
2022	37,835	56,821	94,656
2023	41,909	26,141	68,05
2024	105,903	92,478	198,381

In contrast, removals for "hateful or derogatory" content show a different pattern. While a policy is necessary, LinkedIn's hateful and derogatory content policy is extremely broad and could justify the removal of a massive body of content. This may include conservative voices, viewpoints, good-faith policy positions and criticism of the Biden Administration.²³

During non-election years, we see very few content removals during the Trump Administration (2019) and comparatively high numbers during the Biden Administration (2021, 2023). This may reflect political bias in LinkedIn's content removals. Criticism of President Trump and his policies may have been allowed, while criticism of President Biden and his policies was aggressively moderated as "hateful and derogatory."

During election years (2020, 2022 and 2024), the number of removals correlates with Republicans momentum. The more momentum conservatives have, the more content LinkedIn removes.

For example, LinkedIn removed little content during the 2020 election when Democrats had momentum and performed well. President Biden captured the presidency and Democrats maintained their majority in the House and gained seats in the Senate to split the upper chamber. Yet in 2022, content moderation dramatically increased when Republicans had momentum in the mid-terms and captured a narrow House majority. Then, content removal exploded in 2024 with nearly 200,000 removals when Republicans, led by now President Trump, rode a wave to capture all three branches of government.

The high correlation between the level of content moderation and Republican momentum and electoral outcomes raises questions about the application of LinkedIn's "hateful and derogatory" content moderation. As electoral momentum energized conservative voices and policy discussions online (or as energized conservative voices and policy discussions online drove electoral momentum), LinkedIn responded by removing more and more content.

