

Statement of
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for THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

Concerning
**“Censorship-Industrial Complex:
The Need for First Amendment Safeguards at the State Department”**

April 1, 2025

Chairman Huizenga and Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, I appreciate the invitation to share my expertise and personal experience with you today. I believe it is my patriotic duty as an American to do so, because the premise of this hearing—the so-called “Censorship Industrial Complex”—is a fiction that has not only had profound impacts on my life, but on our national security. More alarmingly, this fiction is itself deliberately engineered to suppress speech and stymie critical research that protects American security and our democratic processes.

I have studied and worked on the topic of disinformation over a decade, first as a Program Officer at the National Democratic Institute, where I managed democracy support grants, including from the State Department. I was a 2016-2017 Fulbright Public Policy Fellow in Ukraine, and then spent four years at the Wilson Center. Since 2018, I have been honored to publicly testify before Congress four times, at the invitation of both Democrats and Republicans such as Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley. I spent a short time in the Biden Administration, discussed below. I now lead a non-profit, The American Sunlight Project, which is dedicated to increasing the cost of lies that undermine democracy through research and advocacy. I am the author of two books, including *How to Lose the Information War*, which examines European responses to disinformation. I teach a graduate-level course on the topic at Syracuse University and have advised allied governments on their responses to foreign information operations. I am one of TIME Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in AI, and was recognized for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Media Psychology and Technology in 2024 by Division 46 of the American Psychological Association. My work is not motivated by any political ideology, but rather a desire to preserve democracy and free expression around the world.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the irony that we are having this discussion as we witness an assault on the First Amendment we have not seen in decades. Since January 20, the Trump administration has directed far more egregious violations of the First Amendment than the imagined actions of the Biden administration on which this hearing is premised.¹ They are chilling in their own right. But the recent arrest of Rumesya Ozturk, a Fulbright PhD student at Tufts University, especially disturbed me.

The Fulbright program—an exchange that has, since its inception, enjoyed broad bipartisan support—was created to promote “mutual understanding.” When I was a Fulbright Public Policy Fellow in Ukraine, I enjoyed nothing but the warmest welcomes everywhere I went. I used my rights to free speech there as I did at home: I spoke up about political developments not only in my own country, but in Ukraine. I wrote op-eds and articles. Those early writings were the seeds of my first book.

The topic of this hearing is “the need for First Amendment safeguards at the State Department.” The Secretary of State seemingly revoked Ms. Ozturk’s visa for publishing an op-ed in Tufts’ campus newspaper. No credible reporting has identified any evidence she was instrumental in organizing protests, and even if she were, that activity is also protected by the First Amendment. For using her constitutionally-protected right to free speech, she was spirited away by plainclothes ICE officers in broad daylight. The “mutual understanding” we have promoted through this gross violation of Ms. Ozturk’s rights is that the United States is no longer a place where speech and dissent are safe. Her detention is the sort of event I am used to observing in the authoritarian countries I study. If the same scene had happened

¹ The American Sunlight Project, “Trump claims he’s a champion of free speech. He’s actually attacking it.” March 24, 2025.
<https://americansunlight.substack.com/p/trump-attacks-free-speech>

in a country in this Subcommittee's portfolio, you would issue a statement of concern. But it happened here, in the United States of America. So yes, we need some First Amendment protections at the State Department—but not related to any imagined transgressions of previous administrations or their grantees. We need protections from this administration, today. What will this committee do about it?

The So-Called “Censorship Industrial Complex” Does Not Exist

Instead of talking about the real threats to the First Amendment occurring as we sit here, this Subcommittee has chosen to devote its first hearing of the new Congress to a fiction that has caused grave threats to me and my family's personal safety, as well as our national security.

