

The contents of the Twitter Files, presented as a summary

1. Matt Taibbi, December 2, 2022: "The Hunter Biden Laptop Story"

Twitter's stated mission has always been to provide "the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers." However, these barriers eventually started cropping up, writes Taibbi: first, to combat spam and financial fraudsters. Then, requests started coming from the outside. On October 24, 2020, one Twitter executive [wrote to another](#): "More to review from the Biden team," linking to five tweets for Twitter to delete. The reply came back: "Handled." Taibbi did not disclose the content of those tweets, but four were later found from [internet archives](#) to contain nude photos and videos, purportedly of Hunter Biden, which violate Twitter policy and California law as revenge porn; the content of the fifth deleted tweet is unknown.

Both parties had this sort of access to Twitter's content teams, but the system wasn't balanced, writes Taibbi. Because Twitter's staff had more liberals than conservatives, "there were more channels, more ways to complain, open to the left than the right." (A [future Twitter Files notes](#): "*Twitter's staff & senior execs were overwhelmingly progressive. In 2018, 2020, and 2022, 96%, 98%, & 99% of Twitter staff's political donations went to Democrats.*") On October 24, 2020, the *New York Post* published emails based on the contents of Hunter Biden's abandoned laptop. "Twitter took extraordinary steps to suppress the story, removing links and posting warnings that it may be "unsafe." They even blocked transmission via direct message, a tool reserved for extreme cases," writes Taibbi. White House spokeswoman Kaleigh McEnany was locked out of her account for tweeting about the story.

A public policy executive at the company asked internal teams to take a closer look and was told "the laptop story had been removed for violation of the company's "[hacked materials](#)" policy." Users would get a warning that the content was "unsafe," referencing spam, malware, hacked materials, and private information. Taibbi says that the decision was made without the knowledge of the CEO but under legal head Vijaya Gadde. Communications official Trenton Kennedy [writes](#) in an email, "I'm struggling to understand the policy basis for marking this as unsafe." [Twitter later [said](#) it was erring on the side of caution, given the history of 2016.]

Democratic congressman Ro Khanna [contacted](#) Gadde to gently suggest she hop on the phone to discuss the "backlash re: speech", concerned about 1st Amendment implications and possible political backlash resulting from censorship (Note: Legal experts have [refuted](#) the idea that content moderation by a private company violates the First Amendment, as it only restricts government actors). Khanna was the only Democrat that Taibbi could find in the files who expressed concern. NetChoice, a trade association of internet businesses, [emailed](#) Twitter Public Policy executive Lauren Culbertson to say "a 'blood bath' awaits in upcoming Hill hearings, with members saying it's a 'tipping point,' complaining tech has 'grown so big that they can't even regulate themselves, so government may need to intervene.'

Note: Taibbi doesn't say this in the thread, but Twitter's Head of Trust and Safety, Yoel Roth, later [acknowledged](#) that it was a "mistake" to censor the story. Also, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey himself reversed the decision to suppress the story, calling it a "mistake," and Twitter [updated](#) its hacked materials policy to state that news stories about hacked materials would be permitted, but with a

contextual warning. Also important: Taibbi [writes in the thread](#) that "Although several sources recalled hearing about a 'general' warning from federal law enforcement that summer about possible foreign hacks, there's no evidence—that I've seen—of any government involvement in the laptop story." (i.e., no role of FBI)

2. [Bari Weiss, December 8, 2022: Shadow banning and Visibility Filtering](#)

This investigation [reveals](#) that "teams of Twitter employees built blacklists, prevented disfavored tweets from trending, and actively limited the visibility of entire accounts or even trending topics—all in secret, without informing users." Visibility filtering (VF) as a practice has been in place [since 2018](#) for accounts that violate Twitter rules but do not necessarily merit suspension. The approach was announced in 2018 by CEO Jack Dorsey to preserve the "health" of conversations by identifying accounts more likely to disrupt conversations rather than contribute to them. Archived company blog posts indicate there is a difference between visibility filtering and [shadow banning](#).

An [example](#) provided by Bari Weiss: Stanford's Dr. Jay Bhattacharya argued that Covid lockdowns would harm children. Twitter secretly placed him on a "Trends Blacklist," which prevented his tweets from trending. Popular right-wing talk show host Dan Bongino, at one point, was [slapped](#) with a "Search Blacklist." Conservative activist Charlie Kirk was [set](#) to "Do Not Amplify." Twitter denied that it did these things. In 2018, Twitter's Vijaya Gadde and Kayvon Beykpour (Head of Product) [said](#): "We do not shadow ban." They added in the blog post: "And we certainly don't shadow ban based on political viewpoints or ideology," writes Weiss. She [continues](#): Twitter used VF "to block searches of individual users; to limit the scope of a particular tweet's discoverability; to block select users' posts from ever appearing on the "trending" page; and from inclusion in hashtag searches." Twitter denies these claims, pointing to the above blog post saying there is a difference between visibility filtering and shadow banning.

