

FEBRUARY 2021

DETAILED REPORT

February 2021 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report

FACEBOOK



We're constantly working to find and stop coordinated campaigns that seek to manipulate public debate across our apps.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Over the past three and a half years, we've shared our findings about [coordinated inauthentic behavior](#) we detect and remove from our platforms. As part of our regular CIB reports, we're sharing information about all networks we take down over the course of a month to make it easier for people to see progress we're making in one place.

WHAT IS CIB?

We view CIB as coordinated efforts to manipulate public debate for a strategic goal where fake accounts are central to the operation. There are two tiers of these activities that we work to stop:

- 1) coordinated inauthentic behavior in the context of domestic, non-government campaigns and
- 2) coordinated inauthentic behavior on behalf of a foreign or government actor.

COORDINATED INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR (CIB)

When we find domestic, non-government campaigns that include groups of accounts and Pages seeking to mislead people about who they are and what they are doing while relying on fake accounts, we remove both inauthentic and authentic accounts, Pages and Groups directly involved in this activity.

FOREIGN OR GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE (FGI)

If we find any instances of CIB conducted on behalf of a government entity or by a foreign actor, we apply the broadest enforcement measures including the removal of every on-platform property connected to the operation itself and the people and organizations behind it.

CONTINUOUS ENFORCEMENT

We monitor for efforts to re-establish a presence on Facebook by networks we previously removed. Using both automated and manual detection, we continuously remove accounts and Pages connected to networks we took down in the past.

SUMMARY OF FEBRUARY 2021 FINDINGS

Our teams continue to focus on finding and removing deceptive campaigns around the world — whether they are foreign or domestic. In February, we removed five networks from Thailand, Iran, Morocco and Russia. Two Iranian networks primarily targeted people outside of Iran, and three others — from Thailand, Morocco and Russia — focused on domestic audiences in their respective countries. We have shared information about our findings with industry partners, researchers and policymakers.

In addition to these five networks, in February we also detected and removed attempts to reestablish a presence on Facebook by the military-linked networks we had previously removed for CIB in Myanmar. These repeat violations over the past few years and continuous attempts to circumvent our CIB enforcement were among the factors that led to our broader decision to ban the Myanmar military from Facebook and Instagram, which we [shared](#) last week.

Much of the CIB activity we removed worldwide in February was consistent with what we've seen from various threat actors over the past 3 years, including the prevalence of domestic targeting. The Russia-based network, however, was an interesting example of tactics we often see from spam and financially motivated actors being deployed to mislead people during civic protests. In an attempt to drown out relevant information, this network used hundreds of accounts and mass-posted content with the same hashtags and location tags used by people posting about the protests against the arrest of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and politician. These accounts were automatically detected by our systems and then disabled as fake.

We know that influence operations will keep evolving in response to our enforcement, and new deceptive behaviors will emerge. We will continue to refine our enforcement and share our findings publicly. We are making progress rooting out this abuse, but as we've said before — it's an ongoing effort. We're committed to continually improving to stay ahead. That means building

better technology, hiring more people and working closely with law enforcement, security experts and other companies.

- **Total number of Facebook accounts removed:** 915
- **Total number of Instagram accounts removed:** 606
- **Total number of Pages removed:** 86
- **Total number of Groups removed:** 21

NETWORKS REMOVED IN FEBRUARY 2021:

1. **Thailand:** We removed 77 Accounts, 72 Pages, 18 Groups and 18 Instagram accounts that originated in Thailand and targeted domestic audiences in the Southern provinces of Thailand. Our investigation found links to the Thai Military's Internal Security Operations Command. We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region.
2. **Iran:** We removed 446 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages, 3 Groups and 2 Instagram accounts that originated in Iran and targeted primarily Iraq, and to a lesser extent Israel, the United Kingdom, and Afghanistan. Our investigation found links to individuals in Tehran. We found this network after reviewing public reporting about a handful of its accounts focused on Israel. Our internal investigation uncovered the broader network.
3. **Iran:** We removed 7 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages, and 16 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Iran and targeted both domestic audiences in Iran and also Lebanon, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. Our investigation found links to individuals in Iran with academic backgrounds. We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region.
4. **Morocco:** We removed 385 Facebook accounts, 6 Pages, and 40 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Morocco and targeted domestic audiences. We found this network after reviewing information about a small portion of this activity in the region shared by Amnesty International.
5. **Russia:** We removed 530 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Russia and targeted domestic audiences throughout the recent protests in support of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and opposition politician in Russia. We detected and disabled the vast majority of these accounts, including through automation, as they began posting.