In 2022, I was appointed to lead the Disinformation Governance Board, an admittedly poorly-named but anodyne coordination body tasked with shepherding counter-disinformation policy within the Department of Homeland Security. This body was created to “develop and support the implementation of governance policies and protocols that, among other issues, protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties,” coordinate DHS's work on disinformation that affected the homeland—work that started under the first Trump administration—and set standards for the Department's interactions with the “private, non-profit, and academic sectors.”²

Within hours of the Board's public launch, partisan media, influencers, and Members of Congress were calling it a “Ministry of Truth” and claiming that I would be censoring Americans' speech. They did this entirely without evidence; even when DHS and the White House corrected the record, politicians, pundits, major media organizations, and influencers continue to repeat this lie, nearly three years after it was debunked by primary source documents, because it is politically useful to them. The Board had no operational authority, no budget, and no full-time staff other than myself. As I told the House Judiciary's Weaponization Subcommittee several times throughout my deposition³ about the Board's activities in 2023: as the granddaughter of a former Soviet political prisoner, if censorship were part of my mandate, not only would I not have taken the job, I would have loudly condemned such activities. I agree that freedom of speech is sacrosanct.

The allegation that the Board was a censorship body and that I was chief censor were the first chapter in many of the tall tales about the so-called “censorship industrial complex” that have since emerged. These tales have been primarily buoyed by the “Twitter Files,” a coordinated smear campaign that cherry picked data points to create a false narrative under the guise of a journalistic effort. One of the witnesses at today's hearing, blogger Matt Taibbi, was among those who published the first installment of the Twitter Files, falsely alleging that Twitter executives were colluding with government to censor disfavored content.⁴ Mr. Taibbi and his colleagues alleged that the content in question was funneled to federal agencies by private-citizen researchers, specifically via the Election Integrity Project (EIP) and Virality Project, and that these agencies in turn coerced Twitter into removing the content. Yet these allegations against Twitter and other social media platforms were not true. Numerous studies, conducted by

² DHS Disinformation Governance Board Charter, as provided to Senators Hawley and Grassley by DHS Whistleblower, February 28, 2022. [https://www.hawley.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/files/2022-06/2022-06-07%20DOCS%20ONLY%20CEG%20JH%20to%20DHS%20\(Disinformation%20Governance%20Board\)\[1\].pdf#page=9](https://www.hawley.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/files/2022-06/2022-06-07%20DOCS%20ONLY%20CEG%20JH%20to%20DHS%20(Disinformation%20Governance%20Board)[1].pdf#page=9)

³ Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, *Deposition of Nina Jankowicz*, April 10, 2023, https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/Jankowicz%20Transcript_Redacted.pdf

⁴ Matt Taibbi, “Capsule Summaries of all Twitter Files Threads to Date, With Links and a Glossary.” *Racket News*, January 4, 2023. <https://archive.is/2EuJe>

institutions including New York University and Indiana University, empirically disprove this notion of political bias by social media platforms in their content moderation decisions.^{5,6,7} Following the first release of the Twitter Files, the Republican majority began organizing hearings around these false narratives and sending letters and document requests to Twitter in regards to censorship activities.^{8,9}

The Twitter Files crafted almost endless fiction based on selectively edited email and text excerpts between the researchers, their projects, platforms, and federal agencies. The blogs are riddled with errors and outright falsehoods, including the notion that the EIP “censored” 22 million tweets about the 2020 election.¹⁰ In actuality, the EIP *tracked* 22 million social media tweets, and only identified 2,890 (approximately 0.013% of the total tweets examined) which the EIP’s researchers believed materially violated Twitter’s terms of use. Even fewer of these posts were *actually* removed. Twitter took *no action* on nearly two-thirds of those 2,890 tweets.¹¹

Additionally, alongside the Twitter Files’ bloggers relentless promotion of the baseless, debunked conspiracy theory that the Disinformation Governance Board was part of a “Censorship Industrial Complex” and “guilty of violating the First Amendment,”¹² Mr. Taibbi has claimed that the EIP was created in 2020 to “fill the gaps” left by the shutdown of the Disinformation Governance Board; however, the Board was created in 2022.¹³ Over the three years since my short tenure in government, Mr. Taibbi and his colleagues have also aggressively targeted me in my personal capacity with incendiary lies.