The group that decided whether to limit the reach of certain users was the Strategic Response Team - Global Escalation Team, or SRT-GET. It often handled up to 200 "cases" a day, [reveals](#) Weiss. Beyond the rank-and-file moderators was another group: the "Site Integrity Policy, Policy Escalation Support," known as "SIP-PES." This group included Vijaya Gadde, Yoel Roth, and subsequent CEOs Jack Dorsey and Parag Agrawal, and they made the most politically sensitive decisions, [according](#) to Weiss.

One of the accounts that rose to a level of high scrutiny was @libsoftiktok—an account that was on the "Trends Blacklist" and was designated as "Do Not Take Action on User Without Consulting With SIP-PES." Twitter suspended this account six times in 2022 for hateful conduct and harassment of LGBTQ communities (@libsoftiktok often [encourages](#) online harassment of hospitals and medical providers for providing gender-affirming healthcare, comparing it to child abuse or grooming). The account has more than 1.9 million followers today. In the Twitter Files, Weiss points out that when @libsoftiktok was herself [doxxed](#) (a photo of her home was posted without her permission), Twitter Support told her, "We reviewed the reported content and didn't find it to be in violation of the Twitter rules." No action was taken.

Note: *In the Twitter Files, Weiss did not reveal how many accounts were de-amplified overall or the larger politics of those who were. An [internal study](#) Twitter conducted in 2018 found its algorithms favored the political right.*

3. [Matt Taibbi, December 9, 2022: The Removal of Donald Trump](#)

This Twitter File covers the period before the election through January 6th and [reveals](#), according to Taibbi, “the erosion of standards within the company in months before January 6, decisions by high-ranking executives to violate their own policies, and more, against the backdrop of ongoing, documented interaction with federal agencies.” Rules made after January 6th [say](#) “the new administration will not be suspended by Twitter unless absolutely necessary.” [According](#) to a screenshot of an internal chat, Twitter executives removed Trump in part over what one executive called the “context surrounding” actions by Trump and supporters “over the course of the election and frankly last 4+ years.”

On October 8th, 2020, Twitter executives [opened](#) a channel called “us2020_xfn_enforcement.” Through January 6, this would be home for discussions about election-related removals, especially ones that involved “high-profile” accounts (often called “VITs” or “Very Important Tweeters”). Twitter's moderation process was, [according to Taibbi](#), based on guesswork, “gut calls,” and Google searches, including moderation of then-President Trump's tweets.

Taibbi [writes](#): “During this time, executives were also clearly liaising with federal enforcement and intelligence agencies about moderation of election-related content.” In [Slack messages](#), Policy Director Nick Pickles is asked if they should publicly say Twitter detects “misinfo” through “Machine Learning, human review, and **partnerships with outside experts.**” The employee asks, “I know that's been a slippery process... not sure if you want our public explanation to hang on that.”

Taibbi also reveals that Yoel Roth not only met weekly with the FBI and DHS (a [story also previously reported by The New York Times](#)) but with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). A screenshot of his calendar [shows](#) “Weekly sync with FBI/DHS/DNI re: election security.” and “Monthly meeting with FBI FITF.” (**Note:** *Trump was President when all these meetings happened with agencies.*)

Taibbi [shares](#) a screenshot of the FBI sending reports about a pair of tweets, the second of which involves a former Tippecanoe County, Indiana Councilor and Republican named John Basham, claiming “Between 2% and 25% of Ballots by Mail are Being Rejected for Errors.” The FBI-flagged tweet then got circulated in the enforcement Slack. Twitter internally [cited](#) Politifact to say the story was “proven to be false.”

The Twitter team then applied a “Learn how voting is safe and secure” label on the tweet, because, as one commenter says, “it's totally normal to have a 2% error rate.” Roth then gives the final go-ahead. Taibbi [writes](#): “Examining the entire election enforcement Slack, we didn't see one reference to moderation requests from the Trump campaign, the Trump White House, or Republicans generally. We looked. They may exist: we were told they do. However, they were absent here.”

