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If Tech Fails to Design for the Most Vulnerable, It Fails Us All | WIRED

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What do Russian protesters have in common with Twitter users freaked out about Elon Musk reading their DMs and people worried about the criminalization of abortion? It would serve them all to be protected by a more robust set of design practices from companies developing technologies.

Let's back up. Last month, Russian police coerced protesters into unlocking their phones to search for evidence of dissent, leading to arrests and fines. What's worse is that Telegram, one of the main chat-based apps used in Russia, is vulnerable to these searches. Even just having the Telegram app on a personal device might imply that its owner doesn't support the Kremlin's war. But the builders of Telegram have failed to design the app with considerations for personal safety in high-risk environments, and not just in the Russian context. Telegram can thus be weaponized against its users.

Likewise, amid the back and forth about Elon Musk's plan to buy Twitter, many people who use the platform have expressed concerns over his bid to forefront algorithmic content moderation and other design changes on the whim of his $44 billion fancy. Bringing in recommendations from someone with no framework of risk and harms to highly marginalized people leads to proclamations of "authenticating all humans." This seems to be a push to remove online anonymity, something I've written about very personally. It is ill-thought-through, harmful to those most at risk, and backed by no actual methodology or evidence. Beyond his unclear outbursts for changes, Musk's previous actions combined with the existing harms from Twitter's current structures have made it clear that we're heading toward further impacts on marginalized groups, such as Black and POC Twitter users and trans folks. Meanwhile, lack of safety infrastructure is hitting home hard in the US since the leak of the draft Supreme Court's opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson* showing that protections provided under *Roe v. Wade* are mortally under threat. With the projected criminalization of those seeking or providing abortion services, it has become more and more apparent that the tools and technologies most used for accessing vital health care data are insecure and dangerous.

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