These falsehoods are just a few of many in the Twitter Files. Even beyond these inaccuracies, the allegation that the Twitter Files make—that by conducting independent research and sharing it, researchers are somehow committing acts of censorship—is outlandish and harmful. Researchers have a First Amendment right to analyze the public information environment and speak about it to the public, including to social media platforms and government. Social media platforms, as private businesses, have terms of service that they can implement how they choose. The government, for decades, has benefitted from an exchange of information between itself, academia, civil society, and the private sector. We know the Trump Administration also benefitted from such relationships and exchanges.¹⁴ The only reason the fictional narrative of the “censorship industrial complex” has been selectively applied to some advocacy groups, researchers, and government agencies is because it is politically and financially beneficial to those

⁵ Paul Barrett & J. Grant Sims, “False Accusation: The Unfounded Claim that Social Media Companies Censor Conservatives,” *New York University*, February 10, 2021.

[stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/faculty-research/false-accusation-unfounded-claim-social-media-companies-censor-conservatives](https://www.stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/faculty-research/false-accusation-unfounded-claim-social-media-companies-censor-conservatives)

⁶ Filippo Menczer, et al., “Neutral bots probe political bias on social media,” *Nature Communications* 12, no. 5580 (September 2021)1.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-25738-6>

⁷ Mohsen Mosleh, et al., “Differences in misinformation sharing can lead to politically asymmetric sanctions” *Nature* 634, 609–616 (October 2024). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-07942-8>

⁸ House Judiciary Committee Letter to Yoel Roth, December 6, 2022.

<https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-12-6-Letter-to-Roth-Twitter.pdf>

⁹ House Judiciary Committee News Feature, December 23, 2022.

<https://judiciary.house.gov/media/in-the-news/house-gop-wants-fbis-twitter-censorship-reimbursement-records>

¹⁰ Mike Masnick, “Mehdi Hasan Dismantles The Entire Foundation Of The Twitter Files As Matt Taibbi Stumbles To Defend It,” *TechDirt*, April 7, 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/2p5ppt38>

¹¹ Stanford Internet Observatory, “Background on the SIO’s Projects on Social Media,” March 17, 2023,

<https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/background-sios-projects-social-media>

¹² <https://x.com/shellenberger/status/1639355989836308481>

¹³ Mike Masnick, “Mehdi Hasan Dismantles The Entire Foundation Of The Twitter Files As Matt Taibbi Stumbles To Defend It,” *TechDirt*, April 7, 2023.

<https://www.techdirt.com/2023/04/07/mehdi-hasan-dismantles-the-entire-foundation-of-the-twitter-files-as-matt-taibbi-stumbles-to-defend-it/>

¹⁴ Adam Rawnsley and Asawin Suebsaeng, “Twitter Kept Entire ‘Database’ of Republican Requests to Censor Posts,” *Rolling Stone*, February 8, 2023. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/elon-trump-twitter-files-collusion-biden-censorship-1234675969/>

who peddle it.

The “Censorship” Lie Is Itself Suppressing Speech

Academic freedom and scholarly discourse are a vital part of the marketplace of ideas. However, the academic research community has been significantly impacted by allegations they are part of the so-called “censorship industrial complex.” Some preeminent research institutions have shut down;¹⁵ other researchers are weighing whether their continued work in this sphere is worth the risk to their families and livelihoods, especially given the Day One Executive Order the President signed targeting alleged “censors” for investigation. Given that the U.S. government has successfully bullied tech platforms into rolling back already paltry protections against online harms, and Congress has yet to pass critical oversight and transparency regulations, such academic research is more critical than ever to inform the public and hold these multi-billion dollar corporations to account.

Instead of ensuring access to data that would facilitate research or improve public understanding of technology’s influence on our First Amendment-protected discourse, Members of Congress have used government resources to attack disinformation researchers, deliberately misconstruing their work, burying them under requests for documents and interviews, and stoking the fires of public rage against them. These tactics echo the dark days of McCarthyism, but with a chilling 21st century twist: even as America faces unprecedented threats in the information space, both from our adversaries’ increasing capabilities and from the exponential growth of emerging technologies, committees including this one waste valuable time and taxpayer dollars targeting American citizens who are trying to do work in the public interest. These actions are a dangerous distraction from the real threats we are facing.

