

Three-week-old Biden disinformation task force 'paused'

10 hours ago

Department of Homeland Security seal



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The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has "paused" a controversial task force on disinformation.

Critics pilloried the Disinformation Governance Board when it launched three weeks ago, warning it would be used to censor free speech.

On Wednesday, its director Nina Jankowicz resigned citing "vile personal attacks and physical threats".

In a statement, Ms Jankowicz said the board's future was "uncertain".

The task force has sparked a massive outcry - largely from the right, but also from civil society - ever since its creation on 27 April.

DHS officials said the board was intended to coordinate and standardise its disinformation-related work, ensuring it "protects free speech, civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy".

But civil liberties and human rights groups such as Protect Democracy and the Electronic Frontier Foundation objected to a lack of clarity over the group's mission, [warning last month](#) that DHS has a "poor track record" on issues of privacy and free speech rights.

Republicans, both moderate and further right, have also expressed concern that the board's work, which is taking place under a Democratic administration, could be weaponised against conservatives.

Critics have derided the board as "the Ministry of Truth", from George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984.

Ms Jankowicz, 33, whom the Biden administration touted as a well-known expert in the field, has been a particular focus of abuse and mockery online. Social media users have attacked her left-leaning politics and lampooned [a song she posted on TikTok about disinformation](#).

Nina Jankowicz

Nina Jankowicz / Twitter

Nina Jankowicz resigned as director of the Disinformation Governance Board on Wednesday

Drawing fire from many corners, the homeland security department's leadership was forced to repeatedly defend the board's work.

In testimony before the US Senate earlier this month, DHS chief Alejandro Mayorkas assured lawmakers the group was "not the truth police", but acknowledged its roll-out had been "sub-optimal" and caused confusion.

A spokesperson told the BBC on Wednesday the task force has now been suspended, saying "false attacks have become a significant distraction" from the agency's work.

"The board's purpose has been grossly and intentionally mischaracterised. It was never about censorship or policing speech in any manner. Quite the opposite: it was designed to ensure we fulfil our mission to protect the homeland, while protecting core Constitutional rights," the statement

continues.

An internal advisory council will now review the board's work and make a recommendation within the next 75 days on its future.