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# Digital Action's online harms taxonomy

This is a reference document to allow for the quick identification of the impacts of different types of online harms on democracy and human rights, combined with real-world examples and further reading. We identify five core harms, including:

- [Disinformation & Misinformation](#)
- [Hate Speech & Incitement](#)
- [Online Harassment & Abuse](#)

- [Online Censorship](#)
- [Infringements of Privacy](#)

Note that harms are often interrelated, and employed in combination. The impacts of harms can span from infringements of the rights of individuals, groups or communities, to broader, cumulative impacts that become features of the information ecosystem (e.g. polarisation), and consequently have negative impacts on democracy and society. The harms can also involve a variety of actors, and can be directly or indirectly perpetrated by domestic governments, foreign states, and non-state actors, including tech companies, or individuals, at times in combination with one-another.

| Harm | Disinformation & Misinformation[1] |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| Definition | 1) False information spread in order to deceive people[2];<br>2) Disinformation includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit[3];<br>3) Verifiably false or misleading information which, cumulatively, (a) Is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public; and (b) May cause public harm, intended as threats to democratic political and policymaking processes as well as public goods |

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[1] Misinformation differs from disinformation in that it is not intentional. For the purposes of this framework, we've bundled them together, though responses to them may vary.

[2] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disinformation

[3] It does not cover issues arising from the creation and dissemination online of illegal content (notably defamation, hate speech, incitement to violence), which are subject to regulatory remedies under EU or national laws. Nor does it cover other forms of deliberate but not misleading distortions of facts such as satire and parody. [...] They are driven by actors — state or non-state political actors, for-profit actors, media, citizens, individually or in groups — and by manipulative uses of communication infrastructures that have been harnessed to produce, circulate and amplify disinformation on a larger scale than previously. See: A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation: Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation (EU)

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| Feature / Right | | Impacts | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Impacts on Democracy** | Right to free and fair elections | Overall negative impact on trust in electoral processes and institutions (e.g. false accusations of electoral fraud)<br><br>Voter suppression, including targeted suppression at particular minorities or communities, with content that either undermines opposition, or features false information on how to vote/register etc.<br><br>Dis/misinformation targeting political candidates or parties, and their policies/platforms<br><br>Dis/misinformation targeting minorities or marginalised groups to spread division, incite violence, discourage campaigning or participation<br><br>Dis/misinformation that leads to offline violence | • The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human rights in the world (European Parliament)<br>• Oxford Internet Institute – case study reports covering over 80 countries: 2019 case studies, 2020 case studies, 2020 report<br>• Alliance for Securing Democracy – Hamilton dashboard & Authoritarian Interference Tracker covering Russian, Chinese and Iranian state disinformation<br>• Atlantic Council DFRLab - elections, Digital Sherlocks<br>• Vote and Die: Covering Voter Suppression during the Coronavirus Pandemic (Nieman)<br>• A threat to an American Democracy: Digital Voter Suppression - A key influence in the 2020 elections (Stop Online Violence Against Women)<br>• Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans (European Parliament)<br>• Will a spike in fake news impact Turkey's upcoming election? (Al Jazeera) & Fake news in Turkey: Hunting for truth in land of conspiracy (BBC)<br>• The Hungarian government's disinformation campaign during the 2019 municipal elections & Disinformation in Hungary: From fabricated news to discriminatory legislation (Political Capital)<br>• Nigerian elections 2019: The spread of false information (BBC)<br>• Ethiopia elections: The misinformation circulating online (BBC)<br>• Misinformation Is Endangering India's Election (The Atlantic)<br>• Trust in elections and disinformation in Venezuela (Atlantic Council) |
| | Pluralistic system of political parties and organisations | Dis/misinformation that drives political or societal polarisation – resulting in the undermining of shared political culture, information environment, creating or deepening societal divisions<br><br>Dis/misinformation targeting political opposition, activists, campaigners etc., leading to a chilling effect on expression and political participation and | • Social Media and Political Polarisation (LSE Public Policy Review)<br>• How partisan polarization drives the spread of fake news (Brookings)<br>• Policy Brief: Social Media and Political Polarization (Stanford)<br>• Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization (PNAS)<br>• Social media is making a bad political situation worse (Vox)<br>• Why Are We Polarized? Don't Blame Social Media, Says Ezra Klein (Wired)<br>• Are Social Media Driving Political Polarization? (Berkeley)<br>• Indian Chronicles: deep dive into a 15-year operation targeting the EU and UN to serve Indian interests (EU Disinfo Lab) |

