



David Zweig @davidzweig

Dec 26 · 40 tweets · [davidzweig/status/1607378386338340867](https://twitter.com/davidzweig/status/1607378386338340867)

1. THREAD:

THE TWITTER FILES: 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*

2. So far the Twitter Files have focused on evidence of Twitter's secret blacklists; how the company functioned as a kind of subsidiary of the FBI; and how execs rewrote the platform's rules to accommodate their own political desires.

3. What we have yet to cover is Covid. This reporting, for The Free Press, [@TheFP](#), is one piece of that important story.

4. The United States government pressured Twitter and other social media platforms to elevate certain content and suppress other content about Covid-19.

5. Internal files at Twitter that I viewed while on assignment for [@TheFP](#) showed that both the Trump and Biden administrations directly pressed Twitter executives to moderate the platform's pandemic content according to their wishes.

6. At the onset of the pandemic, according to meeting 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.” But . . . there were runs on grocery stores.

- The Trump White House, specifically Michael Kratsios, led the Trump Administration's calls for help from the tech companies to combat misinformation. Areas of focus included conspiracies around 5G cell towers, runs on grocery stores, and misinformation that could stoke panic buying and behaviors. Coverage [here](#). Documents [here](#) and [here](#).

7. It wasn't just Twitter. The meetings with the Trump White House were also attended by Google, Facebook, Microsoft and others.

- a. Twitter, alongside several other tech companies, including Google, Facebook, and Microsoft, participated. Activities included a standing weekly call to share general trends and hosting a shared Microsoft Teams group. Some of the companies (not Twitter) gathered open-sourced information from researchers. Our teams fed this information to the Twitter policy enforcement teams.

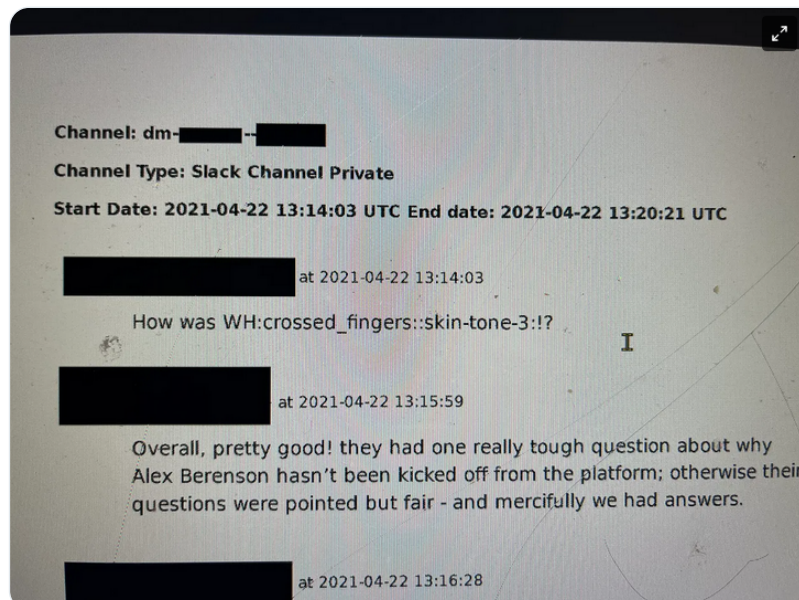
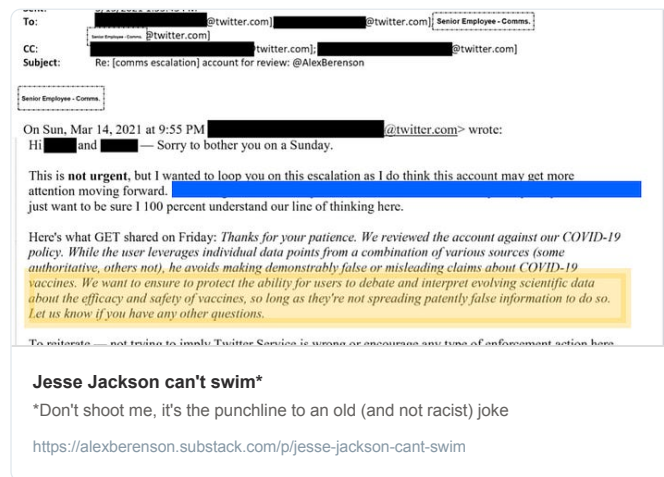
8. When the Biden admin took over, one of their first meeting requests with Twitter executives was on Covid. The focus was on “anti-vaxxer accounts.” Especially Alex Berenson:

Biden

- One of the first meeting requests from the Biden White House was about COVID misinformation. Per regular process, Public Policy took the meeting. Biden's staff focused on vaccines and high-profile anti-vaxxer accounts, including Alex Berenson.

