

## Facebook Civil Rights Task Force

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In order to safeguard against interference in the 2020 census and presidential campaign, Facebook has established a civil rights task force and an election monitoring center to protect the site's users from voter suppression and intimidation. With more than 2.3 billion users worldwide, Facebook has tremendous power and social influence. It has recently faced criticism for not using

its power adequately to stop the spread of disinformation, moderate hate speech content, and fight discrimination and political interference. This new task force and proposed policy changes within the company centered around civil rights and it reflects pressure from civil rights groups and activists to address accountability issues within the company.

Beginning last year, leading civil rights activist and former legislative director of the ACLU, Laura Murphy, began a multi-year audit of the company. She recently released a second report with recommendations for maintaining Facebook's improved civil rights efforts. On Sunday June 30, 2019, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg posted a Facebook news article providing an update on the company's second civil rights audit. She outlined the latest changes that Facebook has incorporated to advance a civil rights agenda and strengthen its corporate responsibility.

The report outlines four areas where Facebook has made progress and recommends next steps for continued civil rights accountability. The first area of focus is on "Content Moderation & Enforcement," where Facebook has strengthened its bans on hate speech and harmful content. Facebook now bans "praise, support, and representation of white nationalism and white separatism", and the report recommends that it extend this ban further to ban any content supporting white nationalist ideology, even if it does not use explicit terminology. The company also recently updated its policies so that events harassing or targeting people based on their identity cannot be organized through Facebook.

The second area of focus is on "Advertising Targeting Practices," and the company has pledged to fight discrimination through Facebook ads by creating updates that do not allow US housing, employment, and credit ads to target users based on their age, gender or zip code.

For the third area of focus, "Elections and 2020 Census," Facebook is building a team comprised of policy experts dedicated to protecting against misinformation in the census. The company will be using its influence to partner with non-partisan groups in order to encourage participation in the

census. For protecting elections, Facebook has created a team made up of legal, policy, and engineering experts who are working to ban ads that discourage voting. These experts are also working on new policies to prevent voter suppression.

Finally, to strengthen its “Civil Rights and Accountability Structure,” one of Facebook’s most significant changes has been assembling the civil rights task force chaired by Sheryl Sandberg. This task force is made up of senior leaders from major areas of the company along with experts in areas such as content policy, fairness in artificial intelligence, and elections. This task force was outlined as key for the company to continue its civil rights efforts long after the audit’s completion. The task force will meet monthly to discuss civil rights issues and systematic vulnerabilities. The task force will allow employees to bring up civil rights concerns to leadership and make them a priority throughout their work. Facebook has also committed to requiring civil rights training for key employees and leaders within the company so that they will be prepared for these new responsibilities and can incorporate civil rights awareness into decision-making.

Facebook has become the largest social media company in the world. Its commitment to upholding the civil rights of users and combatting anti-democratic values should be admired. As the company continues to build its fleet of employees who will carry out the task force, it is necessary to continue holding Facebook accountable. Hopefully, Facebook will inspire other companies to pursue similar agendas.

Links: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/30/tech/facebook-civil-rights-task-force/index.html>

<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/06/second-update-civil-rights-audit/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/06/30/facebook-civil-rights-task-force-2020-census-elections-misinformation/1613994001/>