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[4] Communication - Tackling online disinformation: a European approach (European Commission)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | diminishing political pluralism<br><br>Undermining overall trust in political or legal systems, institutions and/or processes | • [Tackling Gendered Disinformation & Online Attacks Against Women In Politics](#) (#ShePersisted Global)<br>• [Tackling Online Abuse and Disinformation Targeting Women in Politics](#) (Carnegie)<br>• [Gendered Disinformation, Fake News, and Women in Politics](#) & [Gendered Disinformation, Democracy, and the Need for a New Digital Social Contract](#) (CFR)<br>• [Fake Nudes and Real Threats: How Online Abuse Holds Back Women in Politics](#) (NYT)<br>• [In the Philippines, fake news can get you killed](#) (Rest of World) |
| | Transparency & accountability | Ad-tech business model based on data collection/processing enables targeting of dis/misinformation (including via political advertising) – tech companies provide limited or no transparency to prevent or mitigate | • [Social media companies have failed to provide adequate advertising transparency to users globally](#) (Privacy International)<br>• [How online platform transparency can improve content moderation and algorithmic performance](#) (Brookings)<br>• [Tackling misinformation: What researchers could do with social media data](#) (Harvard)<br>• [Social media transparency is key for our democracy](#) (Democracy Fund)<br>• [Transparent digital campaigning](#) (UK Electoral Commission)<br>• ['Utmost importance' for transparency rules on political ads, EU report says](#) (Euractiv)<br>• [California Legislators Introduce Bipartisan Effort to Hold Social Media Companies Accountable for Online Hate and Disinformation](#) & [Bipartisan Measure to Hold Social Media Companies Accountable for Online Hate and Disinformation Passes State Assembly](#) (Jesse Gabriel, California State Assembly) |
| | Free, independent & plural media | Dis/misinformation used in targeted smear campaigns against journalists, especially from minority or marginalised groups to suppress media reporting and pluralism<br><br>Overall prevalence of dis/misinformation undermines overall trust in all journalism/media<br><br>Dangers of actions (by states or companies) to prevent or mitigate dis/misinformation being used to infringe on media freedoms *(see Internet Shutdowns and Online Censorship below)* | • [Attacks on the Press Track a Democratic Backslide](#) (Foreign Policy)<br>• [How Disinformation and Hate Fuel Online Attacks Against Women Journalists](#) & [Online violence, fueled by disinformation and political attacks, deeply harms women journalists](#) (ICJF)<br>• [The Effects of False Information on Journalism](#) (IFTF)<br>• [The role of public service media in the fight against disinformation](#) (Reuters Institute)<br>• [Countering disinformation: enhancing journalistic legitimacy in public service media](#) (Cardiff University)<br>• [Misinformation in action: Fake news exposure is linked to lower trust in media, higher trust in government when your side is in power](#) (Harvard)<br>• [Audience perspectives on misinformation and low trust](#) (Ofcom)<br>• [Concern over 'fake news' has decreased global trust in media](#) (YouGov) |
| **Impact on** | Non-discrimin | Dis/misinformation used to incite violence and/or | • [Engendering Hate: The Contours of State-Aligned Gendered Disinformation Online](#) |

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| Human Rights | ation, incitement & minority protections

Security

Equal before the law, incitement | discriminate against minority groups on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, immigration/refugee status, disability etc.