The Threat of Foreign Disinformation Persists

Despite increased awareness of foreign-backed online influence campaigns, the United States is more vulnerable to them today than it was a decade ago.¹⁶ Our strategic adversaries continue to actively exploit deepening fissures in our society in order to amplify discord and polarization. Social media companies have rolled back their efforts to address disinformation on their platforms and restricted access to their data, making it difficult to hold them to account.¹⁷ Government and public sector responses to foreign disinformation have been derided and dismantled. Our adversaries have taken note.

Russia: The Kremlin continues to weaponize homegrown discontent in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and weaken American national security. My own organization has identified recent evidence of this:

- In what we call the “Sleeper Agent” network on X, over 1100 likely-automated accounts post hundreds of times per day and repeatedly retweet overt Russian propaganda within 60 seconds of it being posted, giving the guise of grassroots support for Kremlin messaging.¹⁸ Despite Elon Musk’s promise to rid his platform of bots, some accounts in this network have existed for over a

¹⁵ Casey Newton and Zoe Schiffer, “The Stanford Internet Observatory is being dismantled,” *Platformer*, June 13, 2024.

<https://www.platformer.news/stanford-internet-observatory-shutdown-stamos-diresta-sio/>

¹⁶ Nina Jankowicz, “The Coming Flood of Disinformation,” *Foreign Affairs*, 7 February 2024.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/coming-flood-disinformation>

¹⁷ Nora Benavidez, “Big Tech Backslide: How Social-Media Rollbacks Endanger Democracy Ahead of the 2024 Elections,” *Free Press*, December 2023. https://www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2023-12/free_press_report_big_tech_backslide.pdf

¹⁸ The American Sunlight Project, “Sleeper Agents: Uncovering a decade-old, global network of suspicious adversarial accounts spreading Russian propaganda and other divisive content,” October 9, 2024. <https://www.americansunlight.org/sleeper-agents-asp-report>

decade, springing into action at key political moments. In that time, they have generated over 100 million posts on divisive issues, from Russia's war in Ukraine to last year's devastating hurricanes.

- The EcoBoost network spams environmental and tech conversations on X at a mass scale.¹⁹ These accounts pose as environmentalists and post provocative content designed to inflame tensions across the political spectrum. We identified this network because it posted code snippets, incorrectly-translated Russian characters and words, and used hundreds of photorealistic AI-generated images to dupe users into thinking the accounts were manned by humans.
- ASP researchers also recently discovered that a collection of several hundred pro-Russia content aggregation sites, known as the "Pravda" network, is pumping out at least 3.6 million articles per year in order to "groom" large language models into regurgitating Russian propaganda.²⁰ Two other independent research organizations have confirmed that Pravda network content was being cited by some major AI chatbots in support of pro-Russia narratives that are provably false²¹; it has even made its way into Wikipedia citations.²²

More evidence of Russia's continued online influence campaigns includes last fall's indictment from the U.S. Department of Justice. DOJ identified a scheme in which two Canadian nationals allegedly set up a shell company, Tenet Media, that ferried ten million U.S. dollars from Russian propaganda network RT to conservative YouTube influencers with millions of collective subscribers.²³ (One of those YouTubers has now been admitted to the White House press pool.²⁴) The influencers posted about divisive issues, from alleged racism against white people, to censorship, to trans rights. The genius of this scheme is that RT was paying influencers to create the divisive content they were already creating for a built-in audience; Russia was simply adding fuel to the fire.

These case studies show that Russia is still active in undermining social cohesion and truth in the United States, and taking advantage of the lack of political will at platforms to address disinformation and a US political environment that is favorable to it.

China: However, Russia is far from the only adversary aiming to undermine our democracy. China has also intensified its information operations dramatically in the last six months; at least three major Communist Party-led campaigns have been exposed by cybersecurity firms and platforms. In September, the long-running "Spamouflage" campaign deployed fake social media profiles posing as American

¹⁹ The American Sunlight Project, "EcoBoost: A malign influence network targeting the environmental and tech sectors in Western democracies," March 4, 2025.