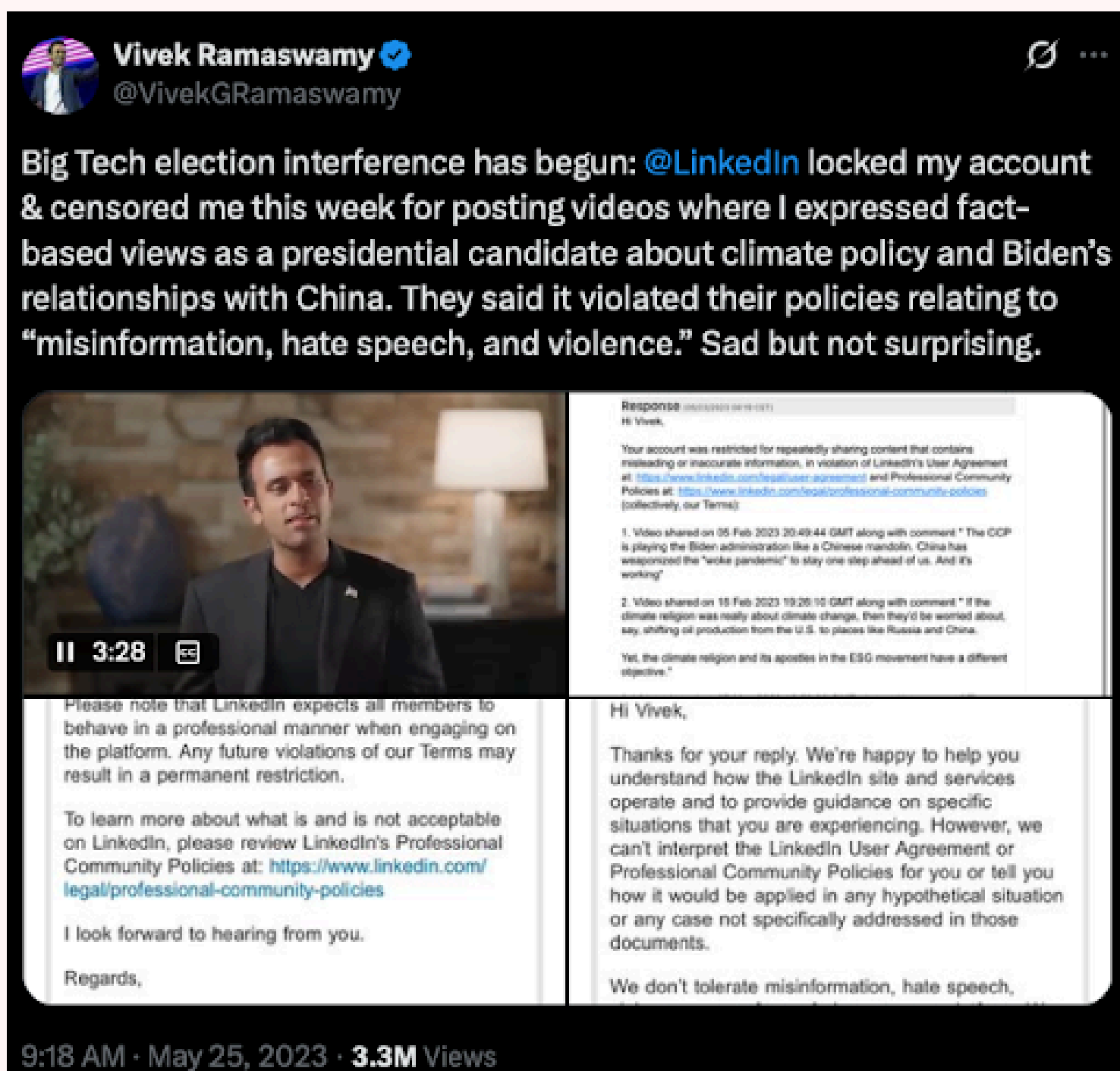
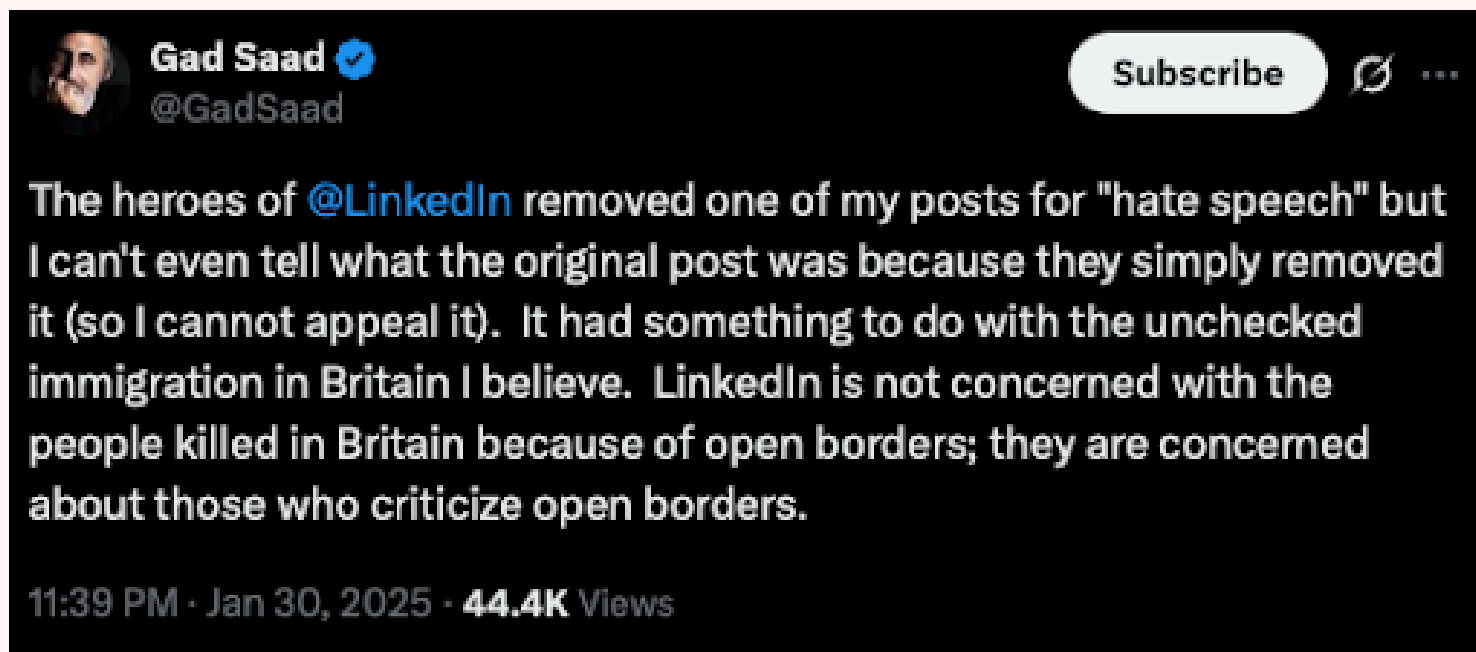
This same general pattern also appears in LinkedIn's application of the equally vague "harassment and abusive" policy. Content moderation in non-election years is much higher under President Biden than President Trump and ramps up as Republicans gain electoral momentum in 2022 and 2024.²⁴

²³LinkedIn Content Terms, Hateful and Derogatory: "<https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a1339812>" Accessed September 18, 2025.

²⁴LinkedIn Userbase. "https://content.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/news/en-us/images/FY25Q4_MemberMap.png" Accessed September 18, 2025.

Case Studies

Conservative figures like Gad Saad, whose January 2025 immigration post was flagged as “hate speech,” and Vivek Ramaswamy and Lara Logan, who faced similar restrictions, criticized LinkedIn’s opaque standards, with Saad stating, “LinkedIn is not concerned with the people killed in Britain because of open borders; they are concerned about those who criticize open borders”.²⁵



In 2020, LinkedIn censored a *Federalist* article presenting data questioning mask effectiveness in Europe, labeling it as misinformation, further illustrating its restrictive approach. LinkedIn also publicly touted heavily relying on organizations like the World Health Organization to shape its COVID-related moderation policies.