Offline violence and threats to security of individuals or groups, including genocide in the most serious cases (e.g. Myanmar) | (Demos)<br>• Gendered disinformation is a national security problem (Brookings)<br>• When you become the target of racist disinformation (Mashable)<br>• Hosting the 'Holohoax': A Snapshot of Holocaust Denial Across Social Media (ISD)How to tackle lies about migrants (InfoMigrants)<br>• Fear and lying in the EU: Fighting disinformation on migration with alternative narratives (European Policy Centre)<br>• The networks and narratives of anti-refugee disinformation in Europe (ISD)<br>• How WhatsApp Destroyed A Village (India - Buzzfeed)<br>• Killing of Pakistan social media star highlights threat to women (FT)<br>• A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military, Facebook Admits It Was Used to Incite Violence in Myanmar (NYT) & Hate speech, atrocities and fake news: the crisis of democracy in Myanmar (FT)<br>• South African riots and why social media needs to up its game on misinformation (Stuff)<br>• Poland's anti-gay crusade: "The most aggressive homophobic campaign I have seen in my life" (Coda)<br>• How Syria's White Helmets became victims of an online propaganda machine & How Syria's disinformation wars destroyed the co-founder of the White Helmets (Guardian) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Privacy & defamation | Ad-tech business model based on data collection/processing enables dis/misinformation to be targeted at specific audiences

Dis/misinformation used as a tool for attacks on reputation, infringing privacy of individuals

Prevalence of online data (as a result of ad-tech business model) enables surveillance or hacking by states or non-state groups, which can then be used as basis for dis/misinformation (including partial disclosure, doctored information etc.) | • Why Disinformation is a Cybersecurity Threat (EU Disinfo Lab)<br>• Hackers post fake stories on real news sites 'to discredit Nato' (BBC News)<br>• Cyber threat looms large over German election (DW)<br>• Poland, Lithuania are targets of cyber disinformation attack (AP)<br>• EMA warns over doctored COVID-19 vaccine data hacked and leaked online (TechCrunch)<br>• Election Defamation Lawsuits Open New Front In Fight Against Disinformation (NPR)<br>• The UN Report on Disinformation: a role for privacy (Privacy International)<br>• By Protecting Data, Federal Privacy Law Can Reduce Algorithmic Targeting and the Spread of Disinformation (New America)<br>• How Data Privacy Laws Can Fight Fake News (Just Security)<br>• Targeted ads are one of the world's most destructive trends. Here's why (Guardian)<br>• How online ad targeting weaponizes political misinformation (Axios)<br>• Disinformation and 'fake news': Final Report (UK DCMS Committee)<br>• EU's top privacy regulator urges ban on surveillance-based ad targeting (TechCrunch) |
| | Freedom of belief | Dis/misinformation resulting in a chilling effect on freedom of expression, belief, assembly and political | • Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (UN) |

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| | Freedom of expression<br><br>Freedom of assembly<br><br>Political participation | participation of targeted individuals or groups, including "censorship through noise" – i.e. drowning out of legitimate expression<br><br>*Note: freedom of expression is not limited to true or correct statements, and includes right to shock, offend or disturb[5] - important to recognise the dangers of actions (by states or companies) to combat disinformation being used to violate or deny these rights (see Internet Shutdowns and Online Censorship sections below)* | • [How China used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to spread disinformation about the Hong Kong protests](#) (Vox)<br>• [Religion and Fake News: Faith-based Alternative Information Ecosystems in the U.S. and Europe](#) (Cambridge)<br>• [Black Lives Matter Fights Disinformation To Keep The Movement Strong](#) (NPR)<br>• [How to Avoid Spreading Misinformation About the Protests](#) (Wired)<br>• [Algeria protests: how disinformation spread on social media](#) (BBC News)<br>• [A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world](#) (Poynter)<br>• [Controls to manage fake news in Africa are affecting freedom of expression](#) (The Conversation)<br>• ['Fake news' laws, privacy & free speech on trial: Government overreach in the infodemic?](#) (First Draft) |
| | Freedom to receive and impart information<br><br>Freedom of thought | Dis/misinformation infringing on the right not to have opinion unknowingly manipulated or involuntarily influenced e.g. inauthentic and/or coordinated accounts used for hate speech, abuse, harassment, 'censorship through noise' and 'astroturfing' – i.e. artificially amplifying certain viewpoints/positions<br><br>Impact of dis/misinformation on overall quality/prominence of information available, undermining of authoritative sources (media, science etc.), with significant potential impacts on democracy, public health, security, climate etc. which often harms oppressed/minority groups in disproportionate way<br><br>*Note: although currently unclear where threshold is between legitimate political persuasion and illegitimate manipulation of thoughts [6]* | • [Report – Disinformation & Freedom of Expression](#) (APC)<br>• [Disinfo Database](#) (EU vs. Disinfo)<br><br>• [Climate Disinformation Database](#) (DeSmog)<br>• [Climate Disinformation case studies](#) (ISD)<br>• [How climate change misinformation spreads online](#) (Carbon Brief)<br>• [Online misinformation about climate change](#) (WIREs Climate Change)<br>• [Facebook's Climate of Deception: How Viral Misinformation Fuels the Climate Emergency](#) (Avaaz)<br>• [Climate denial ads on Facebook seen by millions, report finds](#) (Guardian)<br>• [Facebook launches climate project to tackle misinformation](#) (DW)<br>• [Why is YouTube Broadcasting Climate Misinformation to Millions?](#) (Avaaz)<br>• [How Climate Change Deniers Rise to the Top in Google Searches](#) (NYT)<br>• [Twitter Bots Are a Major Source of Climate Disinformation](#) (Scientific American)<br>• [Twitter will promote credible information with new climate change topic after criticism over misinformation](#) (USA Today) |

