

Chauvin guilty verdict: 'If Facebook can be safer for Black people, why isn't that the default setting?'

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Facebook said it would take emergency steps to limit hate speech and calls for violence that "could lead to civil unrest or violence" when the verdict came down in the murder trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin.

The [social media](#) giant has used these powerful moderation tools before. And that has Facebook critics asking: Why don't they deploy them all the time?

"If Facebook can be safer for Black people, why isn't that the default setting?" said Rashad Robinson, president of Color Of Change.

Facebook declined to say why it has not made the measures permanent or if plans to.

On Tuesday, a Minneapolis jury found Chauvin guilty of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for the killing of George Floyd. Cellphone video of Floyd's

death last May under Chauvin's knee went viral and set off months of protests in the U.S. and abroad condemning police brutality and calling for racial justice.

In anticipation of a verdict in the trial, Facebook pledged to remove posts from Facebook and Instagram that urged people to take up arms and any content that praised, celebrated or mocked George Floyd's death. It also designated Minneapolis as a "high risk location."

"As we have done in emergency situations in the past, we may also limit the spread of content that our systems predict is likely to violate our Community Standards in the areas of [hate speech](#), graphic [violence](#), and violence and incitement," Monika Bickert, vice president of content policy, said in a blog post.

Facebook took similar steps to curb flow of misinformation and calls to violence in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election.

Emerson Brooking, resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, says Facebook's handling of the Chauvin verdict is a case study "in just how far we've come in the past year."

"In 2020, the [social media platforms](#) struggled and often failed to contain violent rhetoric, especially (former) President (Donald) Trump's dehumanizing language targeting the George Floyd protesters," said Emerson Brooking, resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab.

Now, the platforms better understand that "the cycles of violent rhetoric on social media can sometimes mean the difference between life and death," said Brooking, co-author of "LikeWar: The

Weaponization of Social Media."

But Robinson and other activists say Facebook has not done enough to protect Black users from hate and abuse.

"Color Of Change and our allies have been calling on Facebook to enforce its content moderation policies and limit posts that incite hate and violence for years. And yet it was not until today, in anticipation of the Derek Chauvin verdict, that Facebook decided it was in their corporate interest to not be responsible for more violence, or even death, incited on its platform," he said in a statement.

"When former President Donald Trump posted 'when the looting starts, the shooting starts' in response to protests following George Floyd's murder, Facebook leadership refused to take down the post and insisted there was nothing they could do," Robinson's statement continued. "When two innocent protesters were murdered in Kenosha, Wisconsin, following the police shooting of Jacob Blake, again we were told there was nothing they could do—even as it was uncovered that users flagged posts inciting violence hundreds of times prior to the shootings."

Robinson called for "a permanent extension of this content moderation commitment" or for Congress to intervene.

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