

We are Reset.

Our vision is to reset the connection between media and democracy in order to sustain a polity that is more informed and less divided. We seek to neutralize the threats posed to democracy by digital media monopolies and restore the power of information technology as a force for effective self-government. We do this work by developing and promoting new ideas to change public policy, industry standards, and consumer attitudes. As part of this process, we engage in direct advocacy with governments, support public campaigns to raise awareness, and fund research and technology to shed light on the problem and point to solutions. We believe elevating the quality of the public debate and restoring a baseline of shared facts will make effective solutions more likely for every major challenge facing the world today -- from climate change to racial justice, economic inequality to public health.

~~Disinform. Distort. Divide.~~
Inform. **Reset.** Unite.

Our Goal.

Reset was built to contest the rise of surveillance capitalism and mitigate its disastrous impact on the bond between media and democracy. Achieving this singular goal requires a two-pronged approach. First, we must blunt the harms of digital media platforms through regulation. Second, we must build public awareness and popular demand for a new kind of digital media system that better serves democratic society.

Our Structure.

By design, Reset is a hybrid organization. We combine aspects of advocacy NGOs with social enterprise philanthropy. This structure serves our theory of change. Altering digital media markets at the global level will require multi-national policy change. To shape these new rules, we therefore need to have not only an active presence in front of the governments most likely to act, but also the research, communications, and organizing resources required to bolster this critical advocacy.

Under our structure, this can be done in a variety of ways. In certain cases, the Reset team is best positioned to do the work ourselves. In others, we may also engage consultants, lobbyists, agencies, or law firms to lead local operations. And at times, we may choose to work with partner NGOs through grants and contracts. In most of our priority countries, we choose to employ a combination of all these approaches. Grants from Reset come with access to core staff as well as our network of operators all over the world. And our operational work carries the experimental risk that allows us to recommend adjacent grants to other funders in the sector.

What we provide

Reset is built to offer the following assets (in order of priority):



Operational Expertise: The core Reset team is well-versed in the science, technology, and policy of digital threats to democracy. We are experienced practitioners in politics, organizing, communications, and technology development.



Global Network: Our team has strong relationships with leaders in politics, civil society, academia, and business all over the world. These connections enable us to bring the right people to the table to meet the emerging, often immediate, needs of our advocacy work. With a network of technologists, lawyers, scientists, organizers, pollsters, marketers, designers, and activists, we are able to quickly move ideas to action.



Agile Philanthropy: Reset maintains a flexible pool of cash resources to invest in the field to commission research, expand advocacy capacity, develop technologies, deliver communications support, and more. In doing so, our objective is not to build organizations and ecosystems (we work with co-funders that do this) but rather to test new ideas and catalyze near-term change with just-in-time capital.

Investing in Reset: In combining these three assets, Reset is well-positioned to help other funders work in the emerging digital media and democracy space. We routinely engage in co-funding arrangements, and use our local networks and on-the-ground expertise to help other partners make the best funding decisions to advance their missions. For those funders without programmatic capacity or the versatility in grant-making methods required to operate in this fast moving space, we can also serve as a conduit. In this manner, Reset acts as an “index fund” enabling strategic investment by foundations in the media/democracy problem without sourcing grants themselves. Resources invested are either directly programmed by our team, or distributed to the most dynamic opportunities.



Our Strategy.

We believe the primary lever to make swift systemic change is new public policy that regulates the business model of surveillance commerce. The only available force equal to the task of disciplining the interests of the richest companies in the history of capitalism is the power of the state. Most of our work is therefore focused on the development and promotion of new regulatory policy in markets large enough to matter to the industry -- led by governments with the political will to confront the problem, and implemented by strong regulators and courts to enforce new rules.

But this change cannot happen in a vacuum. It requires effective public campaigns that engage affected communities in the call for reform -- as well as the research and analysis to make an effective case. New technologies are also needed to support investigation, activism, education, and -- ultimately -- a demand for changes and protections from consumers themselves. Accordingly, our core strategic activities are policy change, public campaigns, research and investigation, technology, and litigation.