<https://www.americansunlight.org/updates/american-sunlight-project-exposes-ai-driven-disinformation-network-manipulating-environmental-and-tech-debates>

²⁰ The American Sunlight Project, "A Pro-Russia Content Network Foreshadows the Automated Future of Info Ops," February 26, 2025.

<https://www.americansunlight.org/updates/new-report-russian-propaganda-may-be-flooding-ai-models>

²¹ Annie Newport & Nina Jankowicz, "Russian networks flood the Internet with propaganda, aiming to corrupt AI chatbots," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, March 26, 2025.

<https://thebulletin.org/2025/03/russian-networks-flood-the-internet-with-propaganda-aiming-to-corrupt-ai-chatbots/>

²² Amaury Lespligart and Valentin Chatelet, "Russia-linked Pravda network cited on Wikipedia, LLMs, and X," DFRLab, March 12, 2025.

<https://dfirlab.org/2025/03/12/pravda-network-wikipedia-llm-x/>

²³ Will Sommer, "Inside Tenet Media, the pro-Trump 'supergroup' allegedly funded by Russia," September 5, 2024, *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/media/2024/09/05/tenet-media-russia-rt-tim-pool/>

²⁴ Janna Brancolini, "Influencer Paid by Russia Added to White House Press Pool," March 28, 2025, *The Daily Beast*.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/tim-pool-was-paid-by-russia-but-will-joins-white-house-press-pool/>

voters to spread anti-US messaging and exacerbate domestic political divisions.²⁵ These fake profiles were uncovered across multiple social media platforms and amplified divisive content about American politics and foreign policy. In November, Mandiant dismantled “Operation Glassbridge,” a sophisticated network of websites globally disseminating pro-CCP propaganda. It specifically targeted international audiences—including Americans—by masquerading as legitimate news outlets while promoting Beijing's strategic narratives.²⁶ Adding to these conventional disinformation tactics, China has begun leveraging generative AI technologies to achieve its influence goals, evidenced by OpenAI's discovery and disruption of an operation using ChatGPT to efficiently translate Chinese propaganda into Spanish for Latin American audiences.²⁷ These coordinated efforts reveal China's evolving strategy to shape global narratives through both traditional and emerging technological channels.

Iran: Furthermore, Iran dramatically expanded its disinformation capabilities in 2024. The regime executed a sophisticated hack-and-leak operation targeting President Trump's campaign, compromising sensitive data and strategically releasing materials, attempting to influence public opinion.²⁸ Microsoft uncovered multiple Iranian-operated propaganda websites specifically designed to sway American voters before the November election, disguising state-backed narratives as independent news and commentary.²⁹ Further demonstrating Iran's adoption of advanced technologies for information operations—like China—OpenAI reported dismantling numerous Iranian-controlled accounts that were systematically using ChatGPT to generate and disseminate anti-Trump and anti-Israel content across various social media platforms.³⁰ These coordinated activities signal Iran's growing investment in and reliance on information warfare as a core component of its strategy to undermine American democracy.

Other hybrid regimes have also attempted to influence democratic societies beyond their borders in recent weeks. In November, Azerbaijan deployed sophisticated bot networks to manipulate global perceptions, including American public opinion, of its government's legitimacy and environmental policies surrounding the COP29 climate summit hosted in Baku.³¹ These automated campaigns worked to present a positive image of Azerbaijan's regime while downplaying human rights concerns and environmental criticisms ahead of this significant international event. Meanwhile, pro-Kremlin actors, some with direct connections to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic's government, have launched coordinated disinformation campaigns targeting student protests in Serbia. These operations spread false narratives portraying student demonstrations as Western-orchestrated destabilization attempts, pushing anti-American and anti-Western conspiracy theories to undermine these democratic movements.³² The campaigns typically frame protesters as foreign agents rather than citizens with legitimate grievances,

²⁵ Shannon Bond, “China is pushing divisive political messages online using fake U.S. voters,” *NPR*, September 3, 2024.

