



CITIZENS FOR
RESPONSIBILITY &
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

August 31, 2022

Tim Cook
CEO, Apple, Inc.
One Apple Park Way
Cupertino, CA 95014

Sundar Pichai
CEO, Google, Inc.
1600 Amphitheater Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Cook and Mr. Pichai:

When the Truth Social platform, a Trump Media & Technology Group product, launched earlier this year, our organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) warned of its potential to spread disinformation and foment attacks on American democracy. Today, those risks have become reality. As an organization committed to protecting our democracy and building an ethical and transparent government, we respectfully request that you ensure that the Truth Social application cannot be accessed in your online stores, effective immediately.

Current events demonstrate that removing Truth Social from Apple's online stores and ensuring that it cannot be accessed on GooglePlay due to its insufficient content moderation policies is long overdue. Following the FBI's court-approved search of former President Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence on August 8, 2022, researchers have tracked an escalation of violent rhetoric from the far right.¹ From threats against federal law enforcement to chatter suggesting the start of another "civil war," these dangers are now playing out in real-world contexts and with real-world consequences.

Truth Social has not only contributed to this growing threat of violent political instability, but also has provided a platform for extremists to coordinate their activities. In the days following the court-ordered search of Mar-a-Lago to retrieve highly classified documents improperly removed from the White House, the Truth Social application saw a spike in downloads as supporters of Trump flocked to the platform.² These individuals did not simply join the platform to show solidarity. Instead, they joined to intimidate and mobilize. According to reports, the Truth Social platform was used to dox not only FBI personnel and the magistrate who signed the court order in the Mar-a-Lago search, but also

¹Tom Dreisbach, [An attempted attack on an FBI office raises concerns about violent far-right rhetoric](https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1117275044/an-attempted-attack-on-an-fbi-office-raises-concerns-about-violent-far-right-rhe), NPR, Aug. 12, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1117275044/an-attempted-attack-on-an-fbi-office-raises-concerns-about-violent-far-right-rhe>.

²Truth Social App Ranking and Store Data, Data AI, accessed Aug. 23, 2022, <https://www.data.ai/en/apps/ios/app/1586018825/>.



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their family members.³ Although personal information was later removed from the platform, it remained online for days until reporters reached out for comment, leaving private citizens vulnerable to would-be bad-faith actors who might intend harm.⁴

This is not an isolated incident. Since the FBI's retrieval of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, digital communications technology has been awash in angry reactions to federal law enforcement. A Truth Social account linked to the individual who died attempting to breach the FBI's Cincinnati office just days after the events at Mar-a-Lago reportedly called for federal agents to be killed "on sight".⁵ Other posts on the site from the same account reference a "call to arms" and urge people to "be ready for combat."⁶ As these events show, violent threats can quickly escalate from rhetoric to reality.

Even before the Mar-a-Lago search, we already knew that misinformation and disinformation can spread unchecked on social media and lead to real-world consequences for our democracy. The January 6, 2021 attack on our U.S. Capitol is a case in point. Since that attack, fraudulent election falsehoods have continued to gain traction among the former president's supporters. According to recent coverage, "Big Lie" vigilantism is again on the rise as stolen-election activists carry on spreading false information surrounding the 2020 presidential election and look ahead to the next election cycle to try to affect the outcome.⁷

Donald Trump, and his Truth Social platform, play a leading role sowing disinformation and elevating false narratives aimed at undermining our democratic institutions.⁸ In the aftermath of the court-approved search of Mar-a-Lago, Trump deflected

³ Matthew Chapman, *Trump supporters use Truth Social to dox investigators in Mar-a-Lago raid*, *Salon*, Aug. 17, 2022, <https://www.salon.com/2022/08/17/supporters-use-truth-social-to-dox-investigators-in-mar-a-lago-raid--and-their-families-partner/>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Mike Balsamo and Samantha Hendrickson, *Ohio gunman appeared to threaten FBI after Trump home search*, *Associated Press*, Aug. 12, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/fbi-office-shooting-suspect-killed-eb85e9faa93612fc54fb15639075d0fe>.

