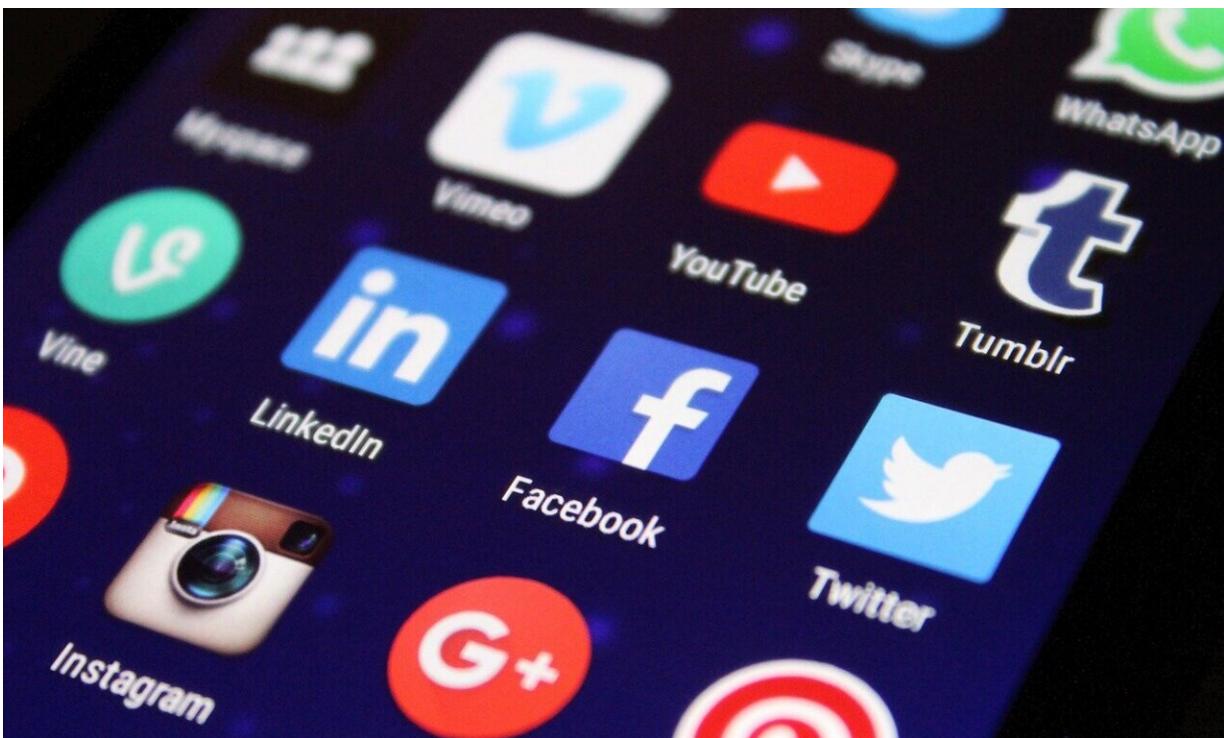


Do Facebook, Twitter and YouTube censor conservatives? Claims 'not supported by the facts,' new research says

February 2 2021, by Jessica Guynn



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Despite repeated charges of anti-conservative bias from former President Trump and other GOP critics, Facebook, Twitter and Google's YouTube are not slanted against right-leaning users, a new report out of

New York University found.

Like previous research, "[False Accusation: The Unfounded Claim that Social Media Companies Censor Conservatives](#)," concludes that, rather than censoring conservatives, [social media](#) platforms amplify their voices.

"Republicans, or more broadly conservatives, have been spreading a form of disinformation on how they're treated on social media. They complain they're censored and suppressed but, not only is there not evidence to support that, what evidence exists actually cuts in the other direction," said Paul Barrett, deputy director of the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights, which released the report Monday.

The report lands as a unifying argument is taking shape that major forces in American society—big media, big government, big business—are muzzling conservatives. That argument intensified after the major social media platforms suspended Trump out of fear he would incite violence following the U.S. Capitol attack.

"There is a broad campaign going on from the right to argue that they're being silenced or cast aside, and that spirit is what is helping to feed the extremism that we are seeing in our country right now," Barrett said.

"We can't just allow that to be a debating point. It's not legitimate. It's not supported by the facts."

Many groups across the [political spectrum](#) feel their opinions and perspectives are under siege when social media platforms moderate content, researchers say, but it's difficult to make the case that these platforms are biased against any one group since the platforms disclose so little about how they decide what content is allowed and what is not.

For their part, Facebook and Twitter say their platforms strike a balance

between promoting free expression and removing hate, abuse and misinformation. They acknowledge making enforcement errors but insist their policies are applied fairly to everyone.

Conservative author Denise McAllister does not see it that way. And she's called on the social media platforms to stop moderating speech altogether.

"This is a [platform](#), right? You don't need to act like mama Twitter or mama Facebook. Just let people say what they are going to say, whether it's true, false, whatever," she recently told U.S. TODAY. "You have to just trust the people as individuals and not to try to impose power because you are going to do it inconsistently."

CEO Mark Zuckerberg said last week that Facebook would no longer recommend political and civic groups to users and would downplay politics in people's News Feeds.

Vast majority of conservatives say social media censors them

A recent poll shows that majorities in both parties think political censorship is likely occurring on social media, but that belief is most prevalent on the political right.

Nine in 10 Republicans and independents who lean toward the Republican Party say it's at least somewhat likely that social media platforms censor political viewpoints they find objectionable, up slightly from 85% in 2018, according to an August report from the Pew Research Center.

The perception that social media platforms censor conservatives is

regularly circulated by Fox News hosts, GOP lawmakers in congressional hearings and online pundits. That, in turn, has intensified GOP calls to reform Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which shields social media companies from legal liability for what their users post and gives platforms immunity when moderating "objectionable" content.

Democrats, including Biden, criticize pandemic, election misinformation

Bipartisan support to restrain the vast power held by a handful of large corporations grew during the Trump administration and shows no signs of ebbing as Democrats retake the White House.

Social media platforms have been judged harshly by both parties for how they policed content over the past year, from the COVID-19 pandemic to election-related misinformation and disinformation.

Democrats, including Biden, say the [social media platforms](#) don't restrict or remove enough harmful content, particularly hate speech, extremism, hoaxes and falsehoods. They have called on companies to play a bigger and more responsible role in curating public debate.

Those on the right say these platforms have too much latitude to restrict and remove content and target conservatives based on their political beliefs.

Those grievances boiled over when Facebook, Twitter and YouTube suspended Trump's accounts, citing the risk that he would use his social [media](#) megaphone to incite more violence before the end of his term.

After being permanently suspended from Twitter, Trump accused the

company of "banning free speech" in cahoots with "the Democrats and Radical Left."

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