

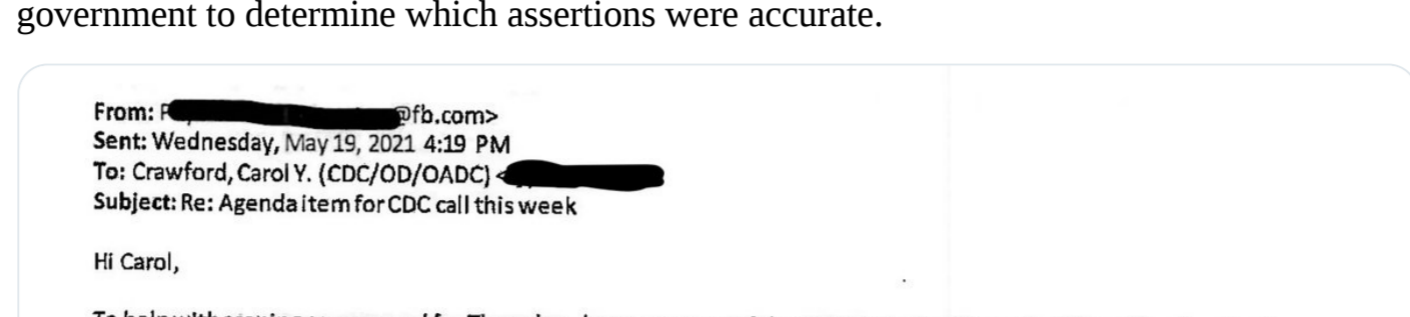
Robby Soave
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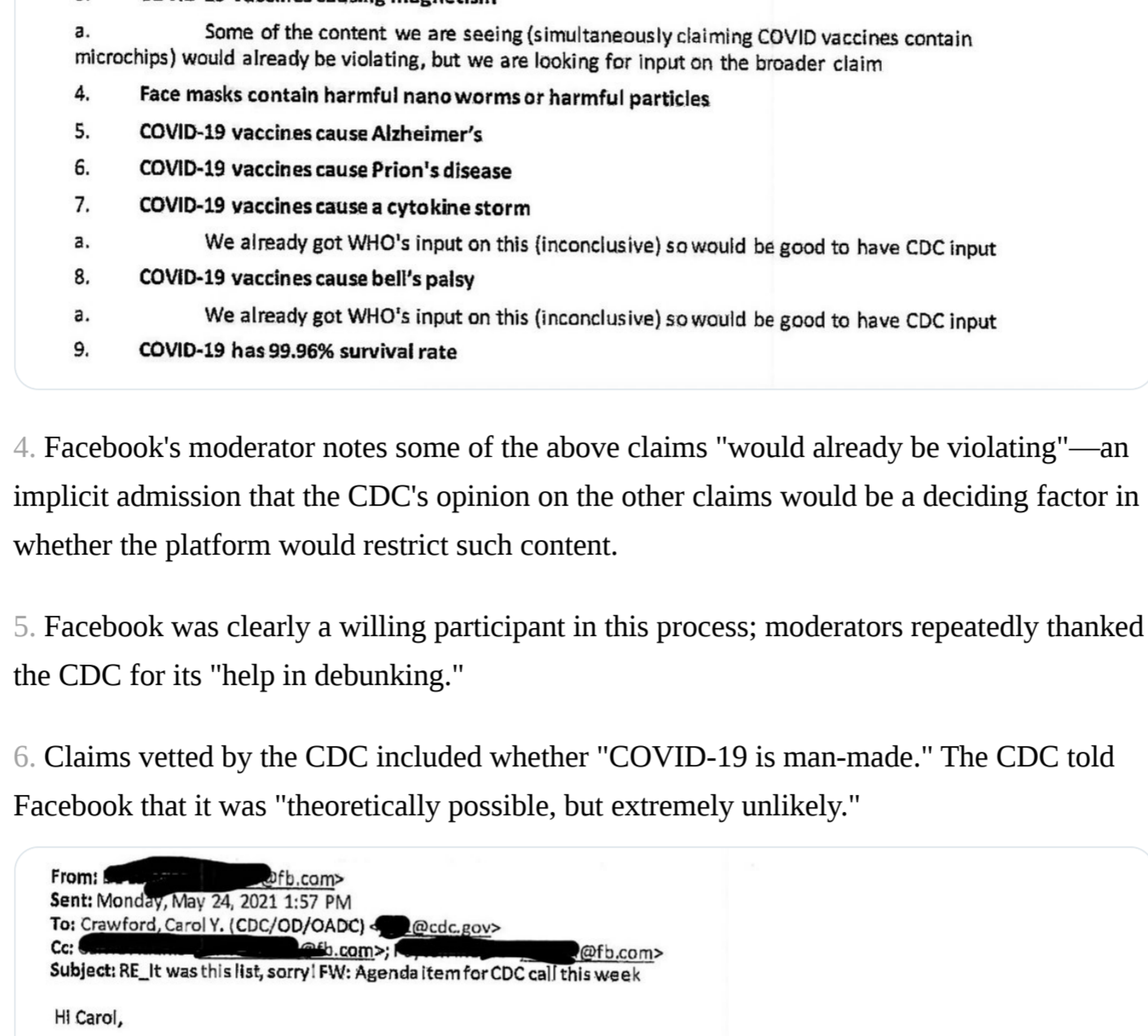
1. THREAD: THE FACEBOOK FILES