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[5] See: [Joint declaration on freedom of expression and "fake news", disinformation and propaganda](#) (OSCE)
[6] See: [The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human rights in the world](#) (European Parliament)

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| | Right to health | Dis/misinformation undermining trust in public health – healthcare professionals, scientists, institutions and systems, and treatments/procedures etc. (e.g. vaccines)<br><br>Impact on individuals' and societal health – dis/misinformation leading to contravention of public health guidance, not accessing healthcare etc. – including targeting minority or marginalised groups | <ul><li>How Facebook and YouTube help spread anti-vaxxer propaganda (Guardian)</li><li>The online anti-vaccine movement in the age of COVID-19 (CDT/Lancet)</li><li>Types, sources, and claims of COVID-19 misinformation (Reuters Institute/Oxford)</li><li>Covid-related misinformation videos spread primarily through Facebook, as its fact-checkers fail to spot false information, finds new Oxford study (OII)</li><li>Online Temptations: COVID-19 and Religious Misinformation in the MENA Region (Social Media + Society)</li><li>MENA Monitor: Arabic COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation Online (ISD)</li><li>Information Manipulations Around COVID-19: France Under Attack (ISD)</li><li>Covid-19 Disinformation Briefings: March, April, May, June 2020 (ISD)</li><li>Coronavirus Disinformation Blog (EU vs. Disinfo)</li><li>Disinformation Overdose: A study of the Crisis of Trust among Vaccine Sceptics and Anti-Vaxxers in Germany (ISD)</li><li>Misogyny and Misinformation: An analysis of gendered disinformation tactics during the COVID-19 pandemic (EU Disinfo Lab)</li><li>How anti-Muslim disinformation campaigns in India have surged during COVID-19 (LSE)</li><li>Duterte's troll armies drown out Covid-19 dissent in the Philippines (Coda)</li><li>Beware of China's coronavirus disinformation, RSF says (RSF)</li></ul> |

