

Meta Group closes hundreds of accounts in Cuba and Bolivia

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Entrance sign at Meta's headquarters in Menlo Park, California ([Commons](#))

Last week, the US-based Meta Group blocked several hundred accounts linked to the Cuban government. Accounts said to be close to the Bolivian government are also affected. The Facebook parent company accuses the accounts of carrying out political propaganda for the respective governments.

On the Cuban side, 363 Facebook accounts, 270 pages, 229 groups, and 72 Instagram accounts with a total of over 650,000 followers are affected. These would have been directed "predominantly at the domestic audience as well as the diaspora". Meta accuses them of spreading government propaganda and discrediting dissidents in the company's latest "Adversary Threats Quarterly Report". Fake accounts and AI-generated images were also used.

In the case of Bolivia, the deletion affected more than 1,000 Facebook accounts and 450 pages allegedly belonging to a group called "Digital Warriors" (Guerreros digitales) close to the ruling party "Movement towards Socialism" (MAS). In total, two million followers are affected in the left-governed Andean country.

The latest account closures are part of a series of other recent events. For example, the Facebook account of the Cuban state research association "Razones de Cuba" was closed in October last year without giving any reasons. During the municipal elections on 27 November, the Facebook page of the largest state news portal "Cubadebate" was blocked for the duration of election day. A few days

before the Twitter sale to Elon Musk, state and state-affiliated Cuban media channels were posted on the platform with a content warning to that effect.

"Four months later, we confirmed that this was not a 'short-circuit' of Facebook's algorithms, but a planned action to restrict the presence of media, professionals and supporters of the revolution on the networks," the portal explained in a background article on the issue. The authors also referred to the bot campaign in the run-up to the July 2021 protests, as well as the scandal surrounding Facebook's purchase of data from the British company Cambridge Analytica and the platform's influence on the 2016 Brexit vote.

As for the recent Meta report on Cuba, the group's head of global threat intelligence, Ben Nimmo, told AFP news agency, "They were using very simple fake accounts to share and like pro-government content." If you like, they were fake cheerleaders". In addition, fake identities had been created "to post criticism of government opponents" on the island and abroad.

As journalist Alan McLeod revealed in a research for the portal Mintpress, there are apparently personal entanglements between the Meta Group and Western security services. Nimmo, for example, used to work as a Nato press officer and for the British Statecraft Institute, which, according to its own statements, strives for the "renewal of national security" in Great Britain. The institute is accused of using targeted disinformation campaigns in social media, which were directed against the British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, among others.

On the part of Meta, David Agranovich reported on Twitter about the blockings of the Cuban and Bolivian accounts. In Bolivia, he said, the investigation had uncovered a "coordinated effort" to "use fake accounts to post in support of the Bolivian government and to criticise and abuse the opposition."

The suspensions in both cases were for violating meta-rules against "coordinated inauthentic behaviour". These are supposed to be against "coordinated efforts to manipulate public debate for a strategic goal", but are not further defined. In its "policy details", Facebook primarily mentions fake profiles, but also the use of "pages, groups or events" that would deceive users.

On his website, Agranovich describes himself as an "offensive counterintelligence specialist who has worked for the US government as an expert on Russian foreign policy and intelligence matters". Specifically, he served as intelligence director on the "United States National Security Council".

The US daily "New York Post" reported in December 2022 that the proportion of ex-CIA intelligence officers at Meta was "particularly pronounced". At least nine former CIA agents and six former intelligence officers from other federal agencies are or were currently employed there.

For example, Meta's top "misinformation" manager, Aaron Berman, is a former senior CIA analyst who worked for the "Company" for 15 years. On Twitter, he introduces himself as "Misinfo @Meta, former @CIA". Scott Stern, Meta's senior manager for "confidence and security risk intelligence", spent more than seven years at the FBI making "high-risk operational decisions for complex and ambiguous overseas terrorism operations", according to his LinkedIn page. He joined the group in 2020 to help develop algorithms to combat "misinformation".

Cuba's government on Friday accused Meta of operating with "double standards" by "censoring" government accounts while tolerating "disinformation and destabilisation campaigns directed against the island", Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez said in a statement on Twitter. Instead of deleting Cuban accounts, he said, the company should "explain its own misleading and biased behaviour as it allows denigrating, stigmatising and hateful campaigns to be waged against our country from Florida."

Cubans would continue to "defend our revolution and our socialist system of social justice, even in the digital arena, in the face of harassment and destabilising measures", despite attempts to "censor" the country's voice and "make the truth invisible", Rodríguez continued.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel expressed rejection "to the new hypocrisy and complicity of these companies with a known history of disinformation and destabilisation operations on digital platforms against Cuba".

In Bolivia, the Minister of the Presidential Office, María Nela Prada, demanded "transparency and clarity" from the Meta Group. Decisions of this magnitude should have been "at least consulted with our democratically elected government", Prada said. It was "mysterious" that such decisions had been taken against two left-leaning governments, of all things. "Mysterious I say because you really have to ask yourself what criteria are used to come to such conclusions and such reports," Prada said.