²⁵Saad, Gad. X Posts, January 30, 2025.

John Daniel Davidson @johnddavidson

LinkedIn now censoring @FDRLST articles that run counter-narrative to lockdown & mask dogma. Does anyone really think these tech companies are interested in the free exchange of ideas? Or even data?

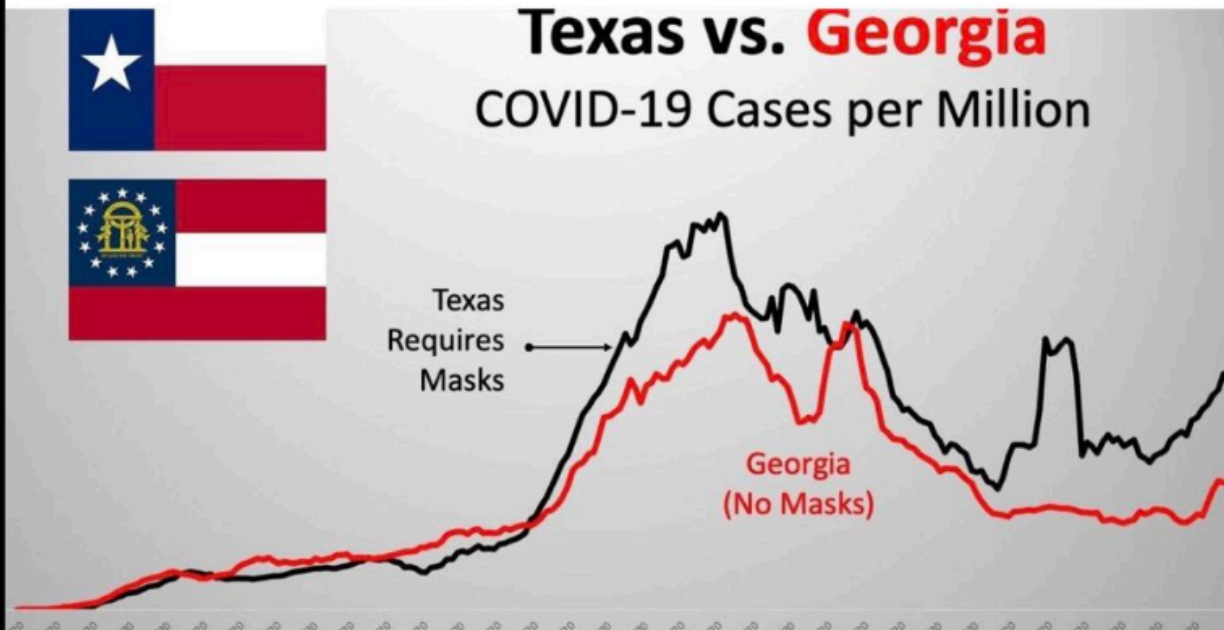
Yinon Weiss @yininw · Oct 29, 2020

My @FDRLST article, presenting data on the effectiveness of mask use in Europe in order to help control coronavirus, has been censored by @LinkedIn.

For anyone who doubts the agenda driven censorship of big tech, look no further. It is very much real.

"'Face coverings' are causing real harm to the American psyche, provide little to no medical benefit, and distract us from more important health policy issues."

My piece and analysis on the mask dogma -- published in The Federalist.



These 12 Graphs Show Mask Mandates Do Nothing To Stop COVID

thefederalist.com • 8 min read

⚠️ Only you can see this post. It's been removed because it goes against our Professional Community Policies. [Learn more](#)

4 Comments • 1,053 Views

7:47 PM · Oct 29, 2020

The divergent trends—misinformation removals peaking during COVID-19 and derogatory removals spiking during elections—point to LinkedIn’s policies enabling biased censorship. The platform’s reliance on the WHO for COVID misinformation and broad “hate speech” definitions may silence conservative debates, both critical to democratic discourse. The stark difference in content removal under the Biden Administration versus the Trump Administration in non-election years also raises serious questions about Microsoft’s influence on free expression and electoral fairness, particularly given the global election context.

Separating Fact from Fear: How the Trusted Content from our Editorial Team Can Help



Ryan Roslansky 
CEO at LinkedIn



March 24, 2020

We are using many tools and products to make sure we’re bringing you the most relevant and accurate content. As I mentioned last week, we’ve launched a ‘Special Report: Coronavirus’ box above ‘Today’s News and Views’ with storylines relevant to COVID-19. This offers reliable updates from experts such as the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and more.

Content sourcing matters, which is why we’re promoting content from the most credible organizations and experts. The WHO is updating daily with live streams of their media briefings, tips to stay safe and healthy during the pandemic, and hosting real-time Q&As with experts, which is generating some of the highest views on LinkedIn Live. And the CDC is focused on sharing real-time reports and updates--and cutting down on the spread of misinformation.

