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The Women's Disinformation Defense Project

Memorandum on the Supreme Court Nomination Process and Platform Accountability
To: Meta, Alphabet, Twitter, TikTok, and Reddit
From: The Women's Disinformation Defense Project (A/b Partners, EMILY's List Action, Higher Heights, Kairos, The League, Media Matter for America, NARAL, Planned Parenthood Action Fund, UltraViolet, Women's March)
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In the age of social media, major platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Meta), YouTube (Google/Alphabet), Twitter, TikTok, and Reddit each play a critical role in defining how women candidates and elected leaders are perceived by voters and the public. Amplification of headlines, photos, social media previews, and article content through algorithms can spread racist and sexist ideas and encourage or legitimize disinformation. Without policies and enforcements in place, sexist, racist, and misogynistic content online perpetuates hate and deepens belief in harmful stereotypes.

The Women's Disinformation Defense Project, a coalition of gender and racial justice organizations, launched in 2020 with the goal of holding media and platforms accountable, as the U.S. elected the most diverse Congress in our nation's history and the first Black and Indian American woman became vice president. The WDDP has mobilized now, at this critical time, to ensure the U.S. Supreme Court nominee is able to get through the nomination process without enduring racist and sexist attacks.

In order to prevent the further spread of disinformation, hate, white supremacy, and misogyny (particularly misogynoir) online, we are calling on major social media platforms to commit to the following three issue areas in the lead-up to the SCOTUS nomination and the 2022 midterm elections: eliminate disinformation, depolarize the algorithm and moderation practices, and enforce and deplatform hate and violence. These demands are built off of UltraViolet's policy demands, issued to you in November 2021.

Eliminate disinformation:
- Rigorously monitor all content and not provide leeway for superusers;
- **Treat gendered, racialized, and religiously bigoted disinformation as hate speech and remove it**;
- **Measure and report on the amount and reach of content with disinformation and include it in transparency reports;**
- **Establish a clear and enforceable process for removing content, user reporting, deplatforming, and closing loopholes** for disinformation and promotion of extremism **across languages, not just in English**;
- **Include election, voting, and candidate disinformation in disinformation bans.**
  - Examples: Anything related to violence, guns, militias, or harassment at voting centers, ballot drop-off, vote counting locations, or threats against election workers, staff, candidates, and family members of candidates. Misinformation about closed polls or disinformation about voter ID requirements, proof of citizenship requests at poll booths, or literacy tests;
- Platforms must take **corrective action by directing those who have been exposed to extremist groups and hate content to resources for countering extremism.**

Depolarizing the algorithm and moderation:
- **Algorithms should not base moderation or promotion on the political alignment of the content or the user who posted;**
- **Ensure algorithms are as free of bias as possible and use human moderators to ensure enforcement and compliance**;
- **Remove moderation loopholes for public figures and hold public figures who are repeat offenders to the same standard as everyday users;**
- **Individuals or accounts that spread hate speech, disinformation, harassment, and violence online must be held accountable, as these behaviors conflict with policies, regardless of who is engaging in them;**
- **Monitor public messages and leverage them to quickly improve AI, identify trends in hate and disinformation, and train both algorithmic and human moderators on what to look for.**
  - This tactic must be implemented based on the knowledge that high-profile women leaders, especially BIPOC women leaders, face disproportionate levels of harassment and hate;
- **Encourage users to engage more frequently with legitimate, well-researched news and peer-reviewed articles**—not disinformation, conspiracies, opinion posts, or claims that are not backed up by science—that offer opposing viewpoints to reduce the effects of confirmation bias.
  - This effort should be measured and reported on, with a goal of decreasing polarization and extremism.

Enforce policies and deplatform hate and violence:
- **Create a clear and enforceable process**—such as a weighted system of escalating warnings and strikes based on the level of offense—**that leads to deplatforming in the event of frequent or severely abusive misogyny policy violations.**
  - For example, those who issued threats of violence against a person or group of people must immediately be deplatformed;
- **All policies around protecting and deplatforming must apply to public figures as well.**

We are calling on you to step up and update your policies and enforcement structures with attention to the impact that your platform's biases have on shaping the public's perception of the nominee. It's time that social media platforms do better in moderating content about women and people of color, specifically Black women and women of color. The country, and women, are watching. Our democracy depends on it.

Background Information:
Social media platforms should not serve as a petri dish for extremist ideologies and hate speech. Rather, platforms must operate as spaces where the sharing of ideas increases access to factual information, encourages empathy and inclusion, and advances democracy. Now, on the eve of what is expected to be the historic nomination of the first Black woman to the Supreme Court, it is critical that platforms take steps to reduce and quickly remove hate, disinformation, and threats related to the nominee and the confirmation process.

Despite a recent increase in the number of political leaders who are women and/or people of color, there's still a long way to go until our nation's officials truly represent our population. Black women represent 12.9% of the total women in the U.S. population, yet in the more than 200 years of the Supreme Court's existence, there has not been a single Black woman nominated to the nation's highest judicial bench (Source: Catalyst, 2019).

Just as it is the responsibility of newsrooms, headline writers, journalists, and editors to get this right in the media, it is the role of social media platforms to avoid promoting and spreading hate, disinformation, white supremacy, and misogyny—particularly at this pivotal time in U.S. history.

The lack of accountability and enforcement of hate and disinformation policies online decreases public confidence in diverse candidates and discourages women from entering politics or seeking positions of leadership and power. Social media must do more to ensure content that spreads mistrust through disinformation tactics, including the promotion of racist, sexist, misogynistic ideologies, is removed— and that counter-extremist measures are provided to users who viewed such content.