



## From Nipples to Nazis

*How should Facebook react to questionable content?*

*Before class (15 minutes):* Read the [Introduction](#) of Facebook's Community Standards, then read the overviews of [the first six cases](#) the Oversight Board will review.

*Class time needed:* 20-60 minutes

*Categories/Tags:* Social media, big tech, free speech

*Learning objectives:* At the conclusion of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Discuss a private company's responsibility to minimize harm while also appreciating a human right to free expression.
- Compare controversial social media posts and defend or denounce their value in the realm of free speech.

*Issue overview:* Facebook has convened an Oversight Board, a panel of experts who will review posts that the social media giant took down because, it says, they violated its community standards. Facebook users can appeal the take-downs, and the board is reviewing its first six cases now. The board's decisions will have major implications about what other content might be allowed and what might be taken down in the future.



## Announcing the Oversight Board's first cases and appointment of trustees

*Background:* Social media giants like Facebook are increasingly facing scrutiny about the ways they monitor content, from misinformation to hate speech to political advertising. Some think social media companies have a greater legal and ethical responsibility for what is published on their platforms because those messages are generally public.

This has resulted in a constant tension within Facebook and other social media sites to maintain standards that minimize harm while also appreciating a human right to free expression.

While Facebook might want numerous and varied posts on the site to drive engagement among users — which translates to time spent on the site and therefore profits via advertising — those inside the organization also recognize an obligation to minimize harm to individuals and democracy by regulating posts that violate community standards.

Facebook's governing [community standards](#) dictate what users can and cannot post about. In some ways, the rules are exceptionally clear, like, "We do not allow content that sexually exploits or endangers children." In other instances, the language is more nuanced: "We have higher expectations for content that we call

cruel and insensitive, which we define as content that targets victims of serious physical or emotional harm.”

Facebook was criticized when, despite years of efforts to combat misinformation, it declined to fact-check the posts of politicians ahead of the 2020 election. CEO Mark Zuckerberg evoked the First Amendment, but even employees of the company were unhappy with the decision. Hundreds of them wrote a letter in opposition of the policy, but it stood.

*Activity:* Read the [Introduction](#) of Facebook’s Community Standards, then read the overviews of [the first six cases](#) the Oversight Board will review. Find one that interests you. What do the community standards indicate about why it got taken down in the first place? (For example, the fourth case seems to have been flagged for violating nudity standards in Section Three, Part 14: Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity).

*Discussion questions:*

1. Make a case to either reinstate your selected content or keep it off Facebook. Use Facebook’s community standards and your own logic to justify your choice.
2. Do you think it should be Facebook’s job to police the speech and posts of its users? Why or why not?
3. Find your university’s social media policy as it pertains to students. What protections are you offered as a student to express yourself freely on social media?
4. If you’re at a public university, find a local private institution and compare its policy to yours, or vice versa. What differences did you find? (Professors: Did your students know that a public university is considered an arm of the government, while a private one is not?)
5. Think about a time where you were impacted by the community standards on a site or publication. How did your engagement in that platform or source change as a result? With the issue? In your own decisions to speak or not to speak?
6. When you think about your own response in that moment, what considerations would you keep in mind moving forward as a journalist at your school? What protections or standards are you grateful for? What are the limitations of those protections or standards?

*For further reading*

- [“How Facebook Gets the First Amendment Backward,”](#) Wired
- [“The debate over Facebook's political ads ignores 90% of its global users,”](#)  
The Guardian
- [“Facebook doesn't have to run paid ads peddling politicians' lies,”](#) USA  
Today

*Supporting materials*

- Slideshow (coming soon)