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| Harm | Hate Speech & Incitement[7] | | |
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| **Definition[8]** | 1) promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons and the justification of all the preceding types of expression, on the ground of "race", colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status[9];<br>2) 'Hate speech' consists of verbal or non-verbal communication that involves hostility directed towards particular social groups, most often on the grounds of race and ethnicity (racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, etc.), gender (sexism, misogyny), sexual orientation (homophobia, transphobia), age (ageism), disability (ableism), etc. (see discrimination; racial discrimination; gender discrimination; LGBTI rights; age discrimination)[10]<br>3) A form of other-directed speech which rejects the core human rights principles of human dignity and equality and seeks to degrade the standing of individuals and groups in the estimation of society[11] | | |
| **Feature / Right** | **Impacts** | | **Examples** |
| **Impacts on Democracy** | Right to free and fair elections | Hate speech used to suppress political participation, campaigning or voting among targeted groups<br><br>Hate speech directly targeting political candidates, campaigners etc. on the basis of protected characteristics | • [When politicians use hate speech, political violence increases](#) (The Conversation)<br>• ['Trump effect' led to hate crime surge, report finds](#) (BBC News)<br>• [Online hate speech deters candidates from participating in municipal elections](#) (Helsinki Times)<br>• [Germany: Annalena Baerbock becomes prime target of sexist hate speech](#) (DW)<br>• [Armenia Follows European Example in Combating Hate Speech](#) (EVNReport)<br>• [Bosnia's election campaign plagued by abuses, hate speech: monitor](#) (Reuters)<br>• [Kenyan web monitors work to avert election violence](#) (Guardian)<br>• [Between Two Extremes: Responding to Islamist and tribalist messaging online in Kenya during](#) |

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[7] Hate speech and incitement are most often consequential, although incitement may have a large scale/societal connotation as opposed to hate speech.

[8] Worth noting that different countries will have different legal definitions and, therefore, thresholds for what constitutes 'hate speech'; see [US congressional Research Service](#); [German Criminal Code](#); For international human right thresholds see [Article19 'Hate Speech' Explained (pp.-19-22)](#).

[9] European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, [ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 On Combating Hate Speech](#)

[10] See: [Oxford Constitutional Law: Hate Speech](#)

[11] [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism](#) (OHCHR)

| | | Incitement of offline violence against targeted groups | [the 2017 elections](#) (ISD) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pluralistic system of political parties and organisations | Hate speech targeting political opposition, activists, campaigners, civil society etc. on the basis of protected characteristics, leading to a chilling effect on expression and political participation and diminishing political pluralism, and creating or deepening societal divisions that fuel further online hate | • [Hate speech ahead of Guinea elections must be curbed and condemned – Bachelet and Patten](#) (ReliefWeb) <br>• [Monitoring online hate speech during elections in Kyrgyzstan](#) (EPD)[In India Election, False Posts and Hate Speech Flummox Facebook](#) (NYT) & [India: high-profile candidates banned from election trail over hate speech](#) (Guardian) <br>• ['Spreading like wildfire': Facebook fights hate speech, misinformation before Myanmar poll](#) (Reuters) & [Algorithm of harm: Facebook amplified Myanmar military propaganda following coup](#) (Global Witness) <br>• [Voting in Hate: A study of hate speech on Facebook surrounding Sri Lanka's Parliamentary Election of 2015](#) (CPA) <br>• [Colombia's election observers warn about online hate speech](#) (Colombia Reports) |
| | Free, independent & plural media | Hate speech targeting journalists from minority or marginalised groups, to suppress media reporting and pluralism and/or incite further online abuse or offline intimidation or violence | • [Malaysian journalist targeted by hate speech and racist attacks on Facebook](#) (Global Voices) <br>• [Women journalists are facing a growing threat online and offline](#) (Al Jazeera) <br>• [The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists](#) (UNESCO) |
| **Impact on Human Rights** | Non-discrimination, incitement & minority protections <br><br> Security <br><br> Equal before the law, incitement | Incitement and discrimination against minority groups on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, immigration/refugee status, disability etc. <br><br> Offline violence and threats to security of individuals or groups, including genocide in the most serious cases (e.g. Myanmar) | • [How Hate Online Leads to Violence Offline](#) (Slate) <br>• [When Hate Speech Leads to Violence](#) (RSF) <br>• ["Hate speech, social media and minorities" - Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#) (UN March 2021) <br>• [The cost of hate speech: Policy brief for Punjab](#) (Minority Rights Group) <br>• [Hate in the Machine: Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Social Media Posts as Predictors of Offline Racially and Religiously Aggravated Crime](#) (British Journal of Criminology) <br>• [Caste-hate speech: Addressing hate speech based on work and descent](#) (IDSN) <br>• [Online Caste-Hate Speech – A Growing Concern](#) (DSN) <br>• [Mapping hate in France: A panoramic view of online discourse](#) (ISD) <br>• [What is online anti-LGBT+ hate speech and hate crime?](#) (Galop) <br>• [Facebook's Secret Censorship Rules Protect White Men From Hate Speech But Not Black Children](#) (ProPublica) |