4. [Michael Shellenberger, December 10, 2022: The Removal of Donald Trump: January 7](#) (co-reported with Leighton Woodhouse, a documentary filmmaker)

On January 7, senior Twitter execs created justifications to ban Trump, sought a policy change for him (distinct from other global political leaders), and expressed no concern for the free speech or democracy implications of a ban, [writes](#) Shellenberger.

For years, Twitter had resisted calls to ban Trump. "Blocking a world leader from Twitter," [it wrote in 2018](#), "would hide important info... [and] hamper necessary discussion around their words and actions." After January 6, pressure grew on Twitter to ban Trump. Dorsey was on vacation in French Polynesia the week of January 4-8, 2021, and delegated much of the decision-making to Yoel Roth and Vijaya Gadde, [writes](#) Shellenberger.

On January 7, Yoel Roth [wrote](#) in an internal message that "we can't afford to permaban Trump's personal account without first "playing the movie out" and anticipating all the other things that can happen, and then figure out the plans for those possible scenarios (for e.g., "if we suspend the personal account and he posts the same thing on the official government account, do we suspend that too?"). Around 11:30 am PT, Roth [directly messaged](#) his colleagues with news he is excited to share. "GUESS WHAT," he writes. "Jack just approved repeat offender for civic integrity." The new approach would create a system where five violations ("strikes") would result in permanent suspension. "Progress!" exclaims a member of Roth's Trust and Safety Team. "The exchange between Roth and his colleagues makes clear that they had been pushing Jack for greater restrictions on the speech Twitter allows around elections," [writes](#) Shellenberger.

On January 8, Twitter announced a permanent ban on Trump due to the "risk of further incitement of violence." Twitter said its ban is based on "specifically how [Trump's tweets] are being received & interpreted." (**Note:** [In 2019](#), Twitter said it did "not attempt to determine all potential interpretations of the content or its intent.")

"This might be an unpopular opinion, but one-off ad hoc decisions like this that don't appear rooted in policy are a slippery slope... This now appears to be a fiat by an online platform CEO with a global presence that can gatekeep speech for the entire world..." said one junior employee [in a post on Slack](#) that did not receive much attention, per Shellenberger. "Twitter employees use the term "one-off" frequently in their Slack discussions. Its frequent use reveals significant employee discretion over when and whether to apply warning labels on tweets and "strikes" on users," [writes](#) Shellenberger.

In [another exchange](#), Yoel Roth directly messaged a colleague to ask that they add "stopthesteal" & [QAnon conspiracy term] "kraken" to a blacklist of terms to be deamplified. Roth's colleague objected that blacklisting "stopthesteal" risks "deamplifying counterspeech" that validates the election. Roth admits: "We ran into the world changing faster than we were able to adapt the product or the policy."

[An article by journalist Will Oremus](#) is linked on the team's internal Slack: "*The underlying problem is that "the dominant platforms have always been loath to own up to their subjectivity because it highlights the extraordinary, unfettered power they wield over the global public square and places*

the responsibility for that power on their own shoulders... So they hide behind an ever-changing rulebook, alternately pointing to it when it's convenient and shoving it under the nearest rug when it isn't."

5. Bari Weiss, December 12, 2022: The Removal of Trump From Twitter

On the morning of January 8, President Donald Trump, with one remaining strike before being at risk of permanent suspension from Twitter, tweeted twice.

[6:46 am](#): "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!!!"

[7:44 am](#): "To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th."

There were dissenters inside Twitter. "Maybe because I am from China," [said one employee](#) on January 7 on internal Slack, "I deeply understand how censorship can destroy the public conversation." The response: "It is important to understand that censorship by the government is very different from censorship of the government." Voices like that appear to have been a distinct minority within the company, writes Weiss. Across Slack channels, many Twitter employees were upset that Trump hadn't been banned earlier, she [writes](#). "If Alex Jones was shut down for "get your battle rifles," Trump has far exceeded that standard," one employee says internally.

In the early afternoon of January 8, *The Washington Post* published an [open letter](#) signed by over 300 Twitter employees to CEO Jack Dorsey demanding Trump's ban. "We must examine Twitter's complicity in what President-Elect Biden has rightly termed insurrection," the letter says. But the Twitter staff assigned to evaluate tweets quickly concluded that Trump had **not** violated Twitter's policies. "I think we'd have a hard time saying this is incitement," wrote one staffer. "[Don't see the incitement angle here.](#)" or "as an fyi, Safety has assessed the DJT Tweet above and determined that there is no violation of our policies at this time."