Twitter is not the only social media site to face pressure to censor content. I obtained emails showing that the CDC had significant influence over covid moderation at Facebook and Instagram. Here's what I found.

2. The CDC had significant input on pandemic-era policies at Meta. The CDC was consulted frequently, at times daily, receiving constant updates about which topics were trending, and giving recommendations on what content to flag as false or misleading.



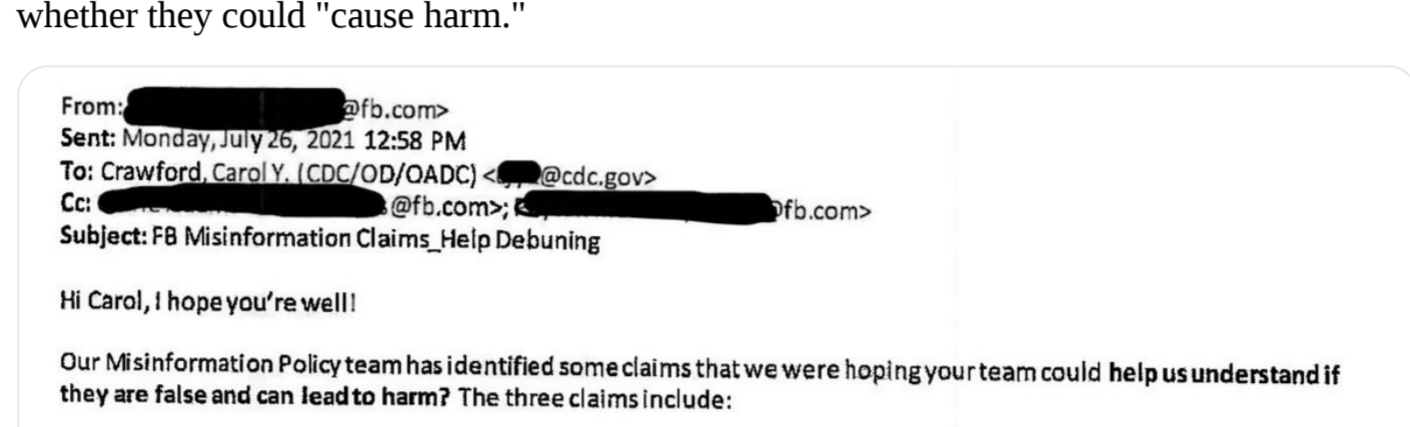
3. For instance, in May 2021, CDC officials began routinely vetting claims about COVID-19 vaccines that had appeared on Facebook. The platform left it up to the federal government to determine which assertions were accurate.



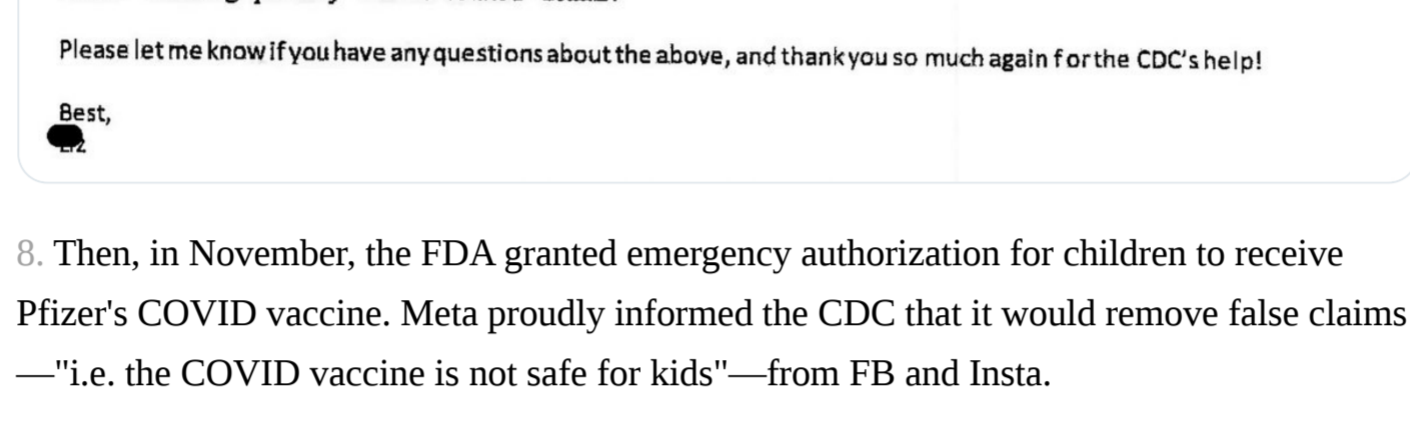
4. Facebook's moderator notes some of the above claims "would already be violating"—an implicit admission that the CDC's opinion on the other claims would be a deciding factor in whether the platform would restrict such content.