Policy Change



Winning regulation of Big Tech in key jurisdictions like the UK, EU, and Australia where there is ongoing legislative activity and well-functioning regulatory and legal institutions to enforce laws.

Public Campaigns



Fostering public engagement on the threats of surveillance capitalism and linking our work with other movements beset by the problems in the information market -- such as climate change and social justice.

Research + Investigation



Investing in research and scientific analysis that explores the harms of data-driven surveillance, disinformation, and hate speech -- and then deploying that knowledge to shape solutions.

Technology



Funding the development of technologies that empower researchers, activists, and consumers to expose and reduce the influence of digital disinformation.

Litigation



Pursuing litigation in the EU and UK where new rules on collective redress will allow US-style class action lawsuits to test the power of data privacy, consumer protection, and human rights law to curb the power of platforms.



How to change policy

Each of our core strategic activities are designed to address -- and ultimately dismantle -- the three pillars of the surveillance commerce business model that enable its harmful effects to erode democracy.



Pillar 1: Data tracking and content targeting

Digital media platforms have asserted and obtained unfettered access to personal data which they collect and use to guide their products and services. The resulting fragmentation of audiences and distorted media curation intensifies disinformation, conspiracy, and polarization. In response, Reset's policy agenda calls for:

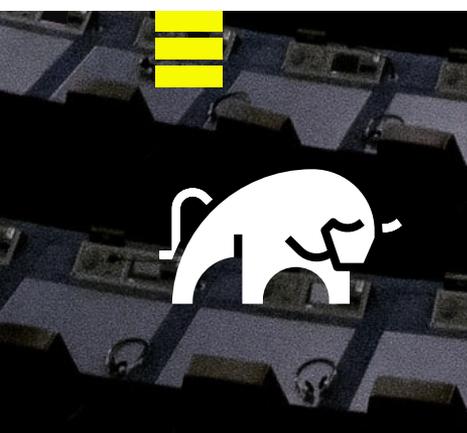
- Severe restrictions on platform data gathering and use;
- Verification audits of the automated systems that curate platform content to ensure and enforce compliance with the law and corporate policies; and
- Regulation of online political advertising to make transparent the origin, funding, and targeting of political ads.



Pillar 2: Liability protection

Most legal systems regard digital media giants as "neutral" platforms that have no editorial responsibility and therefore no liability for the content they distribute, curate, and amplify (regardless of its impact on the public). As a result, the platforms are free to monetize and distribute harmful content with impunity. In response, Reset's policy agenda calls for:

- Laws that establish meaningful legal liability for the promotion of harmful content (forcing platforms to factor these costs into their business decisions);
- Rules that require changes to product design and features in order to reduce the harms of artificial amplification; and
- Safety and security policies that require platforms to have robust early detection, rapid response, and user notification alerts to address illegal content and activity (e.g., child predation, incitement to violence, and election interference).



Pillar 3: Market Power

Today's historic concentration of ownership in the information markets gives a small handful of companies control over vast, global information flows. This unprecedented market dominance forecloses meaningful consumer choice and exacerbates data tracking and targeting problems. In response, Reset's policy agenda calls for:

- Modernization of competition and antitrust laws to curtail monopoly powers, restrict mergers and acquisitions, and regulate the practices of market dominant firms; and
- Tax reform to stop the practice of Big Tech tax dodging, which has deprived governments of over \$100 billion in the last decade.

For a more in-depth analysis on the key pillars of surveillance capitalism that we are targeting with our public policy efforts, please see the Appendix.

Reset 2020.

In our first year of operation, Reset focused on building the global infrastructure needed to be an influential player in the most important policymaking efforts over the next 18 to 24 months. These activities centered on four core areas: people, policy advocacy, research, and technology. A snapshot of each is provided below.

People.

Reset's strength lies in the people we have assembled to help combat the ills of surveillance capitalism. Through careful recruitment, we have built an exceptional group, including:

- **Leaders:** Formed a core leadership team at Reset with complementary skills that cut across policy, politics, organizing, communications, and technology.
- **Operators:** Established a network of consultants, legal counsel, advocates, and organizers responsive to Reset leadership and based in key countries where policymaking is most likely to yield a near-term result.
- **Advisors:** Recruited a diverse set of experts as formal Advisors to our programmatic work and investments in technology projects -- including Shoshana Zuboff (who coined the term "surveillance capitalism"), Audrey Tang (Taiwan's Digital Minister), and Marietje Schaake (former Member of the European Parliament).