To understand Twitter's decision to ban Trump, we must consider how Twitter deals with other heads of state and political leaders, including in Iran, Malaysia, India, and Ethiopia, [writes](#) Weiss. In June 2018, Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [tweeted](#), "#Israel is a malignant cancerous tumor in the West Asian region that has to be removed and eradicated: it is possible and it will happen." Twitter neither deleted the tweet nor banned the Ayatollah. In October 2020, the former Malaysian Prime Minister [said](#) (on Twitter) it was "a right" for Muslims to "kill millions of French people." Twitter deleted his tweet for "glorifying violence," but he remains on the platform. In October 2021, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed [called on](#) citizens to take up arms against the Tigray region. Twitter allowed the tweet to remain up, and did not ban the prime minister. In early February 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government [threatened](#) to arrest Twitter employees in India, and to incarcerate them for up to seven years after they restored hundreds of accounts that had been critical of him. Twitter has not banned Modi.

When Twitter announced Trump's permanent suspension "due to the risk of further incitement of violence," [screenshots](#) show that many at Twitter were ecstatic. By the next day, employees expressed eagerness to tackle "medical misinformation" as soon as possible. Twitter's COO Parag

Agrawal—who would later succeed Dorsey as CEO—told Head of Security Mudge Zatzko [in an internal message](#): “I think a few of us should brainstorm the ripple effects” of Trump's ban. Centralized content moderation IMO has reached a breaking point now.” Outside the United States, Twitter’s decision to ban Trump raised alarms, including with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Prime Minister Angela Merkel, and Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. Weiss [writes](#), this Twitter File is about “the power of a handful of people at a private company to influence the public discourse and democracy.”

6. [Matt Taibbi, December 16, 2022: Twitter, the FBI Subsidiary](#)

Twitter’s contact with the FBI was constant and pervasive, as if it were a subsidiary, [writes](#) Taibbi. Between January 2020 and November 2022, there were over 150 emails between the FBI and former Twitter Trust and Safety chief Yoel Roth.

Some are mundane, like San Francisco agent Elvis Chan wishing Roth a Happy New Year and a reminder to attend “our quarterly call next week.” Others are requests for information about Twitter users related to active investigations. But a surprisingly high number are requested by the FBI for Twitter to take action on election misinformation, even involving joke tweets from low-follower accounts. The FBI’s social media-focused task force, known as FTIF, created in the wake of the 2016 election, swelled to 80 agents and corresponded with Twitter to identify alleged foreign influence and election tampering of all kinds. Federal intelligence and law enforcement reach into Twitter included the Department of Homeland Security, which partnered with security contractors and think tanks to pressure Twitter to moderate content, [writes](#) Taibbi.

The #TwitterFiles show something new, [writes](#) Taibbi: Agencies like the FBI and DHS regularly send social media content to Twitter through multiple entry points, pre-flagged for moderation. What stands out is the sheer quantity of reports from the government.

“HELLO TWITTER CONTACTS”: The “master-canine” quality of the FBI’s relationship with Twitter comes through in this [November 2022 email](#), in which “FBI San Francisco is notifying” it wants action on four accounts. The accounts range from posting about false election dates (which is [unlawful](#)) but also a left-leaning person who is a ballot counter and who [writes](#), “If you don’t wear your mask, I will not count your vote.” In an internal email from November 5, 2022, the FBI’s National Election Command Post, which compiles and sends on complaints, [sent](#) the San Francisco field office a long list of accounts that “may warrant additional action.” Twitter then replied with its list of actions taken, with mercy shown to actor Billy Baldwin. Many of the accounts were satirical in nature, nearly all were relatively low engagement, and some were suspended, most with a generic “Thanks, Twitter” letter.

In a [letter](#) to former Deputy General Counsel (and former top FBI lawyer) Jim Baker on September 16, 2022, Twitter legal exec Stacia Cardille outlines results from her “soon to be weekly” meeting with DHS, DOJ, FBI, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. At the bottom of that letter, she lists a series of “escalations” apparently raised at the meeting, which was already “handled.” Another internal letter from January 2021 [shows](#) Twitter execs processing an FBI list of “possible violative content” tweets. In a March 2021 email, an FBI liaison [thanks](#) a senior Twitter exec for the chance to speak to “you and the team,” then delivers a packet of “products.” The

executive circulates the “products,” which are really DHS bulletins stressing the need for greater collaboration between law enforcement and “private sector partners.” FBI, in one case, sent over so many “possible violative content” reports Twitter personnel [congratulated](#) each other in Slack for the “monumental undertaking” of reviewing them.