01

We removed 77 Accounts, 72 Pages, 18 Groups and 18 Instagram accounts for violating our policy against [government interference](#) which is [coordinated inauthentic behavior](#) on behalf of a government entity. This network originated in Thailand and targeted domestic audiences in the Southern provinces of Thailand.

The people behind this network used both authentic and fake accounts — some of which had already been detected and disabled by our automated systems — to manage Groups and Pages, including overt military Pages and Pages that weren't openly affiliated with the Thai military. They also posted their content on multiple Pages to make it appear more popular than it was. Some of these fake accounts posed as individuals from Southern provinces of Thailand and also as young women, using stock photos as profile images. The majority of Page posting appeared to have occurred in 2020.

This network posted primarily in Thai about news and current events including content in support of the Thai military and the monarchy, calls for non-violence, regional COVID-19 updates, alleged violence by the insurgent groups in Southern Thailand, and criticism of separatist and independence movements.

We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region. Although the people behind it attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, our investigation found links to the Thai Military's Internal Security Operations Command.

- *Presence on Facebook and Instagram:* 77 Facebook accounts, 72 Pages, 18 Groups and 18 accounts on Instagram.
- *Followers:* About 703,000 accounts followed one or more of these Pages, about 100,000 accounts joined at least one of these Groups and around 2,500 people followed one or more of these Instagram accounts.

- **Advertising:** About \$350 in spending for ads on Facebook and Instagram paid for in Thai baht.

Below is a sample of the content posted by some of these accounts.

หน้าข่าวสามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้
 Feb 17, 2021 7:53pm · 🌐

ยะลา ตานี 2 ใน 14 จว. สุดแกร่ง สู้โควิด - 19 ทั้งนี้ก็เพราะเราช่วยกันดูแลตนเองเป็นอย่างดี ใส่แมส ล้างมือ การ์ดไม่ตก เรดออร์รอด!! เปิด !! 14 จังหวัด สุดแกร่งสู้โควิด-19 ดีไม่แตก 1.ศรีสะเกษ 2.มิ่งกาฬ 3.ยโสธร 4.กาฬสินธุ์ 5.สกลนคร 6.มุกดาหาร 7.แพร่ 8.พะเยา 9.แม่ฮ่องสอน 10.อุทัยธานี 11.พังงา 12.ชุมพร 13.ปัตตานี 14.ยะลา
 อ้างอิงข้อมูลจาก : ศูนย์ข้อมูล COVID 19 สายด่วน โทร 1111 #ศูนย์บริหารสถานการณ์โควิด19 #ศูนย์ข้อมูลCOVID19

Translate

ยะลา ตานี
2 ใน 14 จว. สุดแกร่ง
สู้โควิด - 19

Translation:

Page name: News of the Three Southern Border Provinces

Caption: Yala and Pattani, the top 2 of 14 best provinces against COVID because we help each other. Wear a mask, Wash hands. We will survive!

Here is 14 provinces that there is no COVID: -----list of the 14 provinces-----
 Data by COVID information center

Image overlay: The same first sentence as the caption.: Yala and Pattani, the top 2 of 14 best province against COVID



รู้ทันชนวนการ
Feb 19, 2021 11:27pm · 🌐

NGO ไม่เคยสนใจชาวบ้าน ตาดำๆ เพียงเพราะเขาไม่ใช่ผู้มีบทบาททางสังคม ไม่โด่งดัง คดีไม่สะเทือนขวัญ ไม่คุ้มกับทุนที่ได้รับจากต่างชาติที่จะลงไปดำเนินการใดๆ หรือนี่อาจจะเป็นเสียงที่ไม่ได้ยินสำหรับ NGO

[Translate](#)



Translation:

Page name: Comprehending the operation

Caption: The NGO never cares about ordinary citizens because they have no role in the society. Normal people are not famous. Any case is not a big news. They are not worth the investment from foreigners so they will not do anything to help. This is why we don't see anything from the NGO.

Image overlay: The NGO never cares about ordinary citizens because they have no role nor money.