In the coming year, we plan to diversify our team even further and incorporate an increasingly broad set of skills and experiences into our network.

Policy Advocacy.

After evaluating the global landscape of near-term policy change opportunities, we chose the UK, EU, and Australia as our primary areas of opportunity. Each of these governments have active legislative and regulatory proceedings that we assess to be the most likely to achieve one of our key policy objectives in the next 12 to 24 months.

- **London:** The British have the best chance of moving first with Online Harms legislation and Age Appropriate Design Code. The UK's Competition and Markets Authority has also signalled it will start taking tougher action against the platforms.
- **Brussels:** The world's most consequential legislative package on platform regulation -- the Digital Services Act -- will be shaped in 2021 for passage in the next 2 to 3 years. In addition, Europe will initiate the European Democracy Action Plan -- a soft law code of conduct that will establish important precedent for how the EU plans to govern Big Tech.
- **Canberra:** The Liberal government is using competition law to rebalance ad revenue distribution between the platforms and the news media. There are also signs that the country may follow the UK with online harms policies.

In each of these capitals, Reset contracted with experienced advocates and policy experts to establish immediate access and influence. These efforts extend the reach of our core team and enable the exchange of ideas and tactics across various theaters of operation. Around our network of operators, we layered in targeted grants and contracts with a constellation of organizations whose work we believe can be amplified to help achieve our common goal.

The specific form of Reset's engagement and particular combination of partners is optimized to fit the circumstances we find on the ground in each area. In some places, we are behind-the-scenes advisors and funders, supporting the development of shared research and advocacy infrastructure. In others, we are actively leading the work of coalitions or building branded campaigns and institutions to help catalyze advocacy. Highlights of this variable model in action in the UK, Australia, EU, and US are detailed below.



United Kingdom

In London, we determined that the primary driver for regulating digital media was not political disinformation, but rather child online safety. As a result, we developed a strong partnership with the child rights movement (through a grant to the [5Rights Foundation](#)) and together built a partnership among groups focused on both democracy and child rights -- developing a coalition to push the UK government to move forward with major legislation. We also established an [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Digital Regulation and Responsibility](#), for which Reset acts as the Secretariat. This forum has grown to include dozens of MPs from the governing Conservative Party as well as the opposition Labour Party. It will be critical in winning protections against online harms and holding the Johnson government to a high standard.



Australia

In Canberra, we found very few civil society organizations with the interest and capacity to engage a conservative government on the problems of surveillance capitalism. We responded by creating a branded affiliate -- [Reset Australia](#) -- that runs public campaigns and directs policy advocacy. We have no other funded partners in the country, though we invest in lobbying and commission research via our affiliate. Notably, although Australia is a relatively small market, its policymaking has an outsized impact on global debates (due in part to its geo-political situation in the shadow of China, and in part to the influence wielded by Rupert Murdoch). As a result, Canberra has become the site of a kind of proxy war between global economic and political powers. Some of the world's most aggressive legislative proposals to curb Big Tech are currently in play here. With our ringside view of what is happening, we are well-placed to address those same policy debates as they begin to emerge in other parts of the world.



European Union

In Brussels, we are operating in the complex environment of EU policymaking (a field full of actors that hold various priorities in the debate over media and democracy). Given this, we have chosen to operate behind the scenes to serve as an expert advisor and influencer of key EU government offices. We are represented on the continent by [AWO](#) -- a public interest law firm that presents our views to the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council. At this stage, we are not making grants to Brussels NGOs, although we may invest in commonly needed resources such as economic analyses, legislative drafting, and convenings. Notably, we have also quietly established Reset as a valuable source for high-level EU staff, and have made detailed submissions to the EU's consultation on the Digital Services Act and the European Democracy Action Plan. We are also working to align an EU litigation strategy with our Brussels advocacy work, starting with an engagement with an Irish civil liberties organization that is developing a strategy for bringing suit against Google on data protection grounds. A legal victory on the issue could galvanise action by enforcement authorities across the EU.