7. [Michael Shellenberger, December 19, 2022: The FBI & the Hunter Biden Laptop](#)

Subtitle: “*How the FBI & intelligence community discredited factual information about Hunter Biden’s foreign business dealings both after and *before* the New York Post revealed the contents of his laptop on October 14, 2020*”.

The story [begins](#), Shellenberger writes, in December 2019 when a Delaware computer store owner named John Paul (J.P.) Mac Isaac contacts the FBI about a laptop Hunter Biden had left with him. On December 9, 2019, the FBI issued a subpoena for and took Hunter Biden's laptop.

By August 2020, Mac Isaac still had not heard back from the FBI, even though he had discovered evidence of criminal activity. And so he emails Rudy Giuliani, who was under FBI surveillance then. In early Oct, Giuliani gave it to the [New York Post](#).

Shortly before 7 pm ET on October 13, Hunter Biden’s lawyer, George Mesires, [emails](#) JP Mac Isaac. Hunter and Mesires had just learned from the *New York Post* that its story about the laptop would be published the next day. At 9:22 pm ET (6:22 PT), FBI Special Agent Elvis Chan [sends](#) ten documents to Twitter’s then-Head of Site Integrity, Yoel Roth, through Teleporter, a one-way communications channel from the FBI to Twitter.

The next day, October 14, 2020, the *New York Post* runs its story revealing the business dealings of President Joe Biden’s son, Hunter. Within hours, Twitter and other social media companies censor the *New York Post* article.

“It’s important to understand that Hunter Biden earned *tens of millions* of dollars in contracts with foreign businesses, including ones linked to China’s government, for which Hunter offered no real work,” [writes](#) Shellenberger. And yet, during all of 2020, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies repeatedly [primed](#) Yoel Roth to dismiss reports of Hunter Biden’s laptop as a Russian “hack and leak” operation. They did the same to Facebook, [according](#) to CEO Mark Zuckerberg. “The FBI basically came to us [and] was like, ‘Hey... you should be on high alert. We thought that there was a lot of Russian propaganda in the 2016 election. There’s about to be some kind of dump similar to that.’” Were the FBI warnings of a Russian hack-and-leak operation relating to Hunter Biden based on *any* new intel? No, they weren’t, [writes](#) Shellenberger. “Through our investigations, we did not see any similar competing intrusions to what had happened in 2016,” admitted FBI agent Elvis Chan in November.

In January 2020, Roth resisted FBI efforts to get Twitter to share data outside of the normal search warrant process. Time and again, the FBI asked Twitter for evidence of foreign influence & Twitter [responded](#) that they aren’t finding anything worth reporting. Despite Twitter’s pushback, the FBI repeatedly requested information from Twitter that Twitter had already made clear it will not share outside of normal legal channels. Then, in July 2020, the FBI’s Elvis Chan arranged for temporary

Top Secret security clearances for Twitter executives so that the FBI could share information about threats to the upcoming elections. On August 11, 2020, the FBI's Chan [shared](#) information with Twitter's Roth about the Russian hacking organization APT28 through the FBI's secure, one-way communications channel, Teleporter. (Recently, Yoel Roth [told](#) journalist Kara Swisher that he had been primed to think about the Russian hacking group APT28 before news of the Hunter Biden laptop came out.)

On October 14, shortly after the *New York Post* published its Hunter Biden laptop story, Roth [said](#) in an email, "it isn't clearly violative of our Hacked Materials Policy, nor is it clearly in violation of anything else," but adds, "this feels a lot like a somewhat subtle leak operation."

The FBI's influence campaign may have been helped by the fact that it was paying Twitter millions of dollars for its staff time, [writes](#) Shellenberger. "I am happy to report we have collected \$3,415,323 since October 2019," [writes](#) an associate of the FBI's Jim Baker in an email, with the money designed to meet the "statutory right of reimbursement" for the cost of processing requests from the FBI.

(**Note:** Twitter's [guidelines](#) under law enforcement state that "Twitter may seek reimbursement for costs associated with information produced pursuant to legal process and as permitted by law (e.g., under 18 U.S.C. §2706)". Alex Stamos, a former chief security officer at Facebook and partner at cyber consulting firm Krebs Stamos Group, has written in a thread on Mastodon that the reimbursements from the FBI have "absolutely nothing to do with content moderation.")

The pressure from the FBI on social media platforms [continues](#), writes Shellenberger. In August 2022, Twitter execs prepared for a meeting with the FBI, whose goal was "to convince us to produce on more FBI EDRs." (EDRs are an "emergency disclosure request," a warrantless search.)