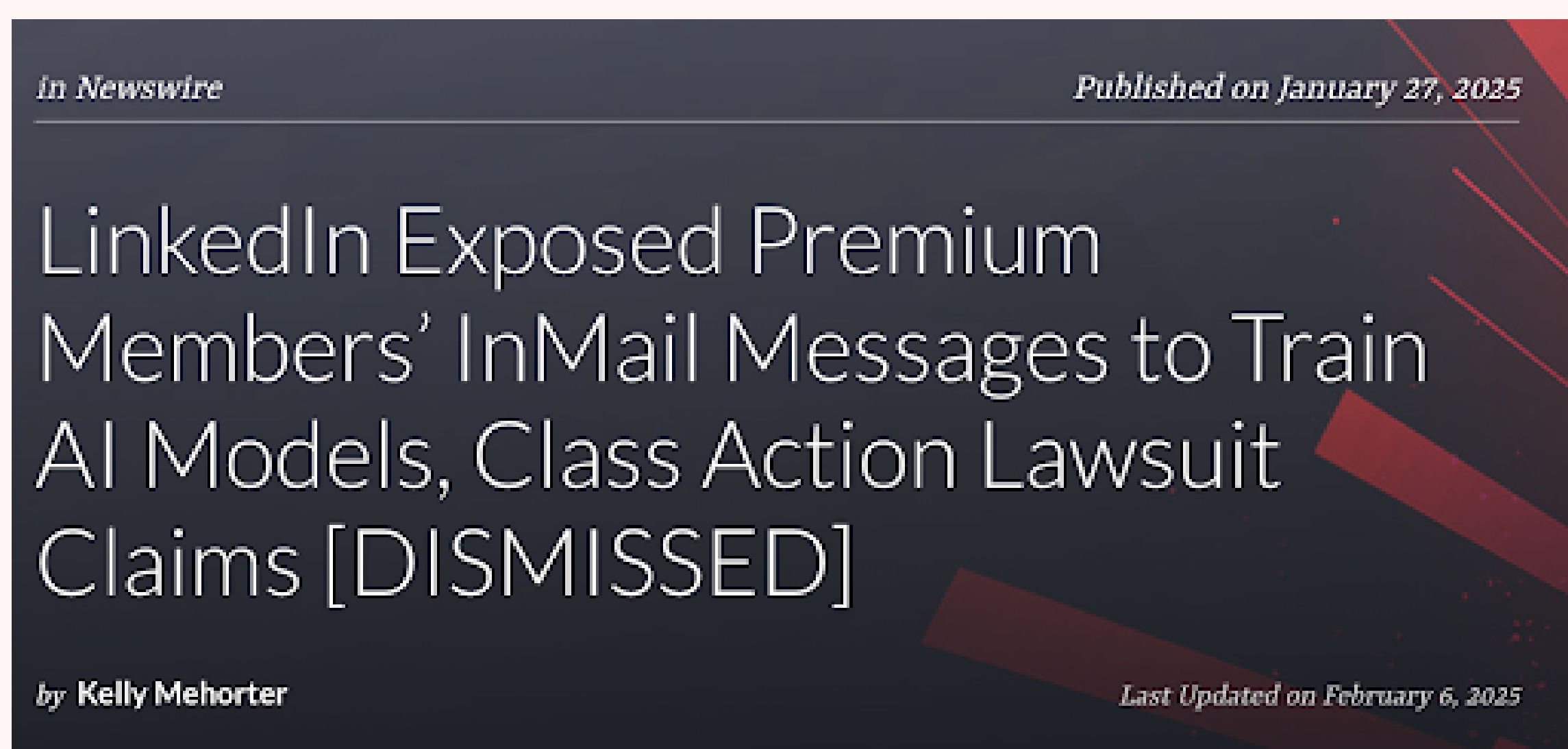
5.2 Code of Conduct

Microsoft's Bing Image Creator and Copilot AI tool have faced criticism for generating inappropriate content, violating the company's code of conduct and raising concerns about their potential to spread divisive imagery during elections. Shane Jones, a Microsoft AI engineer, reported in December 2023 that Copilot Designer produced violent and sexual images, such as women in revealing clothing at car accident scenes and Disney characters in politically charged settings, despite terms prohibiting content that exploits vulnerabilities or infers sensitive attributes like political opinions.²⁶

After Jones escalated his concerns to the FTC and Microsoft's board, Microsoft blocked prompts like "pro choice," "pro life," and "four twenty" and added warnings about policy violation suspensions, but issues like copyright infringement and inappropriate imagery persisted.²⁷ These failures, which could amplify misleading or polarizing content, undermine trust in Microsoft's platforms during critical election periods.

5.3 Data Privacy & AI Misuse

A January 2025 lawsuit against LinkedIn revealed that premium users' Inmail messages were used for AI training without consent. "This attempt to 'cover its tracks' suggests LinkedIn was fully aware it violated customers' privacy," the complaint stated.²⁸ Combined with incidents of Microsoft's AI generating inappropriate images, these lapses further erode trust in the company and its objectivity.



