

Viewpoint Censorship on the Internet

National Religious Broadcasters launched Internet Freedom Watch to bring greater attention to online censorship, challenge Silicon Valley to uniformly practice its professed commitment to free speech, and explore possible public policy options that may exist to address the loss of internet freedom.

This timeline illustrates examples of suppression of Christian and conservative views on the internet by private corporations that are not constrained by the First Amendment. The timeline is not exhaustive, but merely representative. For an updated timeline, visit InternetFreedomWatch.org.

December 2018

Franklin Graham gets 24-hour Facebook ban for 2016 post asserting biblical values on gender in response to singer Bruce Springsteen's cancellation of North Carolina concert. **Facebook** later said the ban was a mistake and apologized to Graham.

November 2018

Radio talk show host and former congressional candidate Jesse Kelly banned from **Twitter** without any explanation.

Instagram deletes an image by Founders Ministries, "Only Men Can Be Pastors," claiming the post was "hate speech."

October 2018

U.S. Senate candidate from Tennessee Marsha Blackburn's ad, "Stop The Mob," rejected by **Google Ads** as "shocking content."

Facebook rejects pro-life ads by Susan B. Anthony List about babies born prematurely.

August 2018

PragerU announces that it is being "heavily censored" on **Facebook** after videos were blocked as "hate speech." Facebook later apologized and restored the content

Because it "related to politics or an issue of national importance," **Facebook** denies an ad that Steven Solomon, a pastor and Army veteran, wished to use to promote his radio program that said, "Speak the truth, Love God, Defend America"

Facebook suspends popular blogger Elizabeth Johnston ("The Activist Mommy") for unspecified "hate speech." Facebook later apologized and restored content it had removed

July 2018

Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.) confirms that he filed an FEC complaint against **Twitter** due to an apparent shadow ban of his account. Reps. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), Mark Meadows (N.C.), and Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) were reportedly also so treated by Twitter

June 2018

Facebook blocks Dr. Robert Gagnon, previously on the faculty of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, for criticizing a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation video that promoted homosexuality and nudity to young children

- May 2018 ● **Amazon** denies Alliance Defending Freedom access to its charitable AmazonSmile program based on a categorization of the controversial Southern Poverty Law Center
- April 2018 ● **Facebook** rejects an ad from Franciscan University of Steubenville featuring the historic San Damiano Cross because it was deemed “shocking, sensational, or excessively violent”
- January 2018 ● Google’s **YouTube** flags and deletes the live stream of NRBTv for an unspecified Community Guidelines violation. YouTube also inflicts a three-month strike on NRBTv’s account
- November 2017 ● **Twitter** informs radio talk show host Erick Erickson that his tweet related to the debate about transgenderism “has been flagged for possible violations” of its “hateful conduct policy and/or German laws”
- October 2017 ● **Twitter** blocks a political ad Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) attempted to promote because it deemed her reference to Planned Parenthood’s documented “sale of baby body parts” to be “inflammatory”
- August 2017 ● Google’s **YouTube** demonetizes hundreds of videos produced by Dr. Michael Brown, host of Line of Fire radio show, and targets “controversial religious” content
- July 2017 ● **Twitter** blocks tweets and retweets of AT&T’s public policy blog expressing an opinion contrary to its own during a “Day of Action” supporting “common carrier” Title II federal regulation over internet service providers
- **Facebook** temporarily blocks more than 20 pages of Catholic organizations and individuals followed by millions worldwide
- May 2017 ● **Twitter** makes Live Action, a pro-life organization, ineligible to advertise on its platform until removal of “offensive” content
- March 2017 ● Citing disagreement with views expressed in four videos by Pure Passion TV on sexuality, **Vimeo** removes all 850 videos of the ministry and closes its account
- January 2017 ● **Amazon** denies D. James Kennedy Ministries access to its charitable AmazonSmile program based on a categorization of the controversial Southern Poverty Law Center
- October 2016 ● Prager University announces that Google’s **YouTube** is censoring many of its educational videos by placing them in “restricted mode,” which flags and prevents them from being accessed freely
- July 2016 ● Google’s **YouTube** temporarily blocks a Center for Security Policy video critical of the Muslim Brotherhood, jihad, and Sharia law
- May 2016 ● Gizmodo, a technology blog, reports evidence of **Facebook** workers censoring conservative content off of and injecting preferred articles into its influential trending news feed

