

Matt Taibbi

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Note on Left and Right in the Twitter Files...

Mainstream outlets try to grind every news story into grade D partisan hamburger and Twitter Files coverage is no exception. The Washington Post even called me a “conservative journalist” for a few minutes.

As head of trust and safety at Twitter, Roth was involved in many of the platform’s decisions about what posts to remove and what accounts to suspend. His communications with other Twitter officials have been posted in recent days as part of what Musk calls the Twitter Files, a series of tweets by conservative journalists Matt Taibbi and Bari Weiss.

This isn’t a left or right project. The question that interests me, how these companies have been absorbed as intelligence arms, is more future/dystopia than blue/red. But that story is hard to sell, so we’re getting the usual stupidity.

Still, well-meaning people have questions:

Obviously, I know voices on the left have been “moderated” a lot, because I’ve been interviewing them for years: taibbi.substack.com/p/meet-the-cen...

But we’re all trying to triage time and instead of looking up individual accounts, most of us have been looking at broader search terms to start, like “FBI,” “Covid,” “DHS,” etc.

I did look up account(s) connected to Julian Assange. His "PV2" page doesn't show anything unusual, just automated suspensions of an abandoned account, and I found no record of, say, a government-initiated action.

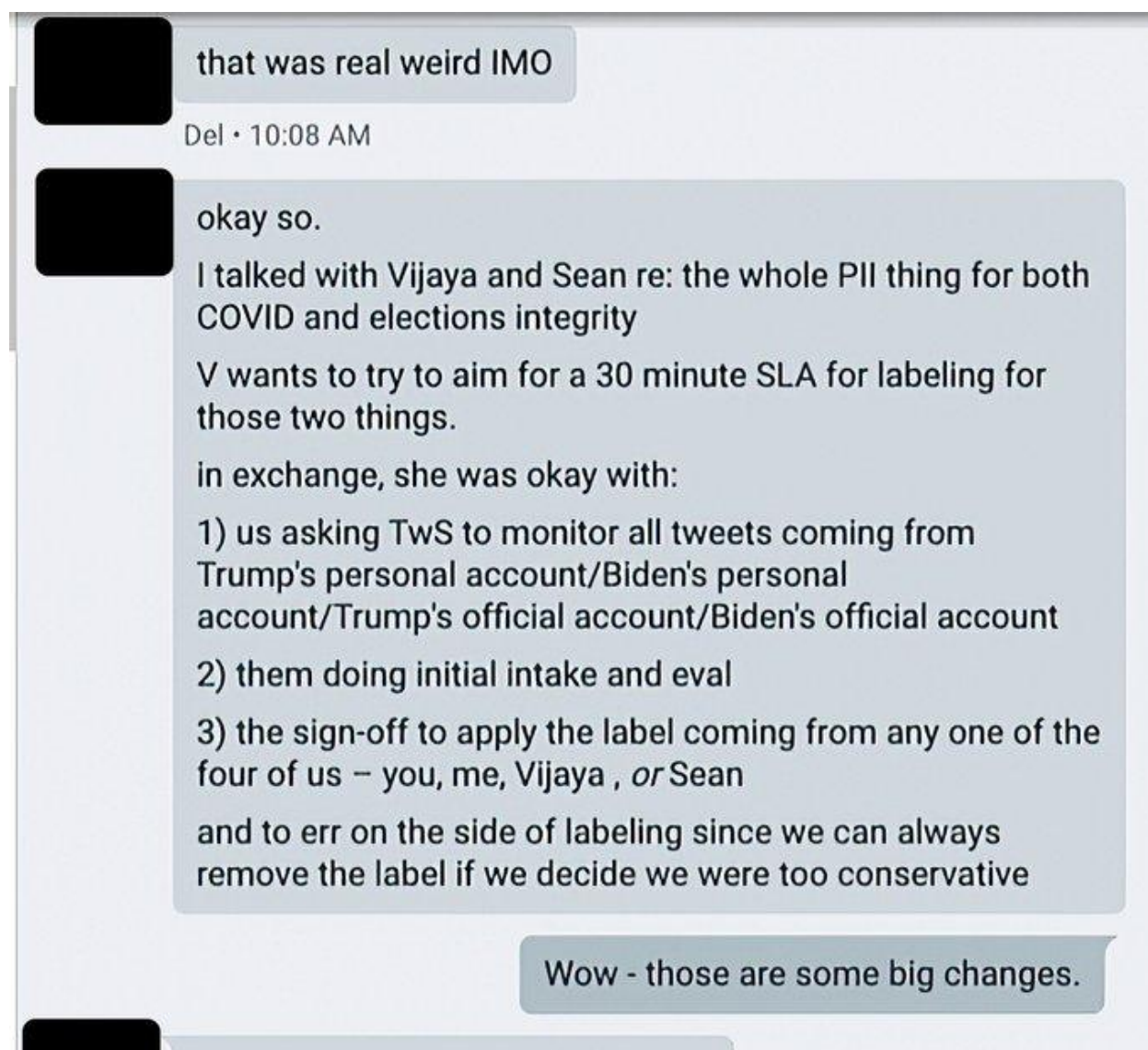


That doesn't mean such intervention doesn't exist. It may be in a Slack or an email somewhere. It's a big haystack. We'll keep looking.