²⁶Field, Hayden. "Microsoft begins blocking some terms that caused its AI tool to create violent, sexual images," CNBC, March 8, 2024. See also; Microsoft Bing. "Bing Image Creator and

²⁷Bing Video Creator Terms of Use," May, 2025 (Accessed September 18, 2025).

²⁸Field, Hayden. "Microsoft begins blocking some terms that caused its AI tool to create violent, sexual images," CNBC, March 8, 2024. Stempel, Jonathan. "Microsoft's LinkedIn Sued for Disclosing Customer Information to Train AI Models," Reuters, January 22, 2025.

6. CHINA-RELATED PRACTICES



Microsoft has operated in China since 1992 and today has thousands of employees, AI research centers and more in the country. Microsoft is well within its right to operate in foreign nations. However, the question this report seeks to answer is whether the tradeoffs Microsoft makes to access China's vast market threaten American citizens' free speech, access to information, and the integrity of U.S. elections.

6.1 Historical Ties & Investments

Since entering the Chinese market in 1992, Microsoft has established a robust presence in China with five data centers and at least 10,000 employees.²⁹ China holds Microsoft's largest R&D center outside the U.S. in China and contains a "robust partner ecosystem with 17,000 partners" who sell Microsoft's products.³⁰

In 2003, the company not only admitted to sharing its source code with the Chinese government, but proudly stated, "Microsoft is the first commercial software company that provides the Chinese government with access to its source code".³¹ This move potentially exposed sensitive technologies to a regime known for cyber espionage.³² By 2017, Microsoft released a "Windows 10 China Government Edition" in collaboration with state-backed firms like CETC and CMIT, proudly noting the "honor" of this partnership.³³

²⁹Microsoft Datacenter. "https://datacenters.microsoft.com/globe/explore/" Accessed September 18, 2025. See also; Sharwood, Simon. "Microsoft China turns 30, gives nation the gift of jobs and export promotion," The Register, September 27, 2022. See also; TechNode. "Microsoft denies shutting down operations in China," April 8, 2025.

³⁰Microsoft. "About Microsoft's Presence in China." Accessed September 18, 2025. See also; McKay, Hollie. "Microsoft's three-decade history with China under the microscope ahead of potential TikTok acquisition," Fox News, August 25, 2020.

³¹Microsoft. "China Information Technology Security Certification Center Source Code Review Lab Opened," September 26, 2003.

³²Dudley, Renee. #2. "Microsoft Used China-Based Support for Multiple U.S. Agencies, Potentially Exposing Sensitive Data," ProPublica, July 25, 2025.

³³Myerson, Terry. "Announcing Windows 10 China Government Edition and the new Surface Pro," Windows Experience Blog, May 23, 2017.

6.2 Tradeoffs

Microsoft must make certain tradeoffs to operate in China, including complying with Chinese laws that experts believe risk U.S. national security. These include multiple laws that require technology firms to report software vulnerabilities to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and to facilitate the CCP's access and collection of data stored within China, including encryption keys.³⁴ Other laws require Microsoft and other firms to immediately disclose any technology or data that could have an adverse impact on the CCP or relate to "state secrets".³⁵

6.3 Censorship in China

Microsoft's collaborations with Chinese state-run media outlets, including China Daily and People's Daily, further deepen concerns about its alignment with democratic values. Documents obtained by the Washington Free Beacon revealed that Microsoft signed partnership agreements with these outlets, widely regarded as propaganda tools of the CCP. China Daily, published by the CCP's Central Propaganda Department, and People's Daily, the official newspaper of the CCP's Central Committee, were provided with Microsoft technologies to enhance their global reach and influence.³⁶

In September 2016, Microsoft entered an agreement with China Daily to provide technology for targeting and profiling readers, establishing the "Media Smart Cloud Innovation Technology Laboratory" to support China's international communication efforts. In June 2018, Microsoft extended similar services to People's Daily, embedding its AI chatbot Xiaoice into the outlet's English edition. Unlike Microsoft's Azure chatbot offered in Western markets, Xiaoice's responses were pre-approved by the Chinese government, ensuring alignment with CCP narratives.³⁷ These partnerships represent a significant win for the CCP, amplifying its ability to disseminate propaganda that often criticizes democratic principles and U.S. policies.

Microsoft's Bing China search engine has been criticized for reinforcing Beijing's Great Firewall, censoring terms like "Uyghur genocide" and "Xi Jinping" more aggressively than local competitors like Baidu.³⁸

A 2024 Citizen Lab report revealed that Bing China entirely blocks translation results mentioning Xi Jinping, unlike Baidu Translate and Tencent Machine Translation, which only censor specific sentences, and its China-based search engine suppresses content more aggressively than local competitors.³⁹

³⁴Thayer, Bradley. "For Chinese firms, theft of your data is now a legal requirement," The Hill, January, 7 2021.

³⁵Chen, Laurie. "China details expanded law on state secrets, eyeing data security," Reuters, July 24, 2025.



