

## FACEBOOK, GOOGLE, AND CENSORSHIP

Facebook and Google have a long history of unevenly applied censorship, targeting those on the political right and those espousing Judeo-Christian values.

In September 2011, for example, the National Religious Broadcasters released a 43-page report on the anti-Christian bias exhibited by the most influential Internet platforms and service providers, including Google and Facebook.

Here are some examples of this biased treatment:

### FACEBOOK

- In 2012, Facebook removed a post from former Gov. Mike Huckabee, supporting Chick-Fil-A's stance on traditional marriage. (*OneNewsNow*, 12/10/2017)
- In January 2012, Facebook intentionally tampered with almost 700,000 Facebook users' News Feeds, skewing them to be positive or negative in order to manipulate the emotional response of those users. While likely legal, the ethics of the study were called into question. (*The Atlantic*, 6/28/2014)
- In 2015, Facebook locked Catholic Online out of its Facebook pages, blocking the administrators as well. Although the account was eventually restored, no explanation was ever given for the months-long outage. (*Catholic Online*, 7/19/2017)
- In September 2015, German chancellor Angela Merkel called upon Mark Zuckerberg to suppress "anti-immigration" posts from German users, and he complied. (*Breitbart*, 2/5/2016)
- In February 2016, Facebook allowed anti-Israel posts but censored anti-Palestine posts. (*Breitbart*, 2/5/2016)
- In February 2016, British journalist Arthur Murray detailed Facebook's "war on free speech," including its policy to "remove hate speech" and posts that "promote xenophobia," primarily in Germany but also in other countries. He argued that Facebook staff would likely remove speech they deemed racist, not only that which is universally considered such. (*Gatestone Institute*, 2/5/2016)

- In May 2016, conservative pundit Steven Crowder announced his intent to sue Facebook for "targeted censorship." He, along with Glenn Beck, Ted Cruz, and others, was listed in the Gizmodo Facebook whistle-blower leak that revealed employees suppressed conservative news, including popular figures. (*Western Journalism.com*, 5/10/16)
- In May 2016, the *Wall Street Journal* published a study which indicated that Facebook manipulates the news seen by users depending on their political views—resulting in ideological "echo chambers" in which users see only or mostly what news aligns with their views. (*Wall Street Journal*, 5/18/2016)
- In May 2016, anonymous former and current Facebook employees admitted to Gizmodo that they were not allowed to publish conservative news stories unless a comparable story ran from a mainstream media organization, such as CNN, BBC, and USA Today. (*Gizmodo*, 5/19/16)
- In May 2016, Facebook came under fire after reports that it suppressed conservative views from and inserted liberal news stories into its "trending topics" feature, a major source of news for many users. A former Facebook employee, citing the mostly liberal staff, confirmed that "if a source came up that may have been less credible to a liberal reviewer—like Breitbart...it would require more extensive secondary sourcing...If there was an article that came from a more liberal-slanted publication...[it] was a more viable topic." (*Digiday*, 8/30/2016)
- In August 2016, Canadian conservative activist Lauren Southern was initially banned from Facebook for 30 days after she complained about the site censoring conservative thought; the ban was later reversed. (*The Hill*, 10/26/2016)
- In October 2016, Facebook staffers made news when they pushed for the removal of President Donald Trump's posts calling for stricter immigration restrictions for Muslim-majority countries; this was later overruled by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg. (*The Verge*, 10/26/2016)
- In July 2017, Facebook removed two dozen popular Catholic Facebook pages, across several countries and languages, with no explanation. Many of these pages had millions of followers. Some pages included Fr. Rocky at Relevant Radio, with 4 million followers, "Catholic and Proud," with 6 million followers, and "Jesus and Mary," with 1.7 million followers. Twenty-one of the pages were Brazil-based, and the other four were

English-language pages based in the U.S. and Africa. The personal pages of the administrators for these groups were also blocked; one page admin received a notification that his account had been blocked for "suspicious activity." (*Catholic News Agency, 7/18/2017*) A day later, Facebook unblocked the pages and blamed it on "spam detection." (*Fox News 7/19/2017*) However, many speculate that anti-Catholicism was behind the shutdown, as only certain popular Catholic pages were targeted. (*Breitbart, 7/19/2017*)

- In December 2017, Facebook temporarily shut down the page Warriors for Christ, "because of [its] biblical stance on marriage...articles on statistics, Bible versus [sic], and memes that exposed the hypocrisy of the left." They suggested that Facebook's choice to remove the page at 5:00 p.m. on Friday December 29th was a deliberate move, hoping that the group wouldn't notice the removal before the holiday weekend. Like many conservative groups, Warriors for Christ has received numerous death threats, which have never been censored by Facebook. Facebook had also previously banned the group for 30 days for posting a picture of a warrior angel. (*News World Communications, 1/8/2018*)
- In January 2018, Fox News' Todd Starnes reported that, according to analytical data obtained from his Facebook page, "barely 5,000 of our followers" are able to see his content, despite having over 255,000 followers. He also cited a recent incident when Facebook blocked his page and removed a post of him which invoked Paula Deen, the NRA, and Jesus, in which he said he was "politically incorrect and happy as a June bug." He also said he was unable to post Bible verses. (*Fox News, 1/15/2018*)
- In January 2018, left-wing author and activist Ijeoma Oluo detailed her ban from Facebook after she posted the racist threats of violence and harassment she had received on Twitter. Facebook later called and apologized after she wrote a piece about the censorship. (*Wired, 1/16/2018*)
- In January 2018, it was reported that Facebook would not remove the user-created group "I will find The Activist Mommy and burn whoever runs it alive." The Activist Mommy, Elizabeth Johnston, is a popular Christian conservative blogger. Facebook did not find that the aforementioned group violated its terms for harassment or incitement to violence. Johnston pointed

out that Facebook had previously suspended her page for quoting the book of Leviticus. (*The Daily Wire*, 1/16/2018)