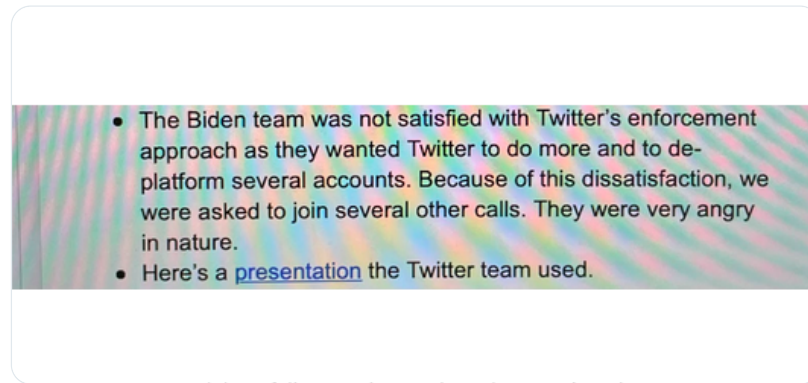
9. In the summer of 2021, president Biden said social media companies were “killing people” for allowing vaccine misinformation. Berenson was suspended hours after Biden's comments, and kicked off the platform the following month.

10. Berenson sued (and then settled with) Twitter. In the legal process Twitter was compelled to release certain internal communications, which showed direct White House pressure on the company to take action on Berenson.



11. A December 2022 summary of meetings with the White House by Lauren Culbertson, Twitter's Head of U.S. Public Policy, adds new evidence of the White House's pressure campaign, and cements that it repeatedly attempted to directly influence the platform.

12. Culbertson wrote that the Biden team was “very angry” that Twitter had not been more aggressive in deplatforming multiple accounts. They wanted Twitter to do more.



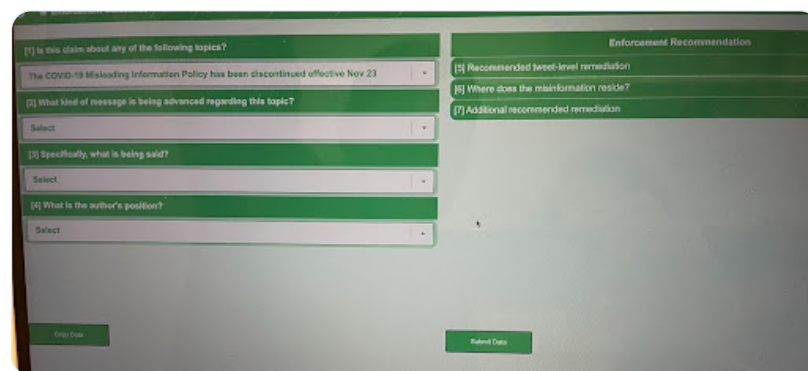
13. Twitter executives did not fully capitulate to the Biden team’s wishes. An extensive review of internal communications at the company revealed employees often debating moderation cases in great detail, and with more care than was shown by the government toward free speech.

14. But Twitter did suppress views—many from doctors and scientific experts—that conflicted with the official positions of the White House. As a result, legitimate findings and questions that would have expanded the public debate went missing.

15. There were three serious problems with Twitter’s process:

First, much of the content moderation was conducted by bots, trained on machine learning and AI – impressive in their engineering, yet still too crude for such nuanced work.