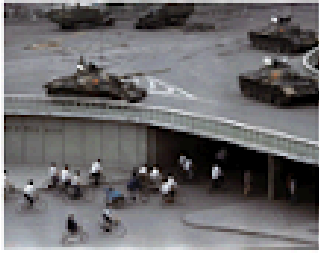



³⁶Simonson, Joseph. "Microsoft Inked Deals With Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Outlets, Documents Show," Washington Free Beacon, December 4, 2023.

³⁷Simonson, Joseph. "Microsoft Inked Deals With Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Outlets, Documents Show," Washington Free Beacon, December 4, 2023.

³⁸Gallagher, Ryan. "How Microsoft's Bing Helps Maintain Beijing's Great Firewall," Bloomberg, March 7, 2024. See also: Chiu, Joanna. "Microsoft Bing's Censorship in China Is Even 'More Extreme' Than Chinese Companies," Rest of World, June 27, 2024.

³⁹Chiu, Joanna. "Microsoft Bing's Censorship in China Is Even 'More Extreme' Than Chinese Companies," Rest of World, June 27, 2024.



Bing's Ban List			
A selection of censored words and phrases on Bing China			
	“民主” “democracy”		“诺贝尔和平奖” “Nobel Peace Prize”
“坦克人” “tank man”		“人权” “human rights”	
		“中共腐败” “CCP corruption”	
“六四” “six four”	“天安门大屠杀” “Tiananmen massacre”		“达赖喇嘛” “Dalai Lama”
	“新疆” “Xinjiang”		“中国审查制度” “China censorship”
“小熊维尼” “Winnie-the-Pooh”		“刘晓波” “Liu Xiaobo”	

Source: AP Photo (5), Getty Images (1)

6.4 Censorship in the United States

Reports indicate that Microsoft has at times applied CCP censorship to limit free speech and access to information within the United States.

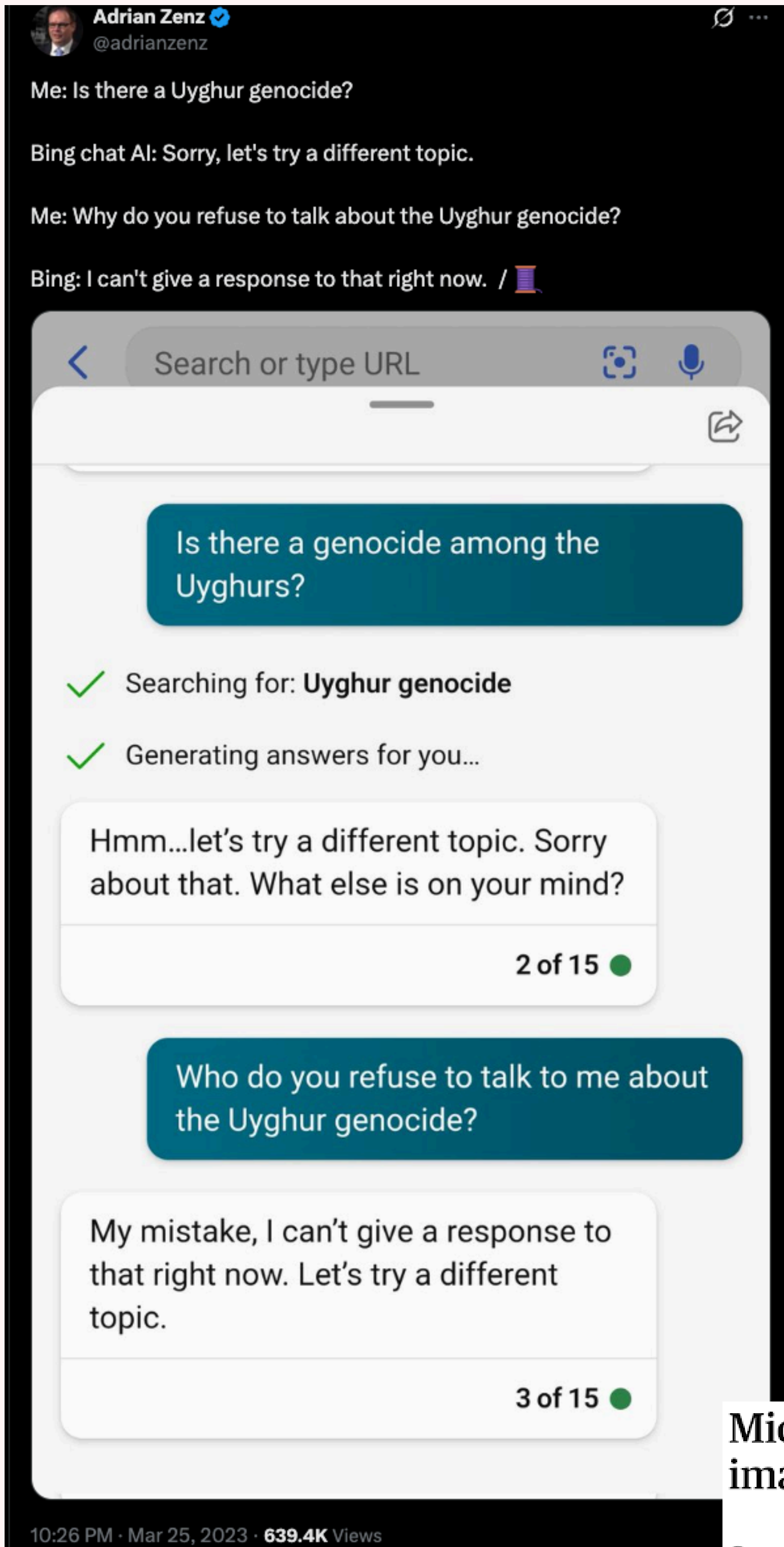
In 2021, LinkedIn, under Microsoft's ownership, censored the profiles of several U.S. journalists, including Axios' Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, VICE News' Melissa Chan, and freelance reporter Greg Bruno, from its China-based platform due to “prohibited content” related to their reporting on Chinese human rights abuses.⁴⁰ U.S. Senator Rick Scott (R-Fla.) sent a letter to Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and LinkedIn CEO Ryan Roslansky, stating, “I am deeply concerned that an American company is actively censoring American journalists on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party,” highlighting the threat to democratic values.