November 2015

Facebook blocks postings by Vanderbilt University professor, Dr. Carol Swain, for over 26 hours after liberal student activists organized complaints about her religious and moral viewpoints

Google's **YouTube** terminates account of Olive Tree Ministries after the ministry posted an interview about persecution of Christians in the Middle East. YouTube reinstated the account 3 days later after media inquiries

August 2015

Facebook temporarily blocks user postings about a report on illegal immigration by the Center for Immigration Studies

April 2015

Responding to pressure from complaints, **GoFundMe** deletes fundraising campaigns for Sweet Cakes by Melissa and Arlene's Flowers — companies that had declined to provide services for same-sex weddings — and then changed its terms of service to support its decision

October 2014

Twitter blocks users from linking to a petition supporting the Houston pastors whose sermons were subpoenaed by the city because the pastors supported a referendum against a gender-neutral restrooms ordinance

April 2014

Citing a violation of its Community Standards, **Facebook** removes satirical post about immigration and Nevada rancher standoff by FOX's Todd Starnes

March 2014

Facebook temporarily bans evangelist Ray Comfort after he posts a photo of Westboro Baptist Church signs in an article in which Comfort encourages Christians to distance themselves from Westboro

After the number of "shares" his stories receive on **Facebook** drastically drop, Lt. Col. Allen West blogs about whether Facebook is just promoting sponsored stories or is actually censoring conservative content

December 2013

Twitter blocks users from posting a link to a petition drive supporting Phil Robertson who had been suspended from the Duck Dynasty show by A&E after voicing his biblically-based views on homosexuality

August 2013

Citing a violation of Community Standards regarding religion, **Facebook** temporarily blocks administrators of the Military with PTSD page

Summer 2013

Citing a violation of its Community Standards, **Facebook** puts a 12-hour suspension on the page of a UNC-Wilmington professor making arguments against same-sex marriage

July 2013

Citing a violation of its Community Standards because of a post which favorably mentioned the NRA, Chick-fil-A, Paula Deen, Cracker Barrel, the Gaithers, and the Gideon Bible, **Facebook** removes the post and temporarily blocks access to the account of Todd Starnes, host of FOX News & Commentary

Apple selectively decides its iOS software dictionary function will not auto-correct certain controversial words like "virginity," "fornicate," "drunken," or "abortion"

- June 2013 ● Citing its policy against “excessively objectionable or crude content,” **Apple** removes from its App Store a Setting Captives Free app that promotes freedom from homosexuality
- March 2013 ● **Facebook** reportedly bans a Texas man for posting the phrase “seize the day with baby Obama,” while leaving up posts calling for the killing of Sarah Palin
- January 2013 ● **Facebook** threatens content control by issuing warnings or temporarily suspending bloggers’ accounts for alleged “spam” when bloggers simply shared content on multiple like-minded pages

Citing “security concerns,” **Facebook** temporarily closes the page of an Israeli journalist after he posted criticism of the Palestinian Authority, restores the page 24 hours later, but deletes the article in question

Citing a violation of its Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, **Facebook** removes a post by Chicks on the Right that was critical of the White House press secretary
- October 2012 ● **Facebook** removes a post critical of President Obama’s handling of the Benghazi attack and puts a 24-hour block on the account of Special Operations Speaks PAC
- July 2012 ● **Facebook** temporarily removes Gov. Mike Huckabee’s post in support of Chick-fil-A
- May 2012 ● Google’s **YouTube** pulls video of a youth minister who warned of the same-sex marriage movement in America
- November 2010 ● **Apple** removes Chuck Colson’s Manhattan Declaration from its iTunes App Store

About the John Milton Project

Internet Freedom Watch is an expansion of NRB’s pioneering work in establishing the John Milton Project for Free Speech in 2011, which first raised concerns about internet censorship and urged Silicon Valley to adopt the Free Speech Charter for the Internet, a model to serve the interests of both free speech and free enterprise.



A project of the National Religious Broadcasters