16. Second, contractors, in places like the Philippines, also moderated content. They were given decision trees to aid in the process, but tasking non experts to adjudicate tweets on complex topics like myocarditis and mask efficacy data was destined for a significant error rate

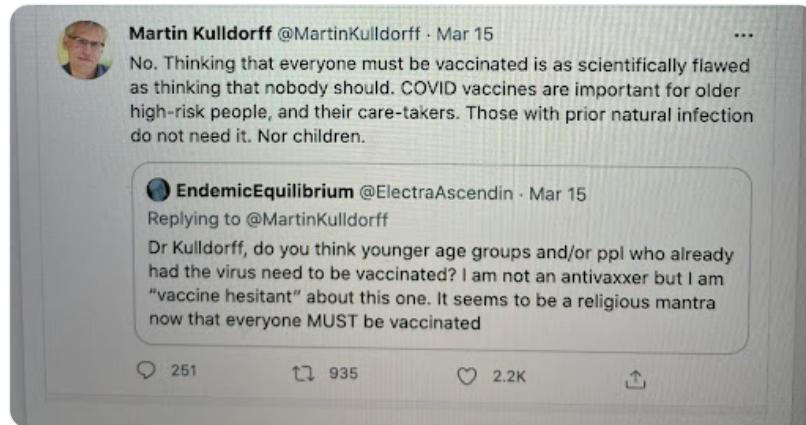


17 Third, most importantly, the buck stopped with higher level employees at Twitter who chose the inputs for the bots and decision trees, and subjectively decided escalated cases and suspensions. As it is with all people and institutions, there was individual and collective bias

18. With Covid, this bias bent heavily toward establishment dogmas.

19. Inevitably, dissident yet legitimate content was labeled as misinformation, and the accounts of doctors and others were suspended both for tweeting opinions and demonstrably true information.

20. Exhibit A: Dr. Martin Kulldorff, an epidemiologist at Harvard Medical School, tweeted views at odds with US public health authorities and the American left, the political affiliation of nearly the entire staff at Twitter.



21. Internal emails show an “intent to action” by a moderator, saying Kulldorff’s tweet violated the company’s Covid-19 misinformation policy and claimed he shared “false information.”




22. But Kulldorff's statement was an expert's opinion—one which also happened to be in line with vaccine policies in numerous other countries. Yet it was deemed “false information” by Twitter moderators merely because it differed from CDC guidelines.

23. After Twitter took action, Kulldorff's tweet was slapped with a “Misleading” label and all replies and likes were shut off, throttling the tweet's ability to be seen and shared by many people, the ostensible core function of the platform:



24. In my review of internal files, I 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.

25. A tweet by [@KelleyKga](#), a self-proclaimed public health fact checker, with 18K followers, was flagged as “Misleading,” and replies and likes disabled, even though it displayed the CDC’s *own data.*



Kelley K
 @KelleyKga

Replying to [@greg_travis](#) [@Mssarahmssarah](#) and 11 others

What an excellent example of cherry picking! If you narrow it down to only the specific months you specify, which include the largest Covid wave (seen across the world), AND you ignore all non-disease deaths, AND you ignore cancer, heart disease, AIDS, then Covid is "leading".

Single Year Ages: 18 categories extracted in this table from time period: 1/1/2018-12/31/2019 (preliminary) through 2020 (preliminary and partial)

ICD-10-CM Code	Deaths	Population	Crude Rate Per 100,000
W00-W99 (Falls)	5,585	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W10-W19 (Transport accidents)	3,219	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W20-W29 (Other transport accidents)	2,412	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W30-W39 (Fires, explosions, and other accidents)	2,343	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W40-W49 (Assaults)	1,071	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W50-W59 (Self-harm)	921	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W60-W69 (Other self-harm)	884	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W70-W79 (Other self-harm)	743	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W80-W89 (Other self-harm)	555	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
W90-W99 (Other self-harm)	462	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S00-S09 (Head injury)	388	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S10-S19 (Head injury)	282	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S20-S29 (Chest injury)	179	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S30-S39 (Abdominal injury)	243	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S40-S49 (Back injury)	195	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S50-S59 (Upper limb injury)	213	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S60-S69 (Lower limb injury)	291	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S70-S79 (Other limb injury)	289	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S80-S89 (Other limb injury)	281	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
S90-S99 (Other limb injury)	267	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T00-T09 (Poisoning)	157	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T10-T19 (Poisoning)	244	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T20-T29 (Poisoning)	117	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T30-T39 (Poisoning)	124	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T40-T49 (Poisoning)	184	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T50-T59 (Poisoning)	180	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T60-T69 (Poisoning)	151	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T70-T79 (Poisoning)	110	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
T80-T89 (Poisoning)	117	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Misleading

Learn why health officials consider COVID-19 vaccines safe for most people.

[Find out more](#)

This Tweet can't be replied to, shared or liked.