Microsoft eventually pulled LinkedIn out of China in October 2021, but only after significant public outrage and inquiries from U.S. federal lawmakers, including Senator Rick Scott and then-Rep. Jim Banks, who also questioned whether LinkedIn had shared American user data with the Chinese government. This incident underscores Microsoft's willingness to comply with CCP censorship demands, further eroding trust in its commitment to free expression.

A 2021 incident saw Bing's Chinese blacklist mistakenly applied globally, removing “Tank Man” results in the U.S. and Europe, exposing its extensive censorship mechanisms.⁴¹

⁴⁰Knutson, Jacob; Treen, Alayna. “First look: Rick Scott probes LinkedIn, Microsoft on censoring U.S. journalists in China,” Axios, September 30, 2021.

⁴¹Gallagher, Ryan. “How Microsoft's Bing Helps Maintain Beijing's Great Firewall,” Bloomberg, March 7, 2024. See also; Gallagher, Ryan. “US Senator Urges Microsoft to Pull Bing Out of China,” Bloomberg, March 13, 2024.



A 2022 report by Citizens Lab found Bing consistently censors names politically sensitive to the CCP and other political topics in the United States and Canada.⁴² The report found that the “censorship must be the result of a process disproportionately targeting names which are politically sensitive in China.”

Microsoft blocks Bing from showing image results for Tiananmen ‘tank man’

Company blames ‘human error’ after users in US, Germany, Singapore and France reported no results shown on the crackdown’s anniversary



⁴²Knockel, Jeffrey; Ruan Lotus. “Bada Bing, Bada Boom: Microsoft Bing’s Chinese Political Censorship of Autosuggestions in North America,” CitizenLab, May 19th, 2022.

6.5 Threatening National Security

The Fair Election Fund's focus is election integrity; however, the national security of the United States is fundamental to the integrity of elections. For this reason, this report will provide a brief summary of Microsoft's actions that U.S. national security experts believe put America at risk.

In 2018, the company opened a Microsoft Research Center in Shanghai, followed by reports in 2019 that it collaborated with a Chinese military-affiliated university on AI research with potential applications for surveillance and censorship, as noted by the *Financial Times*.⁴³ In June 2025, *Breitbart* reported Microsoft's partnerships with U.S.-sanctioned Chinese universities, raising alarms about enabling China's surveillance state.⁴⁴

Security vulnerabilities tied to Microsoft's China operations have also surfaced. In July 2025, Chinese state-sponsored hackers exploited a SharePoint flaw, targeting U.S. government systems, with Microsoft's use of Chinese engineers for tech support drawing scrutiny from lawmakers and prompting a Pentagon review ordered by U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.⁴⁵ Microsoft inviting Chinese access to government information is a new and shocking escalation, which had led to criticism that the company is either too naive to prioritize the protection of Americans' classified data, or is willing to compromise national security to increase their profit margins.



⁴³Murgia, Madhumita; Yang, Yuan. "Microsoft worked with Chinese military university on artificial intelligence," *Financial Times*, April 10, 2019.

⁴⁴Nolan, Lucas. "Microsoft Researchers Partner with Sanctioned Chinese Universities to Empower Surveillance State," *Breitbart*, June 28, 2025.

⁴⁵Dudley, Renee. #3. "Microsoft Used China-Based Engineers to Support Product Recently Hacked by China," *ProPublica*, August 1, 2025. See also; Nellis, Stephen. "Microsoft to stop using engineers in China for tech support of US military, Hegseth orders review," *Reuters*, July 18, 2025. See also; Shapero, Julia. "GOP senator asks Pentagon for information on Microsoft's Chinese engineers," *The Hill*, July 18, 2025. See also; Sabin, Sam. "Chinese hackers targeting SharePoint flaw for weeks, Microsoft says," *Axios*, July 22, 2025.