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| | Privacy & defamation | Ad-tech business model based on data collection/processing enables hate speech or incitement to be targeted at specific audiences or marginalised or minority groups<br><br>Hateful or discriminatory attacks on reputation, infringing privacy of individuals (e.g. hate speech combined with doxing)<br><br>Prevalence of online data (as a result of ad-tech business model) enables surveillance or hacking by states or non-state groups, which can then be used as basis for hateful or discriminatory attacks | • [Europe's top court sets new line on policing illegal speech online](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [Social Media Futures: Anonymity, Abuse and Identity Online](#) (TBI)<br>• [Is Cloudflare a privacy champion or hate speech enabler? Depends who you ask](#) (Fast Company) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Freedom of belief<br><br>Freedom of expression<br><br>Freedom of assembly<br><br>Political participation<br><br>Freedom to receive and impart | Chilling effect on freedom of expression, belief, assembly and political participation of targeted minority or marginalised individuals or groups – e.g. by forcing them to withdraw from online public spaces/political debates | • [Report from the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion and belief on hate speech/incitement and Islamophobia](#) (UNHR)<br>• [Hate speech online: Lessons for protecting free expression](#) (EDRi)<br>• [Germany's balancing act: Fighting online hate while protecting free speech](#) (Politico)<br>• [How Scotland's Hate Crime Bill ignited a freedom of speech row](#) (Prospect)<br>• [French Court Strikes Down Most of Online Hate Speech Law](#) (NYT)<br>• [The Problems With Germany's New Social Media Hate Speech Bill](#) (Forbes) & [Germany: Flawed Social Media Law - NetzDG is Wrong Response to Online Abuse](#) (HRW)<br>• [Austria's online hate speech law prompts question marks about 'overblocking'](#) (Euractiv)<br>• [Turkey's New Internet Law Is the Worst Version of Germany's NetzDG Yet](#) (EFF) |

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| | information | | |
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| | Right to health | Significant impacts on the mental health of those targeted by online hate *(alongside potential for offline violence and consequent impacts on health – see above)* | <ul><li>[What Is the Harm of Hate Speech?](#) (Ethical Theory and Moral Practice)</li><li>[What is the real-world impact of online hate speech on young people?](#) (Internet Matters)</li><li>[Hate targeted at Gypsy, Traveller and Roma linked to rise in suicides – report](#) (Guardian)</li><li>[How Is Hate Speech On Social Media Affecting Your Mental Wellbeing?](#) (Lobster Digital)</li><li>[Hate-Motivated Behavior: Impacts, Risk Factors, And Interventions](#) (Health Affairs)</li><li>[Hate Speech Is Killing Us: Bigotry is both virulent and contagious, causing damage and spreading from person to person, and both victims of bigotry and bigots are harmed](#) (Tufts)</li></ul> |

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| Harm | Online Harassment & Abuse |
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| Definition | Online harassment or abuse is the pervasive or severe targeting of an individual or group online through harmful behaviour.[12] This can take numerous different forms, and occur across different online spaces (e.g. social media platforms) or services (e.g. email, messaging platforms), and crossover into offline actions (e.g. doxing, swatting), as well as utilise a variety of different mediums (text, video etc.). <br><br> PEN America identifies a wide range of different tactics that can, individually or in combination, comprise online abuse or harassment, including: Astroturfing, Concern Trolling, Cross Platform Harassment, Cyberbullying, Cyber-Mob Attacks, Cyberstalking, Deepfake, Denial of Access, Denial of Service (DoS) Attacks, Dog Whistling, Doxing, Hacking, Hashtag Poisoning, Hateful Speech, Non-consensual Intimate Images, Online Impersonation, Online Sexual Harassment, Phishing, Threats, Swatting, or Zoombombing. The Women's Media Center has an alternative list of tactics here: Online Abuse 101 |