ความจริงปัตตานีบ้านฉัน
Jan 27, 2021 7:31pm · 🌐

💎💎#ผู้นำศาสนาได้พี่ตว..... พื้นที่ จชต. ไม่ใช่ดาร์ลฮ์บีย(ห้ามทำสงคราม) กรณีที่แนวร่วมโจรได้ฯ ได้ปลุกกระแสการต่อสู้ในพื้นที่ 3 จังหวัดนั้น โดยสร้างแนวคิดให้กับประชาชนเห็นว่า เราอยู่ภายใต้การปกครองของต่างชาติ บังบอกว่าไม่ได้รับความเป็นธรรม ให้ประชาชนชาวมาลายูลุกขึ้น(ญิฮาด)ต่อสู้เพื่อศาสนา เพื่อปลดแอกดินแดนอิสลาม ถือว่าผิดหลักการศาสนาอย่างชัดเจน! เพราะผู้นำศาสนาในพื้นที่ จชต. ได้พี่ตวไปแล้วว่า... พื้นที่แห่งนี้ไม่ใช่ดาร์ลฮ์บีย (ไม่ใช่พื้นที่ที่ต้องทำสงคราม) เพราะการที่จะตั้งญิฮาด (ต่อสู้ในหนทางศาสนา) นั้น จะต้องพิจารณาเรื่องหลักๆ ดังนี้ คือ - ศาสนาอิสลามได้รับการคุ้มครองหรือไม่, - มุสลิมมีสิทธิพลเมืองและมีส่วนร่วมในการปกครองประเทศหรือไม่, - ดินแดนอันเป็นที่อยู่อาศัยและทำมาหากินของมุสลิมยังคงเป็นกรรมสิทธิ์ของมุสลิม โดยสมบูรณ์หรือไม่, - การเผยแพร่ศาสนาอิสลามและเสรีภาพในการนับถือศาสนาถูกกีดกันหรือถูกคุกคามกตัญหรือไม่ เป็นต้น เพราะฉะนั้นเมื่อสัญลักษณ์ เอกลักษณ์ของความเป็นอิสลามยังคงอยู่ในพื้นที่ จชต. เมื่อนั้นพื้นที่นี้ก็ไม่ใช่พื้นที่ดาร์ลฮ์บีย(พื้นที่สงคราม)อย่างแน่นอน...

Translate



Translation:

Page name: Truth about my home, Pattani

Caption: Muslim leader declares southern border is a peace zone. The southern separatists started a movement by spreading the idea that Thailand is under control by different believers so that people would come and fight for their religion. This was declared that the action clearly violates Islam faith.

The local Muslim leader declares that the area is a peace zone (war prohibiting zone). The factor for Jihad are: - Is Islam is protected? - Does Muslims have their part in governing? - Does Muslim own the land or the business? - Are there freedom to spread the word of Islam? If Islam still hold their identity in the southern border, there can be no religious warfare.

Image overlay: Southern border is not Jihad zone.

02

We removed 446 Facebook accounts, four Pages, three Groups and two Instagram accounts for violating our policy against [foreign interference](#) which is [coordinated inauthentic behavior](#) on behalf of a foreign entity. This network originated in Iran and targeted primarily Iraq, and to a lesser extent Israel, the United Kingdom and Afghanistan.

We identified several clusters of activity within this network. The vast majority of it was consistent with what we previously found and reported from various Iran-linked CIB networks. The people behind it used fake accounts — many of which had already been detected and disabled by our automated systems — to create fictitious personas posing as locals in the countries they targeted, friend people, comment on other people’s posts and manage a handful of Pages. This activity was primarily carried out by fake accounts, rather than Pages or Groups, and it appears to have been active on and off starting March 2020 and into 2021. Notably, all accounts in the network did not post on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in February 2021. This network had nearly no engagement on our platform.

The people behind this activity posted memes, political cartoons and other content in Arabic, English, Pashto and Hebrew about news and domestic politics in each targeted country, including Scottish independence from the UK, criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and US influence in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also briefly mentioned news about COVID-19.

We found this network after reviewing public reporting about a handful of its accounts focused on Israel. Our internal investigation uncovered the broader network. Although the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, our investigation found links to individuals in Tehran.