8. Lee Fang, December 20, 2022: *How Twitter Quietly Aided the Pentagon's Covert Online PsyOp Campaign*

Despite promises to shut down covert state-run propaganda networks, Twitter documents show that it directly assisted the U.S. military's influence operations, [writes](#) Fang.

"Behind the scenes, Twitter gave approval & special protection to the U.S. military's online psychological influence ops. Despite the knowledge that Pentagon propaganda accounts used covert identities, Twitter did not suspend many for around two years or more. Some remain active."

In a 2017 email, a U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) official [sent](#) Twitter a list of 52 Arab language accounts "we use to amplify certain messages." The official asked for priority service for six accounts, verification for one & "whitelist" abilities for the others. The same day CENTCOM sent the list, Twitter officials used a tool to grant a special "whitelist" tag that essentially provides verification status to the accounts w/o the blue check, meaning they are exempt from spam/abuse flags, more visible/likely to trend on hashtags. The CENTCOM accounts on the list tweeted frequently about U.S. military priorities in the Middle East, including promoting anti-Iran messages, promoting the Saudi Arabia-U.S. backed war in Yemen, and "accurate" U.S. drone strikes that claimed only to hit terrorists. The conduct with the U.S. military's covert network starkly contrasts

with how Twitter has boasted about rapidly identifying and taking down covert accounts tied to state-backed influence operations, including Thailand, Russia, Venezuela, and others since 2016, [writes Fang](#).

9. Matt Taibbi, December 24, 2022: Twitter and the Other Government Agencies

The FBI [released](#) a statement in response to the Twitter Files thus far: It didn't refute the allegations. Instead, it decried "conspiracy theorists" publishing "misinformation," whose "sole aim" is to "discredit the agency." The operation, writes Taibbi in this Twitter File, is far bigger than the reported 80 members of the Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF), which also facilitates requests from a wide array of smaller actors, from local cops to media to state governments. A chief end result was that thousands of official "reports" flowed to Twitter from all over, through the FITF and the FBI's San Francisco field office, [writes Taibbi](#). "The government was in constant contact not just with Twitter but with virtually every major tech firm. Especially as the election approached in 2020, the FITF/FBI overwhelmed Twitter with requests, sending lists of hundreds of problem accounts. With so many government requests, Twitter employees had to improvise a system for prioritizing/triaging them."

The New York FBI office requested the "user IDs and handles" of a long list of accounts [named](#) in a *Daily Beast* article. Senior executives say they are "supportive" and "completely comfortable" doing so. The #TwitterFiles show execs under constant pressure to validate theories of foreign influence – and unable to find evidence for key assertions, [writes Taibbi](#). "This is a difficult speech dilemma. Should the government be allowed to try to prevent Americans (and others) from seeing pro-Maduro or anti-Ukrainian accounts? The CIA has yet to comment on the nature of its relationship with tech companies like Twitter. Twitter had no input into anything I did or wrote. Third parties carried out the searches, so what I saw could be limited."

10. David Zweig, December 26, 2022: HOW TWITTER RIGGED THE COVID DEBATE

- By censoring info that was true but inconvenient to U.S. govt. policy
- By discrediting doctors and other experts who disagreed
- By suppressing ordinary users, including some sharing the CDC's *own data*

The US government pressured Twitter and other social media platforms to elevate certain content and suppress other content about Covid-19, [writes Zweig](#). Internal files at Twitter showed that both the Trump and Biden administrations pressed Twitter executives to moderate the platform's pandemic content according to their wishes.

At the onset of the pandemic, according to the [notes](#), the Trump admin was especially concerned about panic buying. They came looking for "help from the tech companies to combat misinformation" about "runs on grocery stores." When the Biden admin took over, one of their first meeting requests with Twitter executives was on Covid. The focus was on "anti-vaxxer accounts," especially Alex Berenson. The Biden team was "very angry" that Twitter had not been more aggressive in deplatforming multiple accounts. They wanted Twitter to do more.