5. Facebook was clearly a willing participant in this process; moderators repeatedly thanked the CDC for its "help in debunking."

6. Claims vetted by the CDC included whether "COVID-19 is man-made." The CDC told Facebook that it was "theoretically possible, but extremely unlikely."

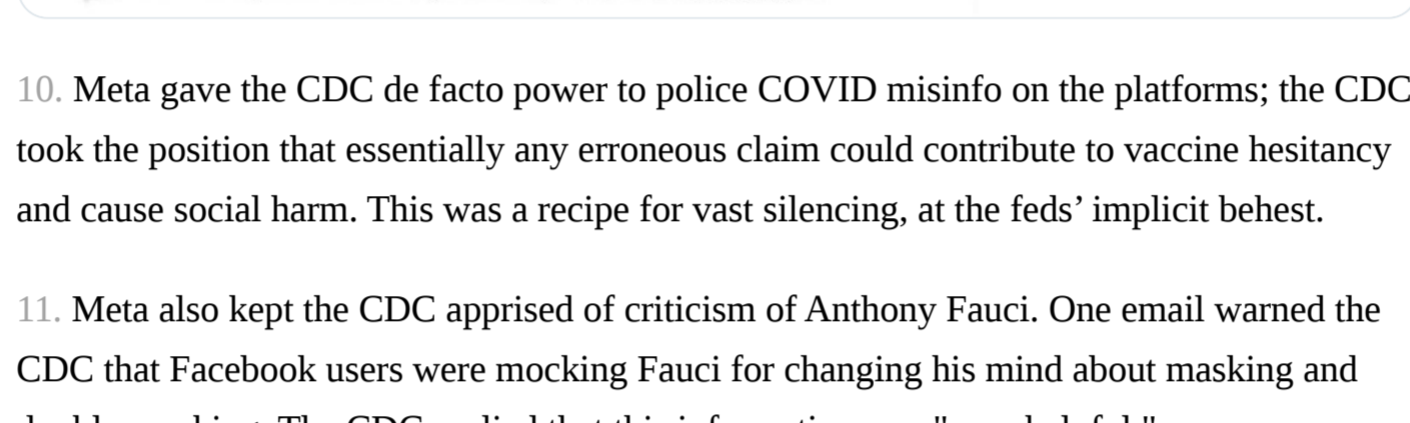


7. By July 2021, the CDC wasn't just evaluating which claims it thought were false, but whether they could "cause harm."



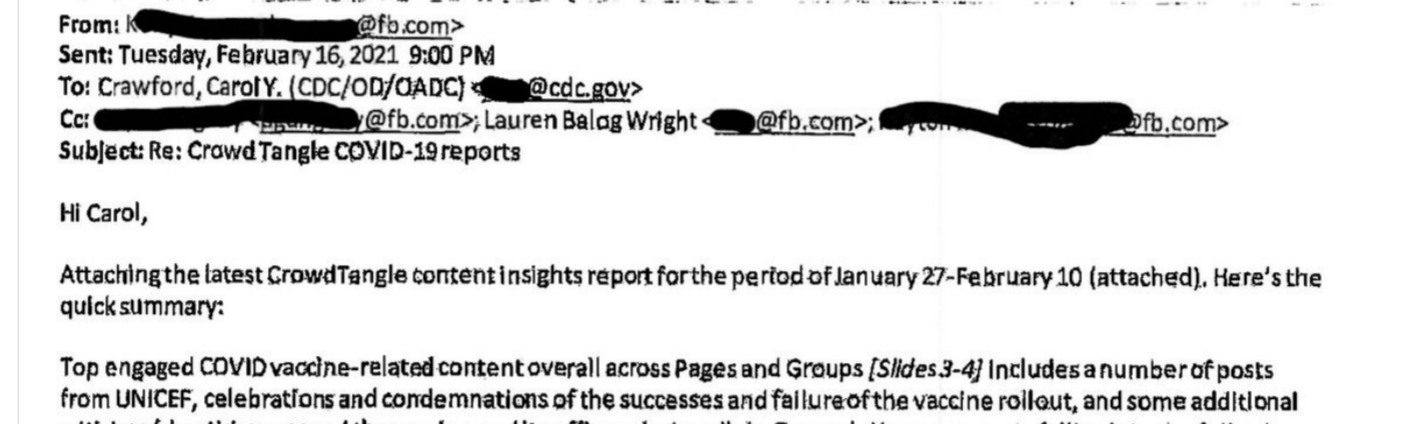
8. Then, in November, the FDA granted emergency authorization for children to receive Pfizer's COVID vaccine. Meta proudly informed the CDC that it would remove false claims—"i.e. the COVID vaccine is not safe for kids!"—from FB and Insta.