- *Presence on Facebook and Instagram:* 446 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages, 3 Groups and 2 accounts on Instagram.
- *Followers:* About 400 accounts followed one or more of these Pages, about 20 accounts joined at least one of these Groups and 0 people followed these Instagram accounts.

Below is a sample of the content posted by some of these Pages:



Translation:

Caption: The Central Bank of Iraq is clamping down on the people to plunder their wealth.



Translation:

Caption: The Taliban and America are united against Afghanistan.



03

We removed seven Facebook accounts, four Pages and 16 Instagram accounts for violating our policy against [foreign interference](#) which is [coordinated inauthentic behavior](#) on behalf of a foreign entity. This network originated primarily in Iran and targeted both domestic audiences in Iran and also Lebanon, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates.

The people behind this network used fake accounts to create fictitious personas posing as geopolitical analysts and authors, post content and drive people to off-platform channels on other internet services. At least one fictitious persona in this network published an op-ed in an online newspaper, which was amplified by several Iranian news outlets. They also created fan Pages for these fake personas, in addition to creating Pages posing as news organizations in the countries they targeted while operating from Iran. These Pages were primarily created in the second half of 2020 and had nearly no following on Facebook. The accounts used stock photos as their profile images.

The people behind this activity posted memes and political cartoons in Arabic and Farsi about news and current events the countries targeted. In Iran, they posted commentary supportive of the Iranian government, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In other countries, this network primarily focused on posting in support of Iranian foreign policy and criticism of Saudi Arabia and the United States.

We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region. Although the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, our investigation found links to individuals in Iran with academic backgrounds.

- *Presence on Facebook and Instagram:* 7 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages, and 16 accounts on Instagram.
- *Followers:* About 1,100 accounts followed one or more of these Pages and around 13,000 people followed one or more of these Instagram accounts.

Below is a sample of the content posted by some of these Pages.



Translation:

Caption: A new article in which I talk about the crisis of government formation in Lebanon, the positions of political parties, the political future of a country suffering from an economic collapse, and the decline of the political elite. Do not forget to engage [with the post]. Thank you dear friends"

Link caption: Fatima Awad Al-Jubouri: The crisis of government formation and the struggle between political parties ... Save Lebanon before it is too late



Translation:

America is crushing the Iraqi people by playing with devaluing the dinar. America is behind this decrease and makes life more difficult for people #dinar #Iraqi dinar



Translation:

Caption: Vatican's Pope travels to Iraq to apologize to the Iraqi people for the American atrocities and Bush's crusade that led to the bloodshed of hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis, including Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites.

04

We removed 385 Facebook accounts, 6 Pages and 40 Instagram accounts for violating our policy against [coordinated inauthentic behavior](#). This network originated primarily in Morocco and targeted domestic audiences.

The people behind this network used fake accounts — some of which had already been detected and disabled by our automated systems — to post in multiple Groups at once to make their content appear more popular than it was. They also frequently used these accounts to comment on news and pro-government stories from various news outlets including ChoufTV.

The people behind this activity posted memes and other content primarily in Arabic and French about news and current events in Morocco including praise for the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic, its diplomatic initiatives, Moroccan security forces, King Mohammed VI and the director of the General Directorate for Territorial Surveillance. They also frequently posted criticism of King's opposition, human rights organizations and dissidents.

We found this network after reviewing information about a small portion of this activity in the region shared by Amnesty International.

- *Presence on Facebook and Instagram:* 385 Facebook accounts, 6 Pages, and 40 accounts on Instagram.
- *Followers:* About 150,000 accounts followed one or more of these Pages and around 2,500 people followed one or more of these Instagram accounts.

Below is a sample of the content posted by some of these Pages.



Translation:

Image overlay: You are in our heart.



Translation:

Betrayal of your country is a grave and unforgivable crime. No traitors among us.

05

We removed 530 Instagram accounts for violating our policy against [coordinated inauthentic behavior](#). This network originated primarily in Russia and targeted domestic audiences throughout the recent protests in support of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and politician in Russia. We detected and disabled the vast majority of these accounts, including through automation, as they began posting.