10:43 AM · Aug 11, 2022

[View Quote Tweets](#)

26. Internal records showed that a bot had flagged the tweet, and that it received many “tattles” (what the system amusingly called reports from users). That triggered a manual review by a human who— despite the tweet showing actual CDC data—nevertheless labeled it “Misleading”

Covid has never been the leading cause of death from disease in children. Yet that tweet remains on the platform, and without a “misleading” label.

10:43 AM · Aug 11, 2022

28. Whether by humans or algorithms, content that was contrarian but true was still subject to getting flagged or suppressed

This tweet was labeled “Misleading,” even though the owner of this account, [@_euzebiusz_](#), a physician, was referring to the results of a published study

Infectious Disease Ethics
@ID_ethics

Below, the first study I have seen showing that mRNA vaccines in young people (age 16-39) are associated with cardiac arrests (not just myocarditis)

First vaccine dose: ●
Second vaccine dose: ●
Cardiac arrests: ●
Covid cases: ●

[nature.com/articles/s4159...](https://www.nature.com/articles/s4159...)

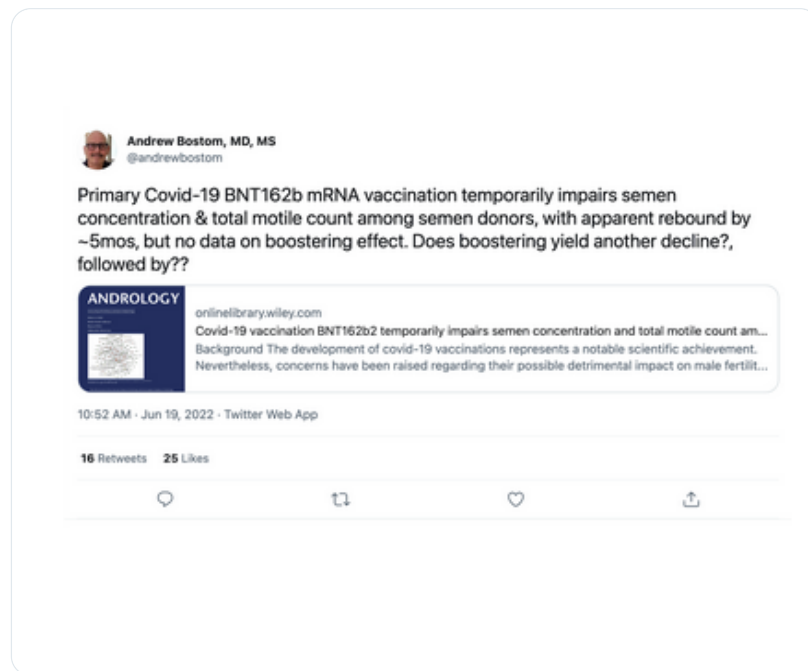
B Ages: 16-39

The graph displays four data series over time (Date: week's starting date) from 2020-10-16 to 2021-05-16. The left y-axis represents the 'Number of Cardiac arrest calls, (n)' ranging from 6 to 14. The right y-axis represents 'Vaccine doses (50,000 doses) and COVID-19 cases (10,000 cases)' ranging from 0 to 7. The series include: Cardiac arrest calls (red line), 1st vaccine doses (50,000 doses) (purple line), 2nd vaccine doses (50,000 doses) (blue line), and Suspected single vaccine doses for myocarditis (green line). A vertical dashed line marks the start of vaccine distribution. A legend also includes COVID-19 cases (grey line), 1st Public health advisory (12-24-2020 to 3-7-2021) (orange line), and Vaccinations first began (2020-12-19) (dashed line).

▲ Misleading
Learn why health officials consider COVID-19 vaccines safe for most people.
[Find out more](#)


This Tweet can't be replied to, shared or liked.

29. Andrew Bostom, a Rhode Island physician, was permanently suspended from Twitter after receiving multiple strikes for misinformation. One of his strikes was for a tweet referring to the results from a peer reviewed study on mRNA vaccines.



30. A review of Twitter log files revealed that an internal audit, conducted after Bostom's attorney contacted Twitter, found that only 1 of Bostom's 5 violations were valid.