United States

In Washington, we engaged with a large group of funders, researchers, and NGOs to create a multi-faceted project to monitor, document, expose, and reduce the influence of disinformation in the 2020 election cycle. As a key strategic advisor to the coalition's leadership, we invested in several of the organizations involved in project research, analysis, and public campaigning. We also deployed our political and communications consultants in DC to help support the coalition's work. Project outputs included a series of [online events](#) to publicize the findings of this exposure project, hosted by the [International Grand Committee on Disinformation](#)

(a multi-national group of legislators for whom Reset serves as secretariat and convener). In addition, we oversaw the construction of the data management system that dozens of groups used to log, track, and analyze harmful content online that threatened the integrity of the 2020 election. This data platform -- Link -- is owned by Reset, and its data repository will be licensed to researchers in 2021 to study what happened in 2020 (and help make the case for why the evidence collected demands policy change).

Research.

We made investments throughout the year in applied research designed to generate scientific outputs that could be fed directly into our advocacy work. In one such project, we organized and supported several rounds of survey research led by behavioral psychologists examining the problem of disinformation. This work showed that simple nudge techniques -- such as reminding people that they believe in accurate news and information -- can significantly reduce the propensity to share disinformation on social media (the series of studies -- captured in a canonical paper called Lazy, not Biased -- was promoted in the NYTimes). We then took that research and hired a digital agency to turn it into a practical application by building an “accuracy nudge” that could be distilled into a single online advertisement. In the weeks ahead of the November election, we bought online ads targeting websites known to be the sources of disinformation shared on social media. The results from this live application demonstrate a very promising avenue to use mechanics of targeted ads to fight disinformation.



“Ad Observer” research project with the Online Political Transparency Project at New York University’s Tandon School of Engineering.

Technology.

In mid-2020, we launched our inaugural Open Call for applications -- a funding system designed to attract technology talent to the cause of contesting surveillance capitalism. In the first round of applications, we received almost 200 applications from around the world. Top-rated projects that are likely to receive funding include:

- **An online tool** that gives residents of Europe control over the data they give to companies by demanding the right to access, remove, correct, or move their data.
- **A project** to improve the detection of disinformation on WhatsApp and strengthen mitigation strategies.
- **A project** utilizing reverse algorithm analysis to identify how personal data is collected without permission (to serve as evidence for future litigation).
- **A research lab** that builds tools for improving the detection of online coordinated manipulation campaigns during elections.
- **A tool** that identifies the narrative and technical signatures of sites that propagate disinformation so that they can be more easily monitored.

In addition to surfacing the best ideas from outside the Reset network, our Open Call system will help create community among applicants so that partnerships can be cultivated between people and organizations that might otherwise never discover one another.

Reset 2021.

As we move into next year, we will maintain our strong focus on policy advocacy and implementation in the UK, EU, and Australia. During this time we also intend to extend our reach and deepen engagements in other places, such as the US and the Global South. We plan to grow our campaigning work around corporate accountability, invest in more scientific research and technology projects, and launch new experiments in strategic litigation. Profiled below are the key pieces of our 2021 agenda.

US Pivot

The new administration opens substantial opportunities for change in Washington. The time is right to demand accountability from Big Tech in the wake of disinformation, conspiracy, and hate speech playing outsized roles in the COVID-19 public health crisis, racial injustice protests, and the 2020 presidential campaign/subsequent insurrection. Going forward there may be room for targeted legislative work on data privacy, as well as a potential path for transformative legislation now that the Senate and House are controlled by the same party. Most promisingly, the Biden administration may open the door for specific actions on antitrust and competition policy in the Justice Department and Federal Trade Commission (some of which are already underway). The new administration's foreign policy team could also use economic diplomacy and trade agreements to help encourage stronger policies in the EU and elsewhere. In the very near-term, we will be focused on documenting evidence from 2020 to build out our policy change agenda and corporate accountability campaigns. Supporting a constellation of organizations working on research, communications, and advocacy to ensure they are more than the sum of their parts will be our consistent goal.

