

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

We write to you regarding reports of content censorship and account closures of Iranian pro-democracy and anti-authoritarian activists on Meta's social media platforms, such as Instagram<sup>1</sup> amid popular protests in Iran triggered by the clerical regime's economic mismanagement, while the regime is repressing these protests.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, social media has become an important venue for Iranians to express non-violent discontent and amplify their voices from different iterations of street protest, such as in 2009 with the Green Movement, or the more recent wave of anti-regime demonstrations starting in 2017.<sup>3</sup> However, critics of the Islamic Republic inside and outside Iran, including Iranian-American activists in the United States, have been complaining about American social media platforms selectively censoring their voice while allowing the officials and persons tied to the Islamic Republic to retain their accounts and spew hate speech and expressions of violence.

Recently, an investigation by the *BBC* Persian service has shed troubling light on Instagram's content reporting process.<sup>4</sup> According to the report, Instagram outsourced its content reporting to a third-party company called Telus International, which had allegedly been infiltrated by those sympathetic to the Islamic Republic in Iran.

This report confirms and reinforces the long-held view of many human rights advocates, pro-democracy activists, and dissidents, that the dictatorship in Tehran is actively manipulating the social media space.<sup>5</sup> Direct infiltration of Instagram's internal processes, however, is far more sinister than even the shadow-banning, bot-creation, and other manipulation that have been troubling Iranian pro-democracy activists for years.

Multiple former and current employees of Telus International claim that affiliates of the Islamic Republic actively delete accounts, photos, and posts of the regime's critics.<sup>6</sup> Further reporting indicates these

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iranwire.com/en/technology/104044-instagram-iran-protests-footage-censorship>

<sup>2</sup> <https://iran-hrm.com/2022/05/26/iran-crush-protests-over-price-hikes-in-food-staples/>;  
<https://abcnews.go.com/International/bloody-protests-iran-food-prices/story?id=84789746>;

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26939971>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/NUFDIran/status/1526979029211000834>

<sup>5</sup> For example: <https://twitter.com/AlinejadMasih/status/1526668948585988097>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nysun.com/article/as-iran-mullahs-post-propaganda-anti-regime-protesters-charge-social-media-censorship>

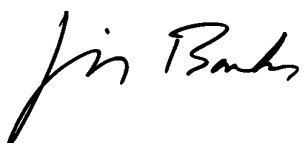
infiltrators have been offered tens of thousands of dollars to delete the accounts of activists, including American citizens,<sup>7</sup> and at the same time pro-regime content seems to remain intact. The threat of infiltration by Iran's regime and its supporters into a social media platform used by millions of Americans is an unacceptable threat to their privacy, liberty, and our national security.

We request that Meta Platforms respond by June 10<sup>th</sup> to the following questions pertaining to the allegations of systematic censorship and discrimination against anti-Islamic Republic activists:

1. Does Meta have any mechanism in place to prevent foreign governments from infiltrating on its social media platforms and manipulating content policing? Has Meta conducted any investigation on such infiltrations in general?
2. Has Instagram, Telus International, or any other associated organization that regulates content on Meta's platforms conducted an internal investigation since the release of the *BBC* report?
3. Specifically on Iran, what steps has Meta taken to confront infiltration by proponents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is a state sponsor of terrorism under U.S. law and has a track record of trying to spoof social media accounts for political purposes?<sup>8</sup>
4. What additional steps are you going to take to ensure the data and privacy of your platforms' users who voice discontent with the Islamic Republic, given the danger that such breaches pose to their lives?

We thank you for your time and look forward to your response(s).

CC: U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken



Jim Banks  
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress



Claudia Tenney  
Member of Congress

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<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1528452335193702402>, and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61516126>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/iran-linked-fake-accounts-facebook-twitter/>