A few actions hit both Republicans and Democrats. Some FBI offices were clearly running searches of "November 4" to catch people trying to trick others into not voting, and this snared both Biden and Trump voters in silly numbers.

D	E
Date of Tweet	Tweet
8/1/20	Replying to @RepAdamSchiff "PS: to keep things simple ... Republicans are to vote on November 3. Democrats vote on November 4."
8/1/20	Replying to @FrankLuntz "Sis is just a reminder that the GOP needs to fight! Don't forget to vote on November 4!"
8/1/20	Replying to @mikefarb1 "Aren't voters for Trump supposed to vote on November 4? You know, to help with social distancing and all."
8/2/20	Replying to @Amy_Siskind "Many people are saying Trumplicans can vote on November 4 to teach the libtards a lesson in freedom."
8/4/20	Replying to @h8Wankmaggot45 "Great. Vote on November 4."
8/4/20	Replying to @h8Wankmaggot45 "Hope you vote on November 4!"
8/4/20	Replying to @h8Wankmaggot45 "Good. Don't forget to vote on November 4. Of course all the smart people will be voting on November 3"
8/4/20	Replying to @h8Wankmaggot45 "Yes! I want to se all the MAGAs go out to vote on November 4! Remember that date. November 4!!!"
8/5/20	Replying to @h8Wankmaggot45 "You are ruining my posters reminding Republicans to vote on November 4."
8/5/20	Replying to @realDonaldTrump "We will not gorfet when we vote on November 4! Thanks for fighting for all Americans. #TRUMP"

There are interesting/ambiguous details, like a decision we found in which the company considered restricting all moderation decisions involving Biden or Trump to four senior executives:



But Twitter did have a clear political monoculture. I ran searches for both “RNC” and “DNC,” cross-referenced against senior executives. “RNC” turned up pages about Republicans suing the company. “DNC” returned mountains of insistent moderation demands.

Some of the latter were quite funny and revealing.

In multiple instances Twitter initially decided not to remove videos lampooning Joe Biden because they were obvious parodies “unlikely to cause offline harm or generate confusion.”

These included a "deceptively edited" video of Biden coughing:

<https://reuters.com/article/uk-fac> check biden coughing video; fact-check video of biden coughing has been selectively edited to imply he has covid 19

And a "Todos Con Biden" Trumo spoof:


<https://youtu.be/n-CgjeGJUfQ>

Usually Twitter was responding to complaints from one very voluble DNC staffer and still applied warning labels to such content. In one case, they refused to do either.

"Because the video is an unaltered excerpt of the Vice President's speech, our teams consider it to be out of context, but not deceptive," Twitter told the staffer, who fumed, "These rules need revision."

In the process, they sent a graph of their bizarre moderation flow chart, which among other things showed they can still apply labels to non-deceptive material. This seemed more interesting than the fate of a Biden coughing mashup.

September 23, 2020 at 6:49 AM

☆ [Redacted] Re: Deceptively Edited Video of VP Biden 

To: Timothy Durigan, Cc: [Redacted] & 7 more [Details](#)

Tim,

Because the video is an unaltered excerpt of the Vice President's speech, our teams consider it to be out of context, but not deceptive.

I hope this provides some insight.

Best,
[Redacted]

On Wed, Sep 23, 2020 at 9:39 AM Timothy Durigan [Redacted]@dnc.org> wrote:
[Redacted]

Can you help us understand the decision-making process here? The content is deceptively altered and shared in a deceptive manner, which would seem to warrant a label.

<https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/manipulated-media>

Is the content significantly and deceptively altered or fabricated?	Is the content shared in a deceptive manner?	Is the content likely to impact public safety or cause serious harm?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Content may be labeled.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Content may be labeled.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Content is likely to be labeled, or may be removed.*
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Content is likely to be labeled.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Content is likely to be removed.

Thanks,
Tim

If this kind of mechanized speech control can be used one way today, it can be used in another tomorrow, especially if unseen enforcement officials are pushing on the levers.