We have re-reviewed each of the strikes and collaborated with Site Integrity to validate our findings. Of the 5 violations, 4 of them are not invalid and are not in violation, and only this tweet is in violation: 1519678640178577410 of misinformation. As a result, we have now unsuspended the user and responded to their appeal to let them know that we have rescinded their suspension. Also, we have left a pinned note on the account to ensure that before any enforcement action will be taken against the account, it will be subject for review by Site Integrity. We will also remove the annotations on the tweets we have marked as no vio.

 **Andrew Bostom, MD, MS**
@andrewbostom

Follow

U.S. & local Rhode Island data: Influenza is more lethal than covid-19 in children, while covid-19 vaccination causes >>> serious morbidity than influenza vaccination in children

portion of recent U.S. pediatric flu (seasonal) 1 yr. pandemic) and covid-19 deaths
by age group

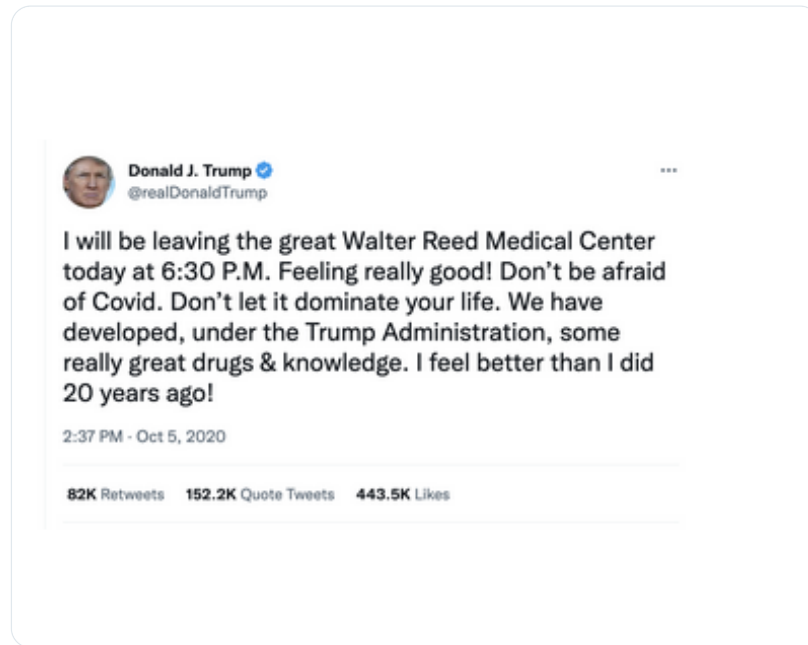
	Age range (years)	Deaths
US, 2019	<17	189
US, 2020	<17	192
US CDC Flu, 2009	<17	1229
US Flu, 2012	<17	1741
US Flu, 2013	<17	850
US Flu, 2014	<17	826
US Flu, 2015	<17	850
US Flu, 2016	<17	826
US Flu, 2017	<17	850
US Flu, 2018	<17	826
US Flu, 2019	<17	850
US Flu, 2020	<17	826
US Flu, 2021	<17	850
US Flu, 2022	<17	826
US Flu, 2023	<17	850
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US Flu, 2030	<17	826
US Flu, 2031	<17	850
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US Flu, 2089	<17	850
US Flu, 2090	<17	826
US Flu, 2091	<17	850
US Flu, 2092	<17	826
US Flu, 2093	<17	850
US Flu, 2094	<17	826
US Flu, 2095	<17	850
US Flu, 2096	<17	826
US Flu, 2097	<17	850
US Flu, 2098	<17	826
US Flu, 2099	<17	850
US Flu, 2100	<17	826

*CDC reported for CDC 90% over counting of covid-19 pandemic deaths by death certificate age

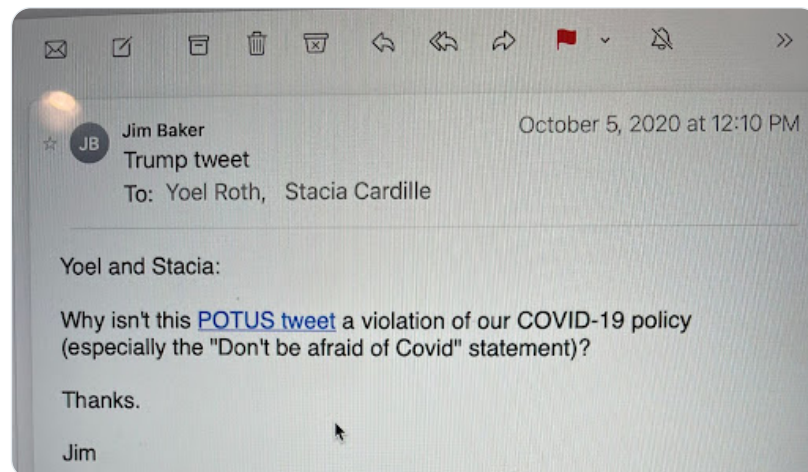
the cdc.gov/newsroom/releases/2021/s0415-covid-19-weekly-deaths.html
covid-19 deaths: https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0415-covid-19-weekly-deaths.html
by the Bureau of Census (Bureau of Economic Analysis) in the United States (April 2020-April 2021)
cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html?_ga=2.151111111.151111111.151111111

