

RED INK REVIEW

THE PRESIDENT IS LOSING HIS PLATFORMS

KEVIN ROOSE, NYT

For years, top executives at social media companies treated President Trump with kid gloves, contorting themselves into pretzels to explain why he was still allowed to post on their platforms despite violating their rules again and again. Fearful of provoking a backlash from the president and his allies, they gave gauzy speeches defending free expression, wrote special policies to justify their inaction and attached weak warning labels to his posts.

**AUTHOR'S
UNATTRIBUTED
OPINION**

But Wednesday's rampage at the Capitol – and perhaps the knowledge, solidified earlier in the day, that Democrats will soon control both houses of Congress – appears to have stiffened some spines.

After Wednesday, the big tech platforms took their strongest actions yet against Mr. Trump. Facebook's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, said on Thursday that the company was locking Mr. Trump's accounts until at least Inauguration Day, adding that "the risks of allowing the president to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great." Earlier, Twitter and YouTube took down a video in which Mr. Trump praised the rioters and falsely claimed that the presidential election was rigged.

Twitter also locked his account on Wednesday until 12 hours after he deleted tweets that violated the company's policies, and threatened a permanent ban if he violated more rules. YouTube removed Mr. Trump's video, and said on Thursday that it would give strikes to channels that posted videos promoting false claims.

These measures may be just the start. I spoke with several employees at Twitter and Facebook on Wednesday who said they expected their companies to ban Mr. Trump's accounts permanently. There is simply too much danger of continued violence stemming from his posts, said these employees, who would speak only anonymously because the internal discussions were private, and few expect that a temporary timeout will be enough to dissuade him from fanning the flames.

Casey Newton and Ben Thompson, two tech writers whose opinions hold sway among social media executives, have both called for Mr. Trump to be barred. Alex Stamos, Facebook's former security chief, said that although he once opposed banning Mr. Trump's account on free speech grounds, he changed his mind after Wednesday's rampage because Mr. Trump's posts were an attack on democracy itself.

**ONE-SIDED
NARRATIVE**

This is the sole place in the article where free speech issues are addressed, yet are immediately dismissed.

"You don't want incredibly powerful information intermediaries deciding who has legitimate speech in a democracy," Mr. Stamos told me. "But that was all based on speech that was happening in the democratic process."

Whether or not Mr. Trump ever gets his accounts back, it's clear that he has already jeopardized one of his most valuable assets: his ability to bully these companies into giving him a wide berth.

For years, being able to use Facebook and Twitter as his personal battering rams has been one of Mr. Trump's biggest political assets. He is an inveterate poster who uses these apps to pick fights, settle scores, promote conspiracy theories and disseminate disinformation, and who has faced remarkably few consequences for doing so. He has more than 100 million combined followers on the platforms, and his posts routinely generate more engagement than those of any other public figure.

Mr. Trump would still find ways to reach his followers without Facebook and Twitter, of course. There would still be Fox News, Newsmax, OANN and legions of pro-Trump partisans willing to repost his messages. Newspapers and cable news stations, which have long treated anything a president said as inherently newsworthy, might not be able to resist giving Mr. Trump airtime and attention even when he is a private citizen. And he has expressed interest in starting his own digital media empire, where he could set his own rules.

The most obvious short-term move for Mr. Trump, after a Twitter and Facebook ban, would be to move to one of the "alt-platforms" such as Parler and Gab, where many of his most ardent followers have flocked after being kicked off more mainstream apps. (On Wednesday night, Gab's chief executive, Andrew Torba, said he was "in the process of connecting with President Trump's team" about setting up the president's account.)

But these apps are small and culturally insular, and wouldn't likely satisfy the president's desire for a mass audience. Even if Mr. Trump built his own social network, no other platform could offer him what Twitter and Facebook currently do: tens of millions of eyeballs from across the political spectrum, and a direct line to the assignment desks and control rooms of every news organization in the world.

David Kaye, a law professor and former U.N. special rapporteur on free expression, said on Thursday that Facebook had made the right call in banning Mr. Trump's accounts until Inauguration Day. He added that even if Mr. Trump emerged on another platform, it would likely be as a diminished voice.

"So he goes to Parler. Who cares?" Mr. Kaye said. "The major platforms have already demonstrated the undeniable value of network and reach beyond the narrow confines of an affinity group."

Mr. Kaye pointed out that other media figures, such as the Infowars conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and the far-right provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos, had struggled to stay relevant after losing their accounts. And without the power of the presidency behind him, Mr. Trump might find himself as just another commentator competing for attention in a crowded right-wing media ecosystem.

Losing his Twitter and Facebook accounts permanently might even make Mr. Trump less likely to run for president again in 2024, an idea he has reportedly floated in private conversations. After all, he'd be competing against Republicans with full posting privileges, who would have the advantage of taking their message to a more mainstream, less hyperpartisan audience.

**AUTHOR'S
UNATTRIBUTED
OPINION**

This strongly implies that the President has a stated goal to "burn it all down".

It's easy to imagine, in other words, that being barred by Facebook and Twitter could consign Mr. Trump to post-presidential irrelevance, and meaningfully damage his political future. It's also easy to imagine that Mr. Trump might not need Facebook or Twitter, if his goal is simply to burn it all down on his way out.

"He will lose the ability to affect the overall conversation," said Mr. Stamos, the former Facebook executive. "But when you're talking about running an insurrection, then you only need to talk to your base."

RED INK KEY

We will be highlighting examples of bias that fall under the following categories:

- **Misleading anecdote** – Framing of an isolated incident as representing an occurrence or trend that is more widespread than it actually is
- **Author's unattributed opinion** – Making unfounded assumptions about how someone mentioned in the article is feeling or thinking
- **Omitted key fact** – Leaving out crucial contextual information
- **One-sided narrative** – Overemphasizing one side of a two-sided story
- **Biased sourcing** – Citing biased sources to support a biased narrative
- **Twisted context** – Quoting someone without providing all the information necessary to understanding that person's intended message
- **Outdated stats** – Using outdated information or statistics to argue a point—e.g., making a point about health care access using information published in 2018, which collected data from 2017
- **Biased labeling** – When a reporter fails to correctly label a source "liberal" or "conservative" when citing it. Or, when a reporter labels a person or group with positive or seemingly nonpartisan labels, such as "an expert" or "advocacy organization", when it is a lobbying, party or industry organization
- **Shaky statistics** – Mathematically incorrect sourcing of statistics—e.g., saying "10 percent increase" when they mean a "10 percentage point increase"
- **Shaky statistical interpretation** – Using legitimate statistics, but coming to an unfounded conclusion
- **Questionable anonymous sourcing** – Over-reliance on anonymous sourcing in an article or giving vague attribution when more specificity is required
- **Questionable statistical sourcing** – Citing a biased or unreliable source of statistics
- **Misleading headline** – When the headline presents a sensationalized or otherwise inaccurate overview of what is actually written in the article