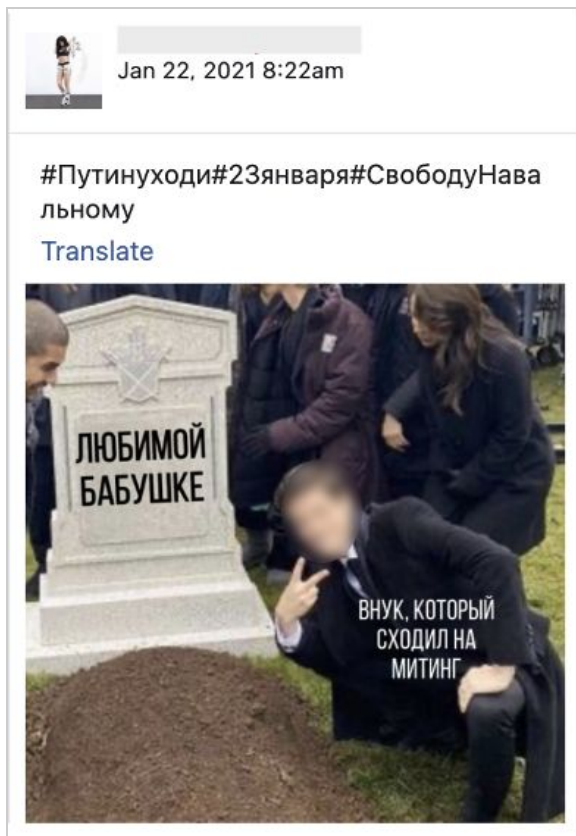
The people behind this activity relied on recently created fake accounts to engage in what we call “hashtag poisoning” and “location poisoning.” This refers to posting large volumes of irrelevant or critical content with particular hashtags and location tags to drown out relevant information and redirect the conversation. Some of these hashtags included: #Путинуходи, #23января, #СвободуНавальному (#PutinLeave, #23January, #FreeNavalny). Some of the location tags included places where protesters planned to gather in Moscow and Saint Petersburg on January 23 and January 31, and later near Moscow City Court. These accounts used celebrity photos and profile photos likely generated using machine learning techniques like generative adversarial networks (GAN). These accounts appeared to have been created in bulk and purchased.

This network posted memes in Russian including about a Russian TikTok celebrity, criticism of pro-Navalny protests, claims of large numbers of minors attending the rallies and also advertising of women’s clothes and handbags.

We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior surrounding the protests in Russia in 2021.

- *Presence on Facebook and Instagram:* 530 accounts on Instagram.
- *Followers:* About 55,000 accounts followed one or more of these Instagram accounts.

Below is a sample of the content posted by some of these Pages.



Translation:

#PutinLeave, #23January, #FreeNavalny

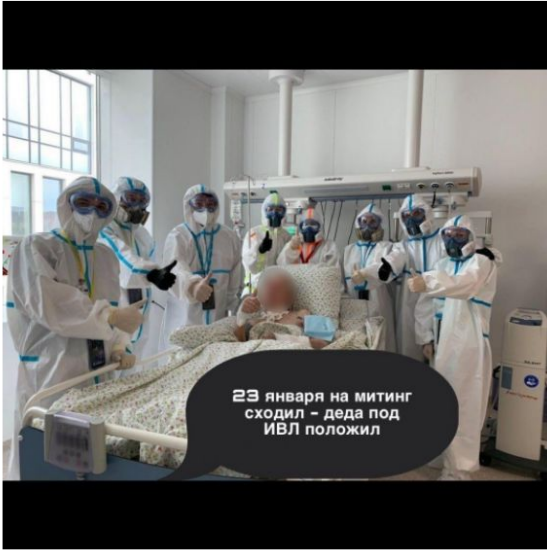
Image overlay: Beloved grandmother
Grandson who attended protests



Jan 22, 2021 8:23am

#Путинуходи#23января#СвободуНавал
ьному

[Translate](#)



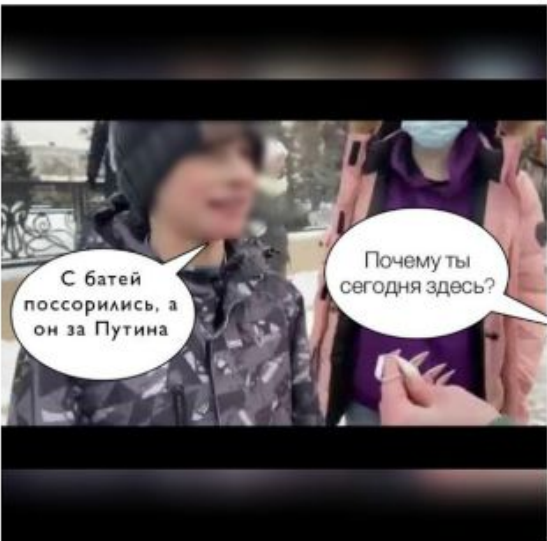
Translation:

Caption: #PutinLeave, #23January, #FreeNavalny

Image overlay: Went to the protest on January 23 - now grandfather is on ventilator



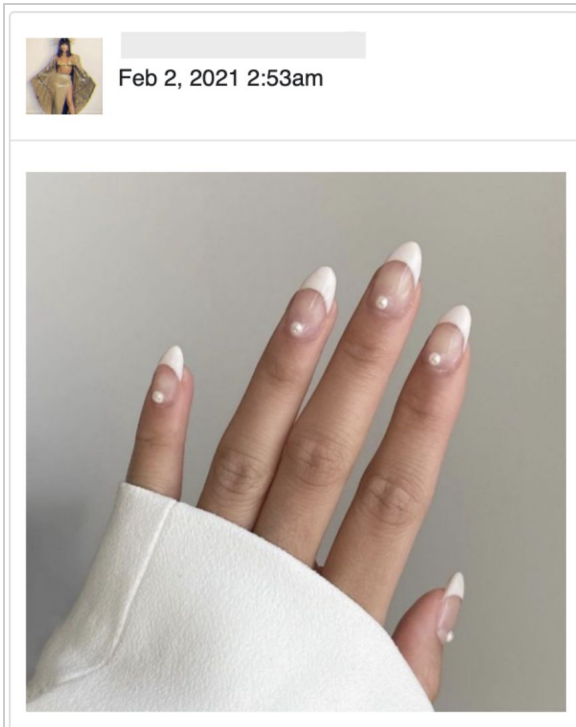
Jan 31, 2021 6:50am



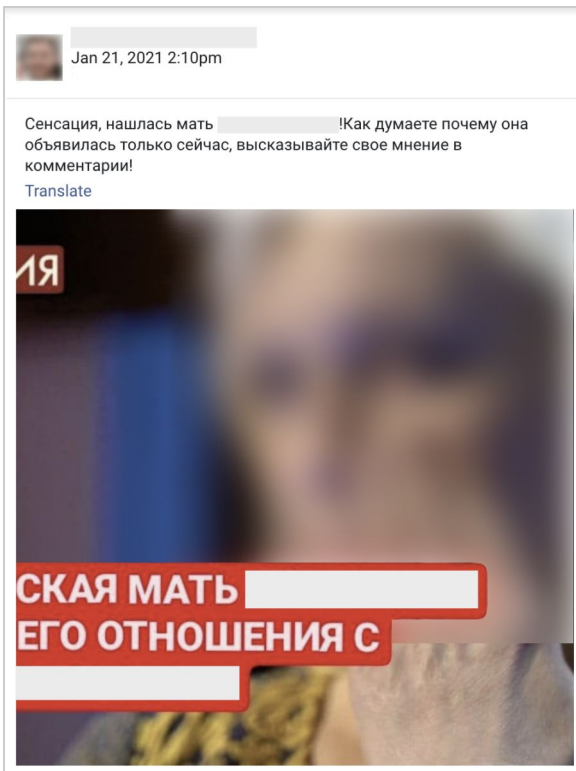
Translation:

Caption: Why are you here today?
Had an argument with dad over Putin

с батей поспорились, а он за путина почему ты сегодня здесь?



Geotag used: Moscow City Court (Moscow)



Translation:

The mother of [a TikTok celebrity] has been found! Why do you think she only appeared now? Leave your take in comments!

Geotag used: Red Square (Moscow)



Jan 31, 2021 7:42am

КОГДА БАТЯ ИЗ РОСГВАРДИИ, А ТЫ
СКАЗАЛ, ЧТО БУДЕШЬ В ШКОЛЕ



И ДАЛИ ПО ЖОПЕ НЕ ТОЛЬКО
НА МИТИНГЕ, НО И ДОМА

Translation:

When Dad is from the Russian National
Guard, and you said you'd be in school
[Photo]

Got spanked not only at the protest, but at
home too

Geotag used: Pushkin Square (Moscow)