Global South Engagement

Although our policy engagement in 2020 focused on key Western democracies, we are acutely aware that the burden of the most egregious harms of the digital media platforms is borne by people in the Global South whose governments are unable or unwilling to respond effectively. Disinformation has been weaponized in numerous countries with little prospect for a public policy intervention. Indeed, most of the mitigation strategies adopted by Big Tech are limited to major Western countries and English-language content. The role of Facebook in the genocide in Myanmar, for instance, was condemned by the UN and the global community -- yet the practical changes in local digital media markets were utterly insufficient. In response to these failings, we will seek to build partnerships with local organizations to help document the media/democracy problem in key Global South countries in an effort to raise the profile of these cases and develop organizing power to bring direct pressure against the platforms.



Expanding Policy Advocacy

In 2021 we will expand on what we have accomplished with democratic governments around the world -- particularly in countries with upcoming elections and significant geo-political influence. Germany will go to the polls in 2021, and France will be close behind. Both Berlin and Paris are target capitals for us to build partnerships and hire operational staff to advance the Reset policy agenda. Working in these powerful EU member states carries added significance because of their influence on Brussels. In addition, the Canadian government has done some of the most advanced work in developing policies to address platform accountability -- but none of it has yet been put forward as legislation. In each of these cases, we see the opportunity for setting precedents that can be replicated across a variety of countries.

Public Campaigns

Because policy change does not happen in a vacuum, engaging the broader public is a critical component of our work to help build the necessary political capital for lawmakers and regulators to get tough on Big Tech. Public campaigns can also lead to changes in corporate practices and consumer behavior if serious risk of brand damage is created. To this end, we will build on our 2020 partnership with [SumOfUs](#) (one of the leading campaign organizations with a global membership) and create a network of campaign partners. Taking a cue from the climate movement, we will work to bring as many diverse voices as possible into the movement to expose online harms and present solutions (for instance, we are working with [Fix the Glitch](#), one of the few organizations in the UK that focuses on the particular harms experienced by black women in online spaces). Of note, opinion polls increasingly show that the public want large technology platforms to be regulated -- but feel disempowered to discuss the solutions. In 2021, therefore, we want to make strategic investments that advance our policy objectives and help empower key citizen groups to give voice to a positive vision of what the online world could -- and in fact should -- be.

Strategic Litigation

We are currently exploring potential opportunities for strategic litigation against the platforms in the EU, UK, and US. Particularly in Europe, the conditions are very favorable for litigation because the EU has strong baseline legislation that could address each of the three pillars of surveillance capitalism (data tracking, liability protection, and market power). Interestingly, these laws remain largely untested in court -- raising the opportunity to set landmark precedents that could then be applied systematically by the most forward-leaning regulators in the world. The prospects of successful court challenges in the US are less sanguine at this time, but there still may be ways to use this tactic to catalyze popular movements to demand legislative change.

Technology

We plan to build upon our initial [Open Call](#) implementation to further its utility as an integral part of our strategy to deepen and strengthen the global network of technologists addressing threats to media and democracy. Doing so means not only investing in more projects (and increasing the cadence of our review and award process), but also fostering new ideas and building more collaborations between and among like-minded groups and practitioners. We will also continue expanding our practice of putting design, security, and usability resources out into service for the entire community of tech/democracy developers.

Research

Our experience in 2020 revealed that patient investment in research has very significant potential for informing applied work over time in both policy and campaigning. As a result, in 2021 we plan to develop a set of research projects focused on:

- Analysis of the mechanics of how the digital media market works to shape viewpoint, identity, and voting behavior;
- Analysis of how disinformation, conspiracy, and extreme views occupy a share of the media landscape disproportionate to their actual representation in social attitudes;

- Analysis of how disinformation, conspiracy, and extreme views occupy a share of the media landscape disproportionate to their actual representation in social attitudes;
- Analysis of how harmful content is monetized;
- Analysis of the demographics of audiences most engaged with harmful content; and
- Analysis of the media ecosystems for particular audiences and their variance over time.