32. That this tweet was not only flagged by a bot, but its violation manually affirmed by a staff member is telling of both the algorithmic and human bias at play. Bostom's account was suspended for months and was finally restored on Christmas Day.

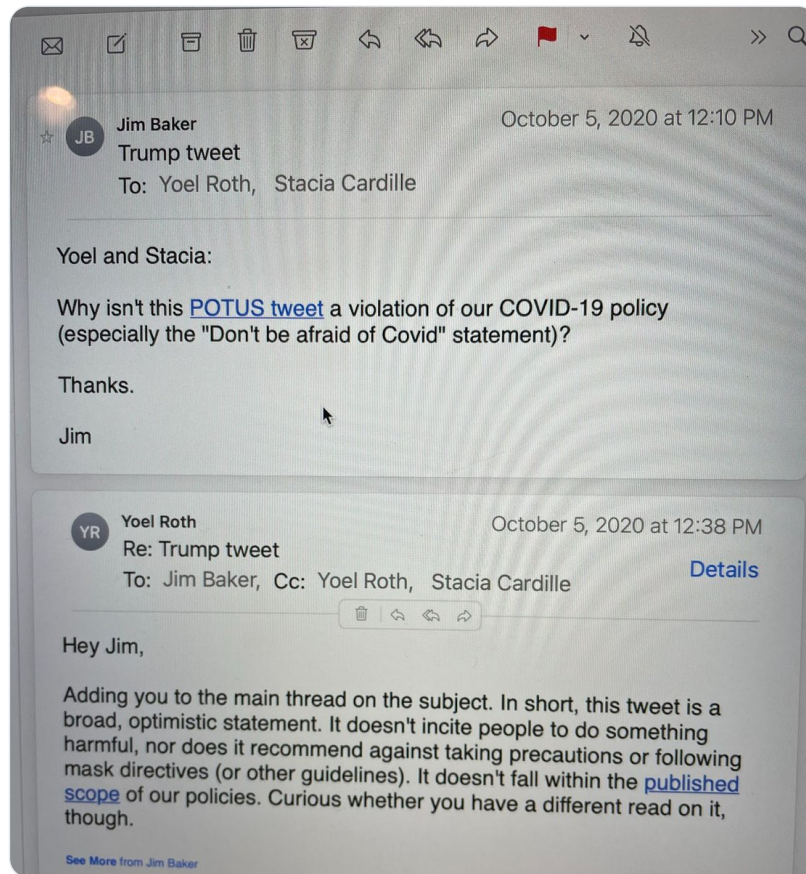
33. Another example of human bias run amok was the reaction to this tweet by Trump. Many Trump tweets led to extensive internal debates, and this one was no different.



34. 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.



35. Yoel Roth, Twitter's former head of Trust & Safety, had to explain that optimism wasn't misinformation.



36. Remember [@KelleyKga](#) with the CDC data tweet? Twitter's response to her is clarifying: "we will prioritize review and labeling of content that could lead to increased exposure or transmission."



37. Twitter made a decision, via the political leanings of senior staff, and govt pressure, that the public health authorities' approach to the pandemic – prioritizing mitigation over other concerns – was “The Science” . . .

38. Information that challenged that view, such as showing 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.

39. What might this pandemic and its aftermath have looked like if there had been a more open debate on Twitter and other social media platforms—not to mention the mainstream press—about the origins of Covid, about lockdowns, about the true risks of Covid in kids, and much more?

40. Thanks to [@ShellenbergerMD](#), [@lwoodhouse](#), [@lhfang](#) and the team [@TheFP](#) for their help reporting this story.

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