

# Reimagining Social Governance: Harm, Accountability, and Repair

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“ We propose a reframing of social media governance **focused on repairing harm** ”

## The Challenge:

Social media companies have attracted widespread criticism for the proliferation of harmful behaviors on their platforms, including hate speech, harassment, misinformation, and recruitment to extremist groups.

## The Solution:

We propose a reframing of social media governance focused on repairing harm. Repairing harm requires recognizing that harm has occurred; centering the needs of individuals and communities who experience harm; and accepting accountability for the harm, both for the specific instance of harm and its root causes.

## Repairing Harms: 5 Social Media Governance Shifts



# 1

### From Neutral to Principled

Principled governance requires transparency, accountability, and opportunities for appeal. We propose that social media governance must be principled rather than neutral, and that a principled approach requires platforms to reckon with their role in enabling, or magnifying, structural injustices.

# 2

### From Equality to Equity

Social media companies have traditionally built their policies and procedures around the notion that all people deserve equal treatment. In practice, an equality-based approach—when applied to inequitable systems—can uphold existing systems of oppression and perpetuate systemic inequality, such as racism and transphobia. An equitable approach recognizes that individual circumstances may require uneven distribution to ultimately reach an equal outcome.

# 3

### From Content to Behavior

Social media companies currently evaluate potentially harmful behavior at the content level—that is, content moderators are asked to consider the specific words in a post or comment, divorced from contextual factors about the author, audience, target, etc. Complex and inherently social behaviors like online harassment cannot be understood separate from the context in which they occurred. A focus on behavior allows for more nuance in what sanctions are applied to potential violators.

# 4

### From Retribution to Rehabilitation

Retributive governance seeks to restore justice by giving the offender a punishment proportional to the offense. To repair harm, we must first transform social media governance from a system of retribution toward one of accountability. We can draw inspiration from principles of restorative justice, which first asks the injured party to identify their desired path forward.

# 5

### From Authority to Community

We encourage social media platforms to transition away from paternalistic, top-down models of governance in favor of giving communities more control over their own experiences. One reason for this approach is practicality: these are extremely difficult problems that will take years, if not decades, to solve.