9. Meta also provided the CDC with a list of new claims about vaccines and asked whether the government thought they could "contribute to vaccine refusals." The CDC determined that this label applied to all such claims.



10. Meta gave the CDC de facto power to police COVID misinfo on the platforms; the CDC took the position that essentially any erroneous claim could contribute to vaccine hesitancy and cause social harm. This was a recipe for vast silencing, at the feds' implicit behest.

11. Meta also kept the CDC apprised of criticism of Anthony Fauci. One email warned the CDC that Facebook users were mocking Fauci for changing his mind about masking and double-masking. The CDC replied that this information was "very helpful."



12. The CDC was not the only arm of the federal government engaged in this work, of course: White House staffers castigated Meta for not deplatforming alleged misinformation fast enough. President Joe Biden himself accused Facebook of "killing people" in July 2021.

13. "What's at stake is the future of free speech in the technological age," @JeninYunesEq, an attorney for @NCLAlegal, tells me. "We've never had a situation where the federal government at very high levels is coordinating or coercing social media to do its bidding..."

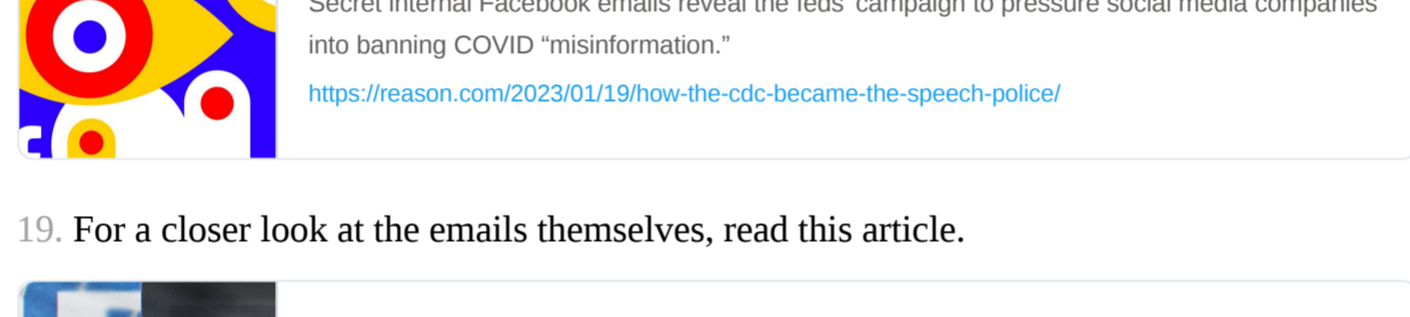
14. The New Civil Liberties Alliance is helping the state of Missouri sue the government over its campaign to pressure social media companies to silence dissent.

15. The theory is that the combination of direct influence and pressure from government officials, in conjunction with explicit threats from politicians, illegal violates free speech rights.

16. There is a word for government officials using the threat of punishment to extort desired behaviors from private actors. That word is: jawboning.

17. "Multiple arms of the administration delivered the jawboning effort together," says @Will\_Duffield, a policy analyst at the Cato Institute. "Each one component wouldn't rise to something legally actionable, but when taken as a whole administration push, it might."

18. I explore the legal case that the federal government's jawboning of social media companies violates the First Amendment in my cover story for the March 2023 issue of @reason magazine. Read it here



19. For a closer look at the emails themselves, read this article.



20. I'm grateful to the work done by @mtabbii, @bariweiss, @lhfang, @ShellenbergerMD, @davidzweig and others (with @elonmusk's cooperation) to uncover censorship at Twitter. It's clear the same forces were conspiring to silence dissent at Meta as well.

21. You can also watch my monologue on this subject for Rising

Twitter post by Rising (@hillTVLive) from Jan 19, 2023. Content: Exclusive Facebook Files: secret emails show today's Covid content, @robbysoave reports in. Includes video thumbnail and engagement stats.

22. Full thing here



23. I'll also be talking about my reporting on a livestream for @reason later today. Details here:

Twitter post by reason (@reason) from Jan 19, 2023. Content: Livestream today at 1 p.m. ET. Confidential emails obtained by Reason's @robbysoave reveal the CDC's role in silencing COVID-19 dissent on social media. Includes video thumbnail.

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