

CHANGE THE TERMS

REDUCING HATE ONLINE

November 17, 2020

Sundar Pichai
Google Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

We are writing on behalf of Change the Terms¹ to request that Google immediately terminate its relationship with Parler, an app touting itself as the “free-speech” version of Twitter, but which, in reality, protects hate speech and allows racism and bigotry to flourish.² The app has been at, or near the top, of Google Play’s app store in recent days, with over 880,000 installs in the US from Google Play and the Apple App Store on a single day.³ However, the app is in clear violation of Google Play’s Developer Program Policy.⁴ We write to alert you to this violation of Google’s terms and call on Google to terminate services with Parler.

Google Play’s policies prohibit the type of content Parler is used to disseminate. The Developer Program Policy (“Hate Speech”) states that “[w]e don’t allow apps that promote violence, or incite hatred against individuals or groups based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, age, nationality, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or any other characteristic that is associated with systemic discrimination or marginalization.” The policy then goes on to provide examples of such content as including content that asserts “that a protected group is inhuman, inferior or worthy of being hated []; [a]pps that contain hateful slurs, stereotypes, or theories about a protected group possessing negative characteristics (e.g. malicious, corrupt, evil, etc.), or explicitly or implicitly claims the group is a threat []; [and c]ontent which promotes hate symbols such as flags, symbols, insignias, paraphernalia or behaviors associated with hate groups.” The policy applies equally when such content is user-generated (“User Generated Content”): “Apps whose primary purpose is...[or] that end up being used primarily for hosting objectionable UGC, or that develop a reputation among users of being a place where such content thrives, will also be removed from Google Play.”⁵

¹ The Change the Terms is a coalition of civil rights, human rights, technology policy, and consumer protection organizations, working to ensure that tech companies do more to combat hateful conduct on their platforms. While dozens of organizations have signed on to the coalition’s model policies for tech companies wishing to combat online hateful activity, the coalition is led by the Center for American Progress, Color of Change, Free Press, the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the National Hispanic Media Coalition and the Southern Poverty Law Center. More information about the coalition is available at changethetterms.org.

² <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/parler-the-site-where-hate-speech-is-free-v8m2znd2d>

³ <https://www.cnet.com/news/parler-downloads-soar-as-conservatives-flock-to-the-twitter-clone-after-biden-win/>

⁴ <https://support.google.com/googleplay/android-developer/answer/10177647?hl=en>

⁵ <https://support.google.com/googleplay/android-developer/answer/10177647?hl=en>

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A quick review of Parler makes clear that the app violates Google Play’s policies. The app is a haven for white supremacists and others that regularly post content that surpasses Google’s proscription of content that “promote[s] violence, or incite[s] hatred against individuals or [protected] groups.” Parler users regularly engage in violent and disturbing activity. For instance, on November 14th, user Enrique Tarrío (@NobleLead), who is a leader of the Proud Boys,⁶ and who helped organize a rally in DC in the wake of the 2020 elections, ominously posted: “@ProudBoys will be on the streets of DC all night.” Then, two hours later, @NobleLead posted: “DC Antifa ends tonight.” A few hours later, he again followed up his post with content that is even more incendiary: “Tonight we don’t sleep... Tonight we keep our enemies awake. Tonight we become nightmares.”⁷

Another Parler user, @KevinKolnKnight, has numerous posts that threaten violence against people of Jewish and African descent. In a September 14, 2020 post, @KevinKolnKnight includes a picture of a Jim Crow era lynching with the words “Return to Tradition” and “Hang ‘em high.” In other posts, this same user refers to the “little tiny monkey brains of a N*gger,” encourages “boots to the skulls!!!” in reference to Antifa, and explains that “Always a n*gger committing Every violent crime[;] Always a Jew Committing Every Child Rape.”⁸ Similarly, another Parler user – a former police chief in Arkansas – was recently exposed for using the app to violently threaten death to Democrats and Black Lives Matter activists.⁹ The former police chief’s Parler posts included calling for “Death to all Marxist Democrats” and instructing readers to “Take no prisoners leave no survivors!!” In another post, the former police chief supposedly refers to Vice President Joe Biden and writes: “Still waiting you little bitch boy. Has your mom let you out of the basement. Did you know all you BLM, ANTIFA cunts are going to be real sorry real soon.” In yet another post, the former police chief writes that he “may have to shoot and kill any of the Communists BLM and ANTIFA Democrat foot soldiers.”¹⁰

⁶ The Proud Boys were founded in 2016 by right-wing activist Gavin McInnes. They are a “far-right, anti-immigrant, all-male group with a history of street violence against its left-wing opponents.”

<https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-54352635>

⁷ See Parler posts by @NobleLead, dated November 14, 2020.

⁸ See Parler posts by @KevinKnightKoln dated September 14, 2020- September 17,2020.

⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/arkansas-police-chief-resigns-after-appearing-call-violence-over-election-n1247059>. <https://www.facebook.com/ozarkscoalition/posts/198602358371038> and <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/arkansas-police-chief-resigns-after-appearing-call-violence-over-election-n1247059>.

¹⁰

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/arkansas-police-chief-resigns-after-appearing-call-violence-over-election-n1247059>. <https://www.facebook.com/ozarkscoalition/posts/198602358371038> and <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/arkansas-police-chief-resigns-after-appearing-call-violence-over-election-n1247059>.

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Given this type of content, it is unsurprising that many of Parler’s users include individuals who have been banned from Twitter and other platforms for engaging in violent, dehumanizing conduct that violates those platforms’ terms of service. For instance, David Duke, the leading white supremacist and former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard, who has been permanently banned from Twitter, is a Parler user.¹¹ Recent posts by Duke includes language about “white domination continu[ing],”¹² a September 30th post applauding President Trump for “giv[ing] the #proudboys the mandate to stand by and fuck shit up,” multiple posts referring to the Black Lives Matter movement as “thugs,”¹³ and posts referring to Chinese as “chinks.”¹⁴

We applaud you for your decision in 2017 to enforce your terms and remove Gab, another app used by the alt-right that allowed hate speech to flourish, from your app store.¹⁵ We ask that you similarly act now to enforce your policies and remove Parler from the app store. The time to act is now, before even worse harms occur. Please contact Arusha Gordon by November 20, 2020, regarding this important issue or we will assume you have decided to continue providing services to Parler.

Respectfully,

The Change the Terms Coalition¹⁶

CC:

Kent Walker, Senior Vice President for Global Affairs

Halimah DeLaine Prado, General Counsel

Corey duBrowa, Vice President, Global Communications and Public Affairs

¹¹

<https://apnews.com/article/david-duke-technology-media-social-media-la-state-wire-b9eaf85d19efa7e4b9402728620bbd70> ;

<https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/twitter-conservatives-parler-surges-amid-election-misinformation-crackdown-n1247333>

¹² See e.g., David Duke post from September 8, 2020.

¹³ See e.g., David Duke’s post from September 24, 2020.

¹⁴ See e.g., David Duke post from September 8, 2020.

¹⁵ <https://techcrunch.com/2017/08/17/alt-social-network-gab-booted-from-google-play-store-for-hate-speech/>

¹⁶ To view a full list of Change the Terms member organizations please visit <https://www.changethetterms.org/coalition>.