| Feature / Right | | Impacts | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| Impacts on Democracy | Right to free and fair elections | Online harassment or abuse used to suppress political participation, campaigning or voting among targeted individuals or groups <br><br> Online harassment or abuse directly targeting political candidates, campaigners etc. <br><br> Incitement of offline violence against those targeted by online harassment or abuse | <ul><li>Trolled out of office: UBC report examines role of online abuse against politicians and democracy (CBC)</li><li>MPs describe threats, abuse and safety fears (BBC News)</li><li>More Black women are being elected to office. Few feel safe once they get there (PBS)</li><li>How Trump impacts harmful Twitter speech: A case study in three tweets (Brookings)</li><li>What impact is hate speech having on climate activism around the world? (DW)</li><li>Hate Speech, Social Media and Political Violence in Iraq: Virtual Civil Society and Upheaval (Tahrir Institute)</li><li>In Kyrgyzstan, social media hate goes unchecked (Open Democracy)</li><li>Misogyny And Harassment Hound Women in Southeast Asia's Opposition Parties: Report (VICE)</li><li>First transgender candidate to contest Kerala election withdraws amid threats, harassment (India Today)</li></ul> |

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[12] PEN America, Online Harassment Field Manual

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| | Pluralistic system of political parties and organisations | Online harassment or abuse targeting political opposition, activists, campaigners, civil society, public figures etc. leading to a chilling effect on expression and political participation, and diminishing political pluralism | <ul><li>Closing Civic Space For Climate Activists (ICNL & ECNL)</li><li>Environment activists: 'I got death and rape threats' (BBC News)</li><li>Greta Thunberg's Online Attackers Reveal a Grim Pattern (Wired)</li><li>The Young Activists Fighting Southeast Asia's Climate Crisis (The Diplomat)</li><li>The New Copyright Trolls: How a Twitter Network Used Copyright Complaints to Harass Tanzanian Activists (Stanford Internet Observatory)</li></ul> |
| | Free, independent & plural media | Online harassment or abuse targeting journalists – especially those from minority or marginalised groups, or reporting on certain issues or topics | <ul><li>Why journalists in India are under attack (BBC News)</li><li>Kyrgyzstan: Out from under the bridge trolling and harassment of independent media (Article19) & Kyrgyz journalists on the online 'fake farms' that threaten to kill them (CPJ)</li><li>Inside Slovenia's war on the media - Prime Minister Janez Janša's attacks create climate of fear, journalists and watchdogs say (Politico)</li><li>Pakistan: Escalating Attacks on Journalists (HRW)</li><li>Afghan women journalists and human rights activists are being forced into hiding (DW)</li></ul> |
| **Impact on Human Rights** | Non-discrimination, incitement & minority protections<br><br>Security<br><br>Equal before the law, incitement | Online harassment or abuse leading to incitement and/or discrimination against minority groups on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, immigration/refugee status, disability etc.<br><br>Incitement of offline violence against those targeted by online harassment or abuse | <ul><li>Stories of Survival (PEN America)<br>Assessment of online violence against politically and civically engaged women in Bangladesh (IFES)</li><li>TROLL PATROL: Using Crowdsourcing, Data Science & Machine Learning to Measure Violence and Abuse against Women on Twitter in the US & UK (Amnesty)</li><li>Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women (Amnesty)</li><li>Online Hate and Harassment Report: The American Experience 2020 (ADL)</li><li>It's time to address online violence against women in India (Al Jazeera)</li><li>Technology-facilitated abuse is creating 'terror' in women, and it's on the rise in Australia (ABC)</li><li>Uzbekistan: Gay Men Face Abuse, Prison: Ensure Rights to Personal Security, Privacy, Nondiscrimination (HRW)</li></ul> |
| | Privacy & defamation | Ad-tech business model based on data collection/processing enables online harassment, abuse or | <ul><li>'We're watching you': Why doxxing is the new weapon of choice for cyber bullies and trolls (ABC)</li><li>I Was Doxxed By White Supremacists For Stepping Out Of Line (Wear Your Voice)</li></ul> |