Twitter executives did not fully capitulate to the Biden team's wishes. An extensive review of internal communications at the company [by Zweig](#) revealed employees often debated moderation cases in

great detail, and with more care than was shown by the government toward free speech. But Twitter did suppress views—many from doctors and scientific experts—that conflicted with the official positions of the White House, he [writes](#). As a result, legitimate findings and questions that would have expanded the public debate went missing. There were three problems with Twitter's approach to content moderation, according to Zweig: a) Bots carrying out the function, b) contractors in the Philippines not trained correctly, and c) senior Twitter executives choosing the inputs for the bots and the contractors. ([Here is an example.](#))

The Twitter Files found “countless” instances of tweets labeled as “misleading” or taken down entirely, sometimes triggering account suspensions, simply because “they veered from CDC guidance or differed from establishment views”. Zweig provides an example: A [tweet](#) by @KelleyKga, a self-proclaimed public health fact checker with 18K followers, was flagged as “Misleading” and replies and likes were disabled, even though it displayed the CDC's *own data.*

In a “surreal” exchange, Jim Baker, at the time Twitter's Deputy General Counsel, asks why telling people to not be afraid wasn't a violation of Twitter's Covid-19 misinformation policy. Yoel Roth, Twitter's former head of Trust & Safety, had to explain that optimism wasn't misinformation. Twitter decided, via the political leanings of senior staff and government pressure, that the public health authorities' approach to the pandemic – prioritizing mitigation over other concerns – was “The Science,” [writes](#) Zweig. Information that challenged that view, such as showing the harms of vaccines or that could be perceived as downplaying the risks of Covid, especially to children, was subject to moderation and even suppression. No matter whether such views were correct or adopted abroad.

11. [Matt Taibbi, January 3, 2023: How Twitter Let the Intelligence Community In](#)

In August 2017, when Facebook decided to suspend 300 accounts with “suspected Russian origin,” Twitter wasn't worried. Twitter was so sure they had no Russia problem, executives agreed the best PR strategy was to say nothing on record and quietly hurl reporters at Facebook, [writes](#) Taibbi.

In September 2017, [after a cursory review](#), Twitter informed the Senate it suspended 22 possible Russian accounts and 179 others with “possible links” to those accounts amid a larger set of roughly 2700 suspects manually examined. In growing anxiety over its PR problems, Twitter formed a “Russia Task Force” to proactively self-investigate. Twitter's search found “only 2” significant accounts, “one of which is *Russia Today*,” was based on the same data that later inspired headlines like “Russian Influence Reached 126 Million Through Facebook Alone,” [writes](#) Taibbi. “The failure of the “Russia task force” to produce “material” worsened the company's PR crisis.”

Eventually, Twitter settled on its future posture. In public, it removed content “at our sole discretion.” Privately, they would “off-board” anything “identified by the U.S. intelligence community as a state-sponsored entity conducting cyber-operations,” [writes](#) Taibbi.

12. [Matt Taibbi, January 3, 2023: Twitter and the FB Belly Button](#)

By 2020, Twitter was struggling with the problem of public and private agencies, bypassing them and going straight to the media with lists of suspect accounts, [writes](#) Taibbi.

In February 2020, as COVID broke out, the Global Engagement Center – an analytic/intelligence arm of the State Department – went to the media with a report called “Russian Disinformation Apparatus Taking Advantage of Coronavirus Concerns.” The GEC flagged accounts as “Russian personas and proxies” based on criteria like, “Describing the Coronavirus as an engineered bioweapon,” blaming “research conducted at the Wuhan institute,” and “attributing the appearance of the virus to the CIA.” State also flagged accounts that retweeted news that Twitter [banned](#) the popular U.S. ZeroHedge, claiming the episode “led to another flurry of disinformation narratives.” ZH had done reports speculating that the virus had lab origin.

Twitter was also trying to reduce the number of agencies with access to Roth. “If these folks are like House Homeland Committee and DHS, once we give them a direct contact with Yoel, they will want to come back to him repeatedly,” [said](#) policy director Carlos Monje in an email.

After spending years rolling over for Democratic Party requests for “action” on “Russia-linked” accounts, Twitter was suddenly playing tough. Why? Because, as Roth put it, it would pose “major risks” to bring the GEC in, “especially as the election heats up,” [writes](#) Taibbi.

Twitter also received numerous requests from officials asking for individuals they didn't like to be banned. The office for Democrat and House Intel Committee chief Adam Schiff [asked](#) Twitter to ban journalist Paul Sperry, who was later suspended. Requests poured in from FBI offices all over the country, day after day, hour after hour: If Twitter didn't act quickly, [questions came](#): “Was action taken?” “Any movement?”

