

Resolved: Social media companies pose a threat to free speech.

Background: The First Amendment protects our freedom of speech- explicitly protecting individuals from government censorship. Privately owned social media companies have the right to restrict what content is published on their services, but their power and influence in public discourse have grown. For example, Twitter has begun flagging posts deemed misleading and notably banned Former President Trump from its service in early January. Last May, Former President Trump signed an executive order that would have allowed the federal government to assume oversight of political speech on the internet. This executive order would have allowed the federal government to hold social media companies liable for posts made on their platforms. Finally, it is not only the companies themselves raising concern over free speech infringement: US foreign adversaries have used techniques like “troll armies” and “reverse censorship” that weaponize information and can be particularly harmful to democracy. As social media becomes even more ubiquitous in our daily lives, it is important to reexamine our censorship laws and how speech is treated online.

Resources:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/05/28/trump-social-media-executive-order/>

<https://time.com/5770755/threat-free-speech-online/>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2018/09/21/regulating-free-speech-on-social-media-is-dangerous-and-futile/>

<https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/first-amendment-center/primers/free-expression-on-social-media/>

<https://knightcolumbia.org/content/how-twitter-killed-free-speech>