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| | | incitement to be targeted at specific audiences <br><br> Online harassment or abuse targeting reputation, infringing privacy of individuals (e.g. defamation and doxing) <br><br> Prevalence of online data (as a result of ad-tech business model) enables surveillance or hacking by states or non-state groups, which can then be used as basis for online harassment or abuse | <ul><li>Online 'doxxing' campaigns leading to harassment and death threats (Journal.ie)</li><li>Colorado Makes Doxxing Public Health Workers Illegal (NYT)</li><li>Deepfake porn is ruining women's lives. Now the law may finally ban it (MIT Tech Review)</li><li>'Deepfake porn images still give me nightmares' (BBC News)</li><li>Revenge porn is 'the new normal' post-lockdown, say activists (Dazed)</li><li>Abuse and anger: Inside the online groups spreading stolen, sexual images of women and children (Korea Times)</li><li>'There's no end and no escape. You feel so, so exposed': life as a victim of revenge porn (Guardian)</li><li>Hundreds of Apps Can Empower Stalkers to Track Their Victims (NYT)</li><li>Stalkerware: The software that spies on your partner (BBC News)</li><li>Stalking victims 'sitting ducks' in lockdown, say Suzy Lamplugh Trust (BBC News)</li><li>How the internet's conspiracy theorists turned Parkland students into 'crisis actors' (NYT)</li><li>Alex Jones, Pursued Over Infowars Falsehoods, Faces a Legal Crossroads (NYT)</li><li>Canadians injured in Las Vegas shooting harassed online by conspiracy theorists (CBC)</li><li>He was shot in Kenosha, then received threats – a frightening pattern after high-profile incidents (USA Today)</li></ul> |
| | Freedom of belief <br><br> Freedom of expression <br><br> Freedom of assembly <br><br> Political participation <br><br> Freedom to receive and impart information | Chilling effect on freedom of expression, belief, assembly and political participation of targeted individuals or groups - e.g. by forcing them to withdraw from online public spaces/political debates | <ul><li>PEN America Position Statement: Online Harassment and Free Expression</li><li>The State of Online Harassment (US – Pew Research)</li><li>Women activists in the Middle East face online bullying and sexual harassment (Open Democracy)</li><li>Online abuse is 'silencing female scientists' (The Times)</li></ul> |
| | Right to health | Significant impacts on the mental health of those targeted by online harassment and/or abuse *(alongside* | <ul><li>The epidemic of online abuse and its impact on well-being (Glitch)</li><li>Toxic Twitter - The Psychological Harms Of Violence And Abuse Against Women Online (Amnesty)</li></ul> |

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| | | potential for offline violence and consequent impacts on health – see above) | <ul><li>[Online abuse during Covid: Almost half of women have experienced abuse online during pandemic](#) (End Violence Against Women)</li><li>[Cyber Stalking, Cyber Harassment, and Adult Mental Health: A Systematic Review](#) (Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking)</li><li>['Cyber trauma' leaves online victims with psychological scars](#) (FT)</li><li>[#StatusOfMind: Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#) (RSPH)</li><li>[Call for journalists to receive 'emotional flak jackets' against worsening online abuse](#) (Press Gazette)</li></ul> |

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| Harm | Online Censorship |
|------|-------------------|
| **Definition** | 1) Any regime or context in which the content of what is publicly expressed, exhibited, published, broadcast, or otherwise distributed is regulated or in which the circulation of information is controlled. The official grounds for such control at a national level are variously political (e.g. national security), moral (e.g. likelihood of causing offence or moral harm, especially in relation to issues of obscenity), social (e.g. whether violent content might have harmful effects on behaviour), or religious (e.g. blasphemy, heresy).[13]<br>2) Censorship is the suppression of speech or other public communication which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, politically incorrect or inconvenient as determined by a government, media outlet or other controlling body. It can be done by governments and private organizations or by individuals who engage in self-censorship. It occurs in a variety of different contexts including speech, books, music, films, and other arts, the press, radio, television, and the Internet for a variety of reasons including national security, to control obscenity, child pornography