⁶ Elizabeth Wolfe, Josh Campbell, Brynn Gingras, and Paul P. Murphy, *An armed man tried to enter the FBI's Cincinnati office and was fatally shot after a standoff with police. Here's what we know*, *CNN*, Aug. 12, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/12/us/fbi-cincinnati-office-armed-suspect-what-we-know/index.html>.

⁷ Andy Kroll, *"Big Lie" Vigilantism is on the Rise. Big Tech is Failing to Respond*, *ProPublica*, June 17, 2022, <https://www.propublica.com/article/election-fraud-ballot-mules-facebook-tiktok-memes>.

⁸ See, e.g., <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/108811279834566814>; <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/108906909057160138>; Nicole Gaudiano, *"Trump Demands Reinstatement or 'New Election immediately!' as some Republicans seek distance from him"*, *Business Insider*, Aug. 29, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-seeks-reinstatement-new-election-immediately-further-dividing-party-2022-8>.



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blame and used his platform on Truth Social to push the false narrative that the search was an “attack on democracy”⁹ and rally his supporters against law enforcement and other perceived enemies.¹⁰ Similar to how his false narratives inflamed the fires of insurrection on January 6, leading Twitter to belatedly block him from their site, Trump is now trying to use his nearly 4 million followers on Truth Social to do the same thing¹¹ - and evidenced by the attack on the FBI field office in Cincinnati, it is working.¹²

From the moment Trump’s Truth Social application became available for download on Apple, CREW raised concerns about the social media platform’s potential for promoting violence, mobilizing like-minded violent individuals, and emboldening and coordinating extremists who wish to harm our democracy. In April 2022, CREW called for Apple to remove the Truth Social application from the App Store, citing the possibility of inviting reputational risks, promoting extremist content, and violating community standards, not to mention that providing a platform to Truth Social meant doing business with a former president who had acted to thwart the peaceful transfer of power.¹³ Months later, we stand firm in our call to ban Truth Social.

Both Apple and Google have community standards that aim to create a safe, productive, and inclusive environment for all of your users. These community standards explicitly prohibit the use of hate speech and calls for violence. Given how Truth Social has operated during its short lifetime to facilitate far-right violence and further propel political instability, your companies would be correct to find that the platform both violates your community standards and runs counter to your public pledges to support our democracy. We are heartened to hear that Google is taking a serious look at Truth Social’s content moderation standards¹⁴ and urge you not to add the application to your online store unless and until they prove that they have effective systems to ensure that the application is not used to incite violence, spread disinformation, and otherwise contribute to the degradation of our democracy.

⁹ <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/108824557024103921>.

¹⁰ <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/108830529259405266>.

¹¹ <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/108789700493889917>.

¹² Sarah Fischer, *Truth Social’s Ugly Truth*, *Axios*, Aug. 29, 2022, <https://www.axios.com/2022/08/29/truth-social-problems-trump>.

¹³ See, e.g., *CREW Letter to Tim Cook*, Apr. 21, 2022,

<https://www.citizensforethics.org/legal-action/legal-complaints/apple-must-remove-truth-social-from-the-app-store/>.

¹⁴ Helen Coster, *Truth Social Android App Not Approved on Google Play Store*, *Reuters*, Aug. 30, 2022,

https://www.reuters.com/technology/truth-social-android-app-not-approved-google-play-store-axios-2022-08-30/?aid=630e53a847502200013f339e&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter.



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If you allow Truth Social to operate on your platform, your companies run the risk of legitimizing and facilitating dangerous behavior and helping to undercut our fragile democracy. We urge you to take immediate steps to follow your community content standards, and protect both your business reputation and our democratic institutions. It is past time to ensure that Truth Social has no home in your online stores.

Thank you for your attention to the critical matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Noah Bookbinder".

Noah Bookbinder
President