- In January 2018, Facebook removed paid ads and blocked the sharing of ads crowdfunding a pro-life documentary, *Roe v. Wade*, produced by Alveda King, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s niece. Actor Nick Loeb, who stars in the film, called the move "stealing or fraud," since the film had paid Facebook to distribute inoffensive, non-graphic ads about the film, including a short trailer. News of this was reported by various sources, including Breitbart, LifeNews, Black Christian News, The Stream, World News Daily, and the Washington Times. The block was reported initially on January 11th, and by January 18th, Facebook issued a statement indicating that the ban had been lifted, blaming it on an "error" for "spam behavior." (*WorldNewsDaily*, 1/12/2018; *Breitbart*, 1/12/2018; *Black Christian News*, 1/18/2018)
- In January 2018, Facebook announced that it would be scaling back the amount of news users see in their News Feeds and would be allowing users, not staffers, to determine which news stories were credible. Even liberal site BuzzFeed criticized this move, saying it would "disproportionately benefit publications that publish less contentious news and shy away from" more controversial topics. Facebook claimed it would rank the news sites' credibility based on the testimony of a "cross section of its users," and it was unclear if Facebook would "factor in ideological bias" in determining which sites were trustworthy. (*Buzzfeed*, 1/19/2018)

## **GOOGLE (YOUTUBE IS OWNED BY GOOGLE)**

- From 2008 to present, Catholic Online has published several reports of YouTube removing, blocking, or demonetizing videos that support a pro-life or Biblical message. In 2008, pro-life activist Carlos Polo had one of his videos, which was produced by the Catholic News Service and uncovered truths about the abortion movement, removed by the platform (*Catholic Online*, 7/9/2008); in August 2017, Catholic Online reported that "at least as far back as 2014," YouTube has censored videos of Bible readings and Robert Spencer's Jihad Watch (8/25/2017); in September 2017, Catholic

Online reported its own Scriptural reflection videos and saint biographies had been removed or demonetized (9/6/2017).

- In September 2011, the Christian Post reported that Google removed "orthodox Christian viewpoints" on "hot button issues." It also cited Google's refusing to allow the English Christian Institute to purchasing anti-abortion advertising. Google also removed an anti-Scientology page after that "church" pressured Google to do so. (*The Christian Post*, 9/16/2011)
- A September 2011 report by the National Religious Broadcasters found that the Google for Not-Profits tool had a policy that excluded churches and faith groups which consider religion or sexuality in their hiring processes. The report also said that Google had blocked a Massachusetts pro-family, conservative Christian website. (*The New American*, 9/18/2011)
- In August 2017, it was reported that YouTube placed videos from conservative pundit Steven Crowder in restricted mode, meaning they were not publicly accessible. (*The Daily Wire*, 8/1/2017)
- In August 2017, Professor Jordan Peterson announced his YouTube account had been disabled and that he had been banned from the platform without explanation. He has done scholarly work on Biblical thought, psychology, and on the inerrancy of our God-given sex/gender at birth. He called gender identity an "ideology that I detest...frighteningly similar to the Marxist doctrines." His account was restored later. (*The Daily Wire*, 8/1/2017)
- In October 2017, Prager University, an educational video series from Dennis Prager, sued Google and YouTube for "restricting" 40 of its lessons, including those supporting Israel, featuring Harvard law professor emeritus Alan Dershowitz. (*Forward*, 1/11/2018) Other videos censored were pro-life. (*LifeNews*, 1/3/2018) Prager claimed "their censorship is ideologically driven," and said he was suing for policy change. He is currently filming a documentary, No Safe Spaces, about political correctness on college campuses, and the PragerU lawsuit will be part of the film. (*Hollywood Reporter*, 1/11/2018)
- In January 2018, former Google employee James Damore filed a lawsuit against Google after he published an internal memo criticizing the company's "ideological echo chamber" and suggested the gender gap in technology is due to personal choices, not sexism. A study by The Stream indicated that Google, at the time of Damore's employment, held events

celebrating polygamy and gender identity politics, but fired Damore for his stances. The study also provided data that proved Google bolstered left/liberal media unfairly over conservative sources. (*The Stream*, 1/17/2018)

- In January 2018, Google began and quickly reversed a new policy adding "fact-checking" links to conservative sites, including the Daily Wire, the Federalist, the Daily Caller, and others. These "reviewed claims" links—all to leftist websites—were intended to debunk the claims of the conservative sites. (*The Daily Wire*, 1/22/2018)