

If moderation is out, then extremism is in

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/01/12/if-moderation-is-out-then-extremism-is-in/>

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:16 pm

Much has been made of Facebook's decision to effectively abandon moderation of the sites it manages, and rightly so. The idea that politics is now open to any and all misinformation, deliberate lies, and abuse is a recipe for further degradation of debate and, most of all, for creating a toxic environment where the lies and abuse of the far right are allowed to prevail.

Those on the far-right call this an end to censorship. For years, far-right trolls who have visited this site have suggested I censor comments by deleting those that I think are harmful, abusive, repetitive, untrue or just unhelpful to constructive debate.

This was not censorship, of course. It was editorial freedom motivated by a desire to create a safe space in which healthy discussion might take place. That goal has, I think, been achieved, although the cost is that sometimes it takes a while for comments to be published. I am fairly dedicated to running this space, but not at every moment of every day. I do, therefore, know a bit about this issue, and that motivates my concern about what Facebook is doing because a lot of what I delete here is quite abusive.

Much of that abuse is aimed at me. Most of it is pretty stupid. Why some people think I am grossly obese is hard to work out, for example, but I am regularly told I am.

Other times, the abuse is plain, straightforwardly nasty. Sometimes, it is threatening. Without exception, it is meant to undermine. And that it is deliberate.

The far right (and quite possibly the far left because they also turn up sometimes) seeks to undermine its opponents by intimidation, but most of all by sowing self-doubt that undermines a person's willingness to offer an opinion in public for fear of ridicule and reprisal. The result is reduced participation in serious debate and the loss of valuable contributions to politics. That is, of course, the goal of those who hate democracy. Facebook's change of policy will, like that which happened previously on Twitter, accelerate that process. I have no doubt that is intentional. But it has also contributed to the serious rise of mental ill-health in the world we now live in. The

evidence for that is overwhelming. Being subject to such abuse, however, and whenever it arises, is toxic. I think I have survived it pretty well, but if you wonder why I am sometimes robust with those who I think are here to abuse, that is my explanation.

But there is something much more worrying about this.

We all know that the web is used to intimidate and bully people on issues other than politics. Most of the victims are young, but not all are. The consequences for many of those ganged up on are significant because they are intimidated, frightened, undermined, and left in fear for their well-being. They end up doubting their worth. The cost is enormous, if immeasurable.

The web is also used for grooming. Some of the victims are underage. Many are vulnerable. The cost to them is also very high and sometimes damaging for what might be a lifetime.

These types of abuse are also now, no doubt, going to pass unmoderated on Facebook. Moderation - or censorship as the right calls it - is intended to prevent such things from happening. It has not entirely succeeded in doing so, but it must have helped. But now, moderation is to go. The language is not coincidental when I suggest that if moderation is out, then extremism is in, and abuse will get very much worse.

As is always the case with the right, and most especially the far right, there is something deeply paradoxical about their demand for freedom. They want an end to what they call censorship, they say when what they actually want to permit is the freedom to abuse. And one of the freedoms that they will permit as a result is the grooming that they claim to be so concerned about - which concern must, however, be a sham on their part since the very thing they call for - the right to abuse online - is a key component in so many grooming scandals.

We are being forced to live in a world increasingly shaped by some very toxic people.