13. Alex Berenson, January 9, 2023: How Scott Gottlieb - a top Pfizer board member - used the same Twitter lobbyist as the White House to suppress debate on Covid vaccines

In August 2021, Scott Gottlieb told Todd O'Boyle – a senior manager in Twitter's public policy department – that a tweet from @drgiroir claiming (correctly, [writes](#) Berenson) that natural immunity was superior to vaccine immunity was “corrosive” and might “go viral.” Twitter put a misleading tag on the tweet, preventing it from being shared. Gottlieb then went after a tweet about Covid's low risk to kids from @justin_hart. Pfizer would soon win the okay for its mRNA shots for children, so keeping parents scared was crucial. In October 2022, Scott Gottlieb claimed on Twitter and CNBC that he was not trying to suppress debate on mRNA jabs. These files prove that Gottlieb – a board member at a company that has made \$70 billion on the shots – did just that, writes Berenson. [Full story here.](#)

14. Matt Taibbi, January 12, 2023: The Russiagate Lies: The Fake Tale of Russian Bots and the #ReleaseTheMemo Hashtag

At a crucial moment in a years-long furor, Democrats denounced a report about flaws in the Trump-Russia investigation, saying it was boosted by Russian “bots” and “trolls.” Twitter officials were aghast, [writes](#) Taibbi, finding no evidence of Russian influence.

On January 18th, 2018, Republican Devin Nunes submitted a classified [memo](#) to the House Intel Committee detailing abuses by the FBI in obtaining FISA surveillance authority against Trump-

connected figures, including the crucial role played by the infamous “Steele Dossier.” The Nunes assertions would virtually all be [verified](#) in a report by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz in December 2019.

On January 23rd, 2018, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA) published [an open letter](#) saying the hashtag “gained the immediate attention and assistance of social media accounts linked to Russian influence operations.” It pointed to the Hamilton 68 dashboard created by former FBI counterintelligence official Clint Watts, under the auspices of the Alliance for Securing Democracy (ASD). The dashboard, which featured a crude picture of Vladimir Putin deviously blowing evil red Twitter birds into the atmosphere, was vague in how it reached its conclusions, [writes](#) Taibbi. Inside Twitter, executives panned Watts, Hamilton 68, and the Alliance for Securing Democracy. Two key complaints: Hamilton 68 seemed to be everyone’s only source, and no one was checking with Twitter.

Executives eventually grew frustrated over what they saw as a circular process – presented with claims of Russian activity, even when denied, led to more claims. Russians weren’t just blamed for #ReleaseTheMemo but #SchumerShutdown, #ParklandShooting, even #GunControlNow – to “widen the divide,” according to the [New York Times](#).

This #ReleaseTheMemo episode is just one of many in the #TwitterFiles, [writes](#) Taibbi. “The Russiagate scandal was built on the craven dishonesty of politicians and reporters, who for years ignored the absence of data to create fictional scare headlines.”

15. Matt Taibbi, January 12, 2023: MOVE OVER, JAYSON BLAIR: TWITTER FILES EXPOSE NEXT GREAT MEDIA FRAUD

“Falsely accuses a bunch of legitimate right-leaning accounts of being Russian bots.”

“Virtually any conclusion drawn from it will take conversations in conservative circles on Twitter and accuse them of being Russian.”

These are quotes by Twitter executives about [Hamilton 68](#), a digital dashboard that claimed to track Russian influence and was the source of hundreds if not thousands of mainstream print and TV news stories in the Trump years.

The secret ingredient to Hamilton 68’s analytical method? [A list](#): “Our analysis has linked 600 Twitter accounts to Russian influence activities online” was how the site launched it. Hamilton 68 never released the list, claiming “the Russians will simply shut [the accounts] down.” All those reporters and TV personalities making claims about “Russian bots” never really knew what they were describing, [writes Taibbi](#). “Instead of tracking how “Russia” influenced American attitudes, Hamilton 68 simply collected a handful of mostly real, mostly American accounts and described their organic conversations as Russian scheming. Twitter immediately recognized these Hamilton-driven news stories posed a major ethical problem, potentially implicating them.” “Real people need to know they’ve been unilaterally labeled Russian stooges without evidence or recourse,” [Roth wrote](#) in an internal email.

What's actually in the Twitter Files?

Capitalisn't Research Brief

This was an [academic scandal](#) as well, as Harvard, Princeton, Temple, NYU, GWU, and other universities promoted Hamilton 68 as a source. Perhaps most embarrassingly, writes Taibbi, elected officials promoted the site, and invited Hamilton “experts” to testify.

“The mix of digital McCarthyism and fraud greatly damaged American politics and culture. News outlets that don't disavow these stories or still pay Hamilton vets as analysts shouldn't be trusted. Every subscriber to those outlets should write to editors about the issue,” [ends](#) Taibbi.