Going forward, this work will inform not only how we build our policy strategy for 2021, but also how we adapt our work over the years ahead.

Digital Literacy

The experience of pandemic-related disinformation has focused the world's attention on the problem of media and democracy in ways that rise above partisan politics. This personalized shift has made educators interested in understanding surveillance commerce and teaching about its impact on the public sphere. Yet despite all the nascent work that has been done to develop news literacy curricula, very little remains known about what works, what sticks, and what helps in the long term. This area is therefore ripe for further research, and the creation of a community of practice could pay significant future dividends.



Appendix

Policy We Are Changing

Policy change sits at the center of Reset’s work. Almost everything else we do is oriented around legislation and regulation to curb the power of the platforms and open opportunities for a healthier media marketplace. We are focused on harnessing public outrage about the harms of digital media and bringing that energy to bear on the central pillars of the surveillance commerce business model. Weakening any of these in a major market holds the promise of structural reform. In each of the countries where we are most active, there is promising legislative or regulatory action on one or more of these three issues:



Pillar #1: Data Tracking And Content Targeting

Mass surveillance of online user behavior permits the platforms to predict user preferences and sell attention to advertisers. This machine of surveillance commerce externalizes all the costs of this business -- hate speech, disinformation, conspiracy, polarization, etc. -- onto the public. The engine of this machine relies on the absence of data protection law or lax oversight and enforcement.

- **Data Rights:** The platforms should be tightly restricted in how they may collect and use personal data. Sensitive categories of data -- including race, health status, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexuality, etc. -- must be strictly protected, and companies must be limited to collecting and using only that data needed for a specific service. Restrictions on data are the single most important policy to curb the harms of surveillance-based content curation and the distortions of algorithmic amplification.
- **Verification Audits of Algorithms:** The industry argues it is actively policing harmful content on its platform, protecting users from exploitation, and guarding the privacy of users. But the public has no means to verify these claims using actual data. We must therefore establish a comprehensive audit authority both to verify companies are representing their own policies accurately as well as complying with future regulations in privacy, competition, and liability. This is a complex task, but we take such oversight for granted in the banking, pharmaceutical, and automotive sectors.
- **Political Data Use and Advertising:** Citizens have the right to know who is paying to influence their views and how they are doing it. There are few rules governing how political parties may collect and use data about voters, and no oversight policing how this data is used to buy ads on digital platforms. Data use must be strictly controlled and oversight of the political ad business must be increased. Online political advertising must have transparency requirements that label its origin, sponsorship, funding, and targeting.



Pillar #2: Liability Protection

Current law in most countries regards the digital media platforms -- key stewards of the relationship between media and democracy -- as “neutral” platforms that have no editorial responsibility and therefore no liability for what they distribute or its impact on the public.

- **Content Moderation:** Platforms lack adequate controls over the artificial amplification of harmful -- but not illegal -- online content (even when this content violates their own corporate policies). New laws, applied across the dozens of languages in which platforms operate, must curb their incentive to profit from hate and disinformation. These rules should be enforced

in a manner that respects the right of free expression. The regulatory regime should focus on feature/design-based rules to curb such content not through deletion but through controls on artificial amplification.

- **National Security:** State-sponsored efforts to interfere in elections and to shift public opinion of other countries must be addressed by providing a robust means for early-detection and rapid-response. Further, there should be a requirement for transparency and notification to users affected by these nefarious campaigns.



Pillar #3: Concentrated Market Power

The historic concentration of ownership in the information markets gives a small handful of companies control over vast, global information flows with little transparency or oversight -- creating an unprecedented asymmetry of power in the relationship between media gatekeepers and the public.

- **Competition Regulations and Antitrust Reform:** The extreme concentration of digital media market power and centralized control over data needs to be addressed by updating antitrust laws. Competition-enhancing regulations should be adopted and mergers/acquisitions curtailed to allow for the growth of competitors.
- **Digital Services Tax Reform:** Globally, Big Tech has avoided at least \$100 billion in taxes over the past decade. This tax gap needs to be addressed as a method of reducing platform market dominance and providing resources to meet public needs.

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