<https://www.npr.org/2024/09/03/nx-s1-5096151/china-tiktok-x-fake-voters-influence-campaign>

²⁶ Jonathan Grieg, “Google takes down fake news sites, wire services run by Chinese influence operation,” *The Record*, November 22, 2024.

<https://therecord.media/google-fake-news-china-outlets>

²⁷ Ina Fried, “OpenAI finds new Chinese influence campaigns using its tools,” *Axios*, February 21, 2025.

<https://www.axios.com/2025/02/21/openai-chinese-influence-campaigns>

²⁸ Eric Tucker, “Iranian operatives charged in the US with hacking Donald Trump's presidential campaign,” *The Associated Press*, September 27, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/trump-hacking-iran-justice-department-1d7d83ccdc6c879be2802142f1c47191>

²⁹ Juliana Kim, “Microsoft detects fake news sites linked to Iran aimed at meddling in U.S. election,” *NPR*, August 9, 2024.

<https://www.npr.org/2024/08/09/nx-s1-5069317/iran-interfere-presidential-election-microsoft-report>

³⁰ Sam Sabin, “OpenAI deactivates ChatGPT accounts linked to Iranian disinformation operation,” *Axios*, August 16, 2024.

<https://www.axios.com/2024/08/16/openai-iran-disinformation-chatgpt>

³¹ Maxine Joselow, “Army of bots promotes petrostate hosting global climate talks,” *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2024.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2024/10/29/cop29-bots-fake-accounts-azerbaijan/>

³² EUvsDisinfo, “Events in Serbia are a Western attempt at a colour revolution,” March 23, 2025.

<https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/events-in-serbia-are-a-western-attempt-at-a-colour-revolution/>

reflecting Russia's broader strategy of discrediting democratic activism in regions where it seeks to maintain influence.

The “Censorship” Lie is Making America Less Safe

Despite the continued threat of foreign disinformation, most of the U.S. capacity to respond to it has been eviscerated in response to the censorship lie.³³ This includes the Global Engagement Center (GEC), a State Department office created through a bipartisan Congressional directive. The GEC's sole mission was to “recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts.”³⁴ In recent years, in particular since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the GEC has provided important information to the public on the narratives, tools, tactics, and procedures utilized in Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and other foreign malign influence operations. The GEC's work was a strong indication to our adversaries that their actions did not go unnoticed. Today, however, the GEC and other similar government bodies have been gutted due to conspiracy theories. The signal to our adversaries is that America is divided and weak. Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran interpret partisan attacks on counter-disinformation work as a sign that their interference is likely to succeed.

The Courts Have Rejected the “Censorship” Lie

In pursuing investigations and hearings on the censorship lie, Congress has punted its responsibility to safeguard our national security; it has opted instead for political theatrics that are high on fantasy and low on facts. Conversely, when given the chance to examine the record, the Supreme Court and others found no substance behind these breathless claims of censorship.

In June 2024, the Supreme Court threw out *Murthy v. Missouri*, a case that alleged the Biden Administration had worked with researchers to censor conservative viewpoints, for lack of standing. During oral arguments in the case, the plaintiffs could not trace a single piece of removed social media content to pressure from government officials. As Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote: “The plaintiff cannot rest on ‘mere allegations,’ but must instead point to factual evidence.”³⁵ The idea that plaintiffs would be harmed by the administration's alleged “censorship,” the Court maintained, was “no more than conjecture.”