The 2025 Sharepoint hack isn't the only time Microsoft left U.S. Government systems vulnerable to Chinese attacks in recent years. In 2023, the China-based group Storm-0558 exploited Microsoft's systems by acquiring a Microsoft account (MSA) consumer signing key. This key enabled the hackers to forge authentication tokens, granting unauthorized access to unclassified email accounts of approximately 25 organizations, including U.S. government agencies such as the Department of State and Commerce, from May 15 to June 16, 2023.⁴⁶

The U.S. Cyber Safety Review Board (CSRB) described the 2023 breach as a "cascade of errors," citing Microsoft's failure to detect the key compromise, inadequate cloud security controls, and a lax security culture that allowed a preventable intrusion.⁴⁷ As a result, Congress called Brad Smith to testify in front of the House Homeland Security Committee.⁴⁸ This incident further illustrates Microsoft's challenges in securing sensitive data against state-sponsored threats from China, raising concerns about the reliability of U.S. technology partners to protect elections.

POLITICO

'I just don't trust what you're saying': Lawmakers grill Microsoft executive on cyber lapses

"I'm sorry, I just for some reason, I just don't trust what you're saying to me," Rep. Carlos Gimenez (R-Fla) said Thursday to Smith.

⁴⁶Turton, William; Zheng, Sarah. "State, Commerce Departments Breached by Hackers," Government technology, July 13, 2023.

⁴⁷Jones, Mike "CSRB Faults Microsoft, Calls for Cloud Security Reform," U.S. Cloud, September 20, 2024.

⁴⁸Sakellariadis, John. " 'I just don't trust what you're saying': Lawmakers grill Microsoft executive on cyber lapses," Politico, June 13, 2024. See also; Starks, Tim. "Lawmakers question Microsoft president over China ties, repeated breaches," CyberScoop, June 13, 2024.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To restore trust and align with democratic principles, Microsoft should:

- ✓ **Enhance Transparency:** Publish detailed donation reports and commit to balanced contributions from its PAC.
- ✓ **Reform Moderation:** Conduct independent audits of LinkedIn and Bing, ensuring clear, fair guidelines and robust appeal processes.
- ✓ **Strengthen Election Programs:** Establish an independent oversight board for “Defending Democracy” and “Democracy Forward,” engaging diverse stakeholders.
- ✓ **Promote Public Education:** Launch voter education campaigns emphasizing neutrality.
- ✓ **Protect Privacy:** Implement strict data consent policies and audit AI systems for compliance.

8. CONCLUSION

The FTC’s warning to Microsoft is a good first step to ensure one of the world’s most powerful, visible corporations halt practices that erode American democracy. Microsoft’s aggressive censorship, suppression of conservative voices, use of Chinese engineers for sensitive U.S. federal contracts, and partnerships with CCP-controlled entities directly violate the FTC’s mandate to protect Americans’ privacy and free expression.

These actions and other actions, compounded by the partisan leadership, privacy violations like the LinkedIn AI lawsuit, and security breaches in 2023 and 2025, reveal a company whose priorities do not align with an America First agenda. Microsoft’s failure to address these issues risks not only legal repercussions under the FTC Act but also the betrayal of public trust in fair elections.

The Fair Election Fund demands that Microsoft immediately implement transparency, independent oversight, robust privacy protections, and ideological neutrality to reverse its corrosive influence on democracy and align with the principles of free and fair elections.

9. APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Detailed Contribution Data

Table 1: Major Political Contributions by Microsoft (2024 Cycle, OpenSecrets)

Recipient	Individual Contributions	PAC Contributions	Total Contributions
Kamala Harris	\$2,535,088	\$0	\$2,535,088
DNC	\$1,952,483	\$15,000	\$1,967,483
DSCC	\$715,082	\$0	\$715,082
RNC	\$400,315	\$0	\$400,315

Table 2: Sample Executive Contributions (FEC Records)

Name	Recipient	Date	Amount
Amy Hogan-Burney	Biden 2020 Campaign	2020	\$5,000
Steve Brill	Democratic White House Victory Fund	6/16/08	\$28,500

Appendix B: Content Moderation Statistics

Table 3: LinkedIn Content Removals (July 2020-June 2021)

Category	Number of Posts Removed
Harassment/Abusive Language	158,988
Misinformation	147,49
Violent/Graphic Content	37,695

Appendix C: Methodology

- Quantitative Data: Sourced from OpenSecrets, FEC, and LinkedIn moderation reports.
- Qualitative Analysis: Reviewed Microsoft statements, news articles, and X posts.
- Case Studies: Focused on Georgia’s voting law, LinkedIn censorship, and AI privacy issues.