

Bias at Facebook? Audit lists conservatives' complaints

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Promising to be more transparent about how it makes content decisions, Facebook on Tuesday released the first results of an audit addressing

conservatives' accusations that it is biased against them.

The social networking giant agreed to the audit last year after complaints of [bias](#) from lawmakers and others. At the same time, the Menlo Park company agreed to a separate civil rights audit, results of which were released in June.

The [conservative](#)-bias audit, which was conducted by former Arizona Republican Sen. Jon Kyl and his team at the law firm Covington and Burling, included interviews with more than 130 conservative lawmakers and groups. The findings included no specific data but listed the conservatives' concerns, which include the reach of content on Facebook, whether hate-speech designations are suppressing content, ad policies and enforcement, and the political leanings of Facebook's employees.

"Facebook's policies and their application have the potential to restrict free expression," said the report, which was written by Kyl. "Given the platform's popularity and ubiquity, this is a danger that must be taken very seriously."

The report mentioned some of the steps Facebook has taken so far, which includes explaining to users why they're seeing certain content or why the company has taken down other content, creating a content-oversight board that includes conservatives and establishing an appeals process for content removal.

In addition, Facebook now will allow ads that show medical tubes connected to a human body, which the company had previously prohibited.

"This policy resulted in the rejection of pro-life ads focused on survival stories of infants born before full-term," the report said. Facebook will

prohibit ads "only when the ad shows someone in visible pain or distress or where blood and bruising is visible," according to the report.

In announcing that the audit will continue and that Kyl and his team will release another report in the coming months, Facebook Vice President of Global Affairs and Communications Nick Clegg—the former U.K. deputy prime minister—said in a blog post Tuesday: "We will inevitably make some bad calls, some of which may appear to strike harder at conservatives. That's why it is so important that we work to make sure this process is free of bias, intended or not."

Civil rights groups slammed Facebook's conservative-bias [audit](#) and the man who led it, accusing the company of "undermining" its own efforts to protect civil rights.

"Facebook's anti-conservative bias report is a smokescreen masking the reality that the company continues to allow violent, white nationalist content to thrive on its platforms," said Madihha Ahussain, special counsel for Muslim Advocates, in a statement Tuesday. (Facebook has officially banned white nationalist and supremacist content.) The group and others also repeated their accusations that Kyl is anti-Muslim, pointing out his ties to the Center for Security Policy, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled a hate group.

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