

2018: The Year Social Media Is Censored

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

The year 2018 has opened with an international campaign to censor the Internet. It should be of little wonder that this was going to happen. The writing was on the wall. All over the world, the tech giants are now giving in to the political demands of governments by cracking down on freedom of speech. The European Convention on Human Rights, like so many agreements in the US, UK are swept aside. There is a full scale attempt to muzzle social media and it's working.

Britain is by no means a paragon a virtue. Last September **Theresa May** threatened the social media giants that they must take down material the government does not approve of. It starts with listing terrorism as the main driver of these demands of course, but it won't end there. [David Cameron](#) wanted to ban material that might be involved in rioting. Then criminal activity. Mission creep is what it is all about.

Bloomberg, the financial news service, published "[Welcome to 2018, the Year of Censored Social Media](#)," which began with the simple observation,

"This year, don't count on the social networks to provide its core service: an uncensored platform for every imaginable view. The censorship has already begun, and it'll only get heavier."

Developments over the past week include:

- On January 1, the German government began implementation of its "Network Enforcement Law," which threatens social media companies with fines of up to €50 million if they do not immediately remove content deemed objectionable. Both German trade groups and the United Nations have warned that the law will incentivize technology companies to ban protected speech.
- On January 3, French President Emmanuel Macron vowed to introduce a ban during election cycles on what he called "fake news" in a further crackdown on free speech on top of the draconian measures implemented under the state of emergency. The moves by France and Germany have led to renewed calls for a censorship law applying to the entire European Union.
- On December 28, the *New York Times* reported that Facebook had deleted the account of Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic, nominally because he had been added to a US sanctions list. As the American Civil Liberties Union pointed out, this creates a precedent for giving the US government essentially free rein to block freedom of expression all over the world simply by putting individuals on an economic sanctions list.
- This week, Iranian authorities blocked social media networks, including

Instagram, which were being used to organize demonstrations against inequality and unemployment.

- Facebook has continued its crackdown on Palestinian Facebook accounts, removing over 100 accounts at the request of Israeli officials.

These moves come in the wake of the decision by the Trump administration to abolish net neutrality, giving technology companies license to censor and block access to websites and services.

In August, the [World Socialist Web Site](#) first reported that the world's biggest search engine (Clue - it begins with G) was censoring left-wing, anti-war, and progressive websites. When it implemented changes to its search algorithms, the company claimed they were politically neutral, aimed only at elevating "more authoritative content" and demoting "blatantly misleading, low quality, offensive or downright false information."

Countless other websites continue to report significantly depressed levels of search traffic throughout last year with little sign that this will change. Eventually, these tactics will force more and more independent outlets out of business.

Bloomberg went on to say

"There's a [growing](#) body of research that shows the internet platforms' business models are conducive to the spread of fake news, as well as hate speech. Regulators should resist the urge to waste time on individual cases in Germany and elsewhere and instead of strike at the fundamentals of the problem: anonymity. Without it, the Facebooks of the world would have a far more difficult time inflating user numbers, avoiding legal responsibility for published content, and continuing to make money off content they don't help create. The limitations of selective censorship and the ability of paid trolls and dedicated activists to bypass it will become obvious this year — and so will the need for better ways to make sure the social media companies join the ranks of responsible media."

wsws.org says:

"Now, no one can claim that the major technology giants are not carrying out a widespread and systematic campaign of online censorship, in close and active coordination with powerful states and intelligence agencies."

The ruling elites all over the world are meeting this technological pressure with an attempt to stifle and suppress freedom of expression on the Internet, under the false pretence of fighting "fake news" and "foreign propaganda." The trouble is - they are winning.

The effort to muzzle social media and free speech should be resisted, but that resistance shows no sign of rising to the challenge.

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