Just last week, in a legal rebuke that thoroughly undermines the censorship lie, a New York Federal judge “dismissed a left-leaning news site's lawsuit alleging that it was [...] illegally censored by NewsGuard in conjunction with the U.S. government.”³⁶ The Court found that, despite NewsGuard having a government contract and a shared “mutual objective of identifying foreign propaganda”, NewsGuard would only be a state actor capable of censorship if the “Government controlled NewsGuard's decision-making process and internal operations,”³⁷ which it did not. Furthermore, the Court found that “even if NewsGuard were a state actor [...] the] Plaintiff ha[d] not sufficiently alleged a First Amendment violation” because NewsGuard's mere labeling of content “is a far cry from the threat of adverse government action” and is

³³ Renée DiResta & Quinta Jurecic, “The Rise and Fall of America's Response to Foreign Election Meddling,” *Lawfare*, February 20, 2025. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/the-rise-and-fall-of-america-s-response-to-foreign-election-meddling>

³⁴ “About Us – Global Engagement Center,” U.S. Department of State, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/about-us-global-engagement-center-2/>

³⁵ *Murthy v. Missouri*, No. 23-411, June 26, 2024. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-411_3dq3.pdf

³⁶ Will Oremus, “Tech Brief: Democrats use online safety hearing to decry Trump's FTC firing,” *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2025. https://www.washingtonpost.com/camp-rw/?trackId=59712cc69bbc0f40d0add439&s=67e554429c24803604e8c3c2&utm_campaign=wp_the_technology_202

³⁷ *Consortium for Independent Journalism, Inc. v. United States et al.*, No. 1:23-cv-07088-KPF, ECF No. 73 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 26, 2025), <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/newsguard-motion-to-dismiss-ruling.pdf>

“at most, merely criticiz[ing] [Plaintiff’s] beliefs ... forcefully in the hopes of persuading others.”³⁸ The same is true of the academic and private parties that have been harassed for years by frivolous allegations of censorship via various ties to the government.

Moving Beyond the “Censorship” Lie

If this Subcommittee is serious about countering disinformation that undermines our national security while preserving freedom of speech, there are a variety of programs to which it could appropriate funding, many of which have been decimated by the slash-and-burn approach that has characterized the Trump administration’s foreign aid cuts. Past, present, or future, these programs do not constitute censorship.

- **Information Literacy.** Invest in programs that teach people how to navigate the modern information environment including through digital literacy training and civics programs. These programs do not label outlets as “good” or “bad,” “real” or “fake,” but give people holistic skills to navigate an increasingly complex digital environment regardless of their politics.
- **Journalism.** News properties of the US Agency for Global Media are invaluable resources. They represent a standard for in-depth, fact-based, non-partisan journalism as a public good, often in environments with no independent journalistic alternatives. They have been a beacon of truth among lies for decades; their funding should not be obliterated, but bolstered, allowing them to compete more effectively in an increasingly crowded media environment.
- **International Exchanges.** Engage people in countries on the front lines of the information war with firsthand educational and exchange experiences in the United States. It is impossible to calculate the return on investment of programs including Fulbright and the Future Leaders Exchange Program. These experiences are more powerful than any counter-disinformation program; they provide participants with a firsthand look at American values and culture.
- **Research.** As social media platforms continue to obscure their content moderation decisions and algorithmic curation, and until Congress passes robust technology oversight and transparency legislation, academic and civil society research provides the public—and our policymakers—with critical information about the health of our information environment.
- **Coordination and cooperation.** Adversaries like Moscow and Beijing utilize an integrated approach to information operations—across sectors, governments, and mediums—to take advantage of American inaction and disorganization on the issue. We should thus prioritize coordination within government and cooperation with allies. This demonstrates resolve and denies benefit to adversaries through a collective stance, including better sharing of information to identify threats, tactics, and tools, and the formulation of effective responses.³⁹

Finally, and most importantly: adversaries use information operations to exploit open societies and undermine our democratic values. These values must therefore remain the center of gravity for any approach to countering hostile interference. Preserving our transparency, openness, and most importantly, commitments to freedom of speech and human rights will ensure the United States continues to provide an alternative to authoritarian regimes. We must act not only as the staunchest defender and guarantor of these values among our allies abroad, but lead by example, and fight just as hard to preserve them at home. Thank you.

³⁸ *Consortium v. United States et al.*

³⁹ Adapted from Nina Jankowicz and Henry Collis, “Enduring Information Vigilance: Government after COVID-19,” *Parameters* 50, no. 3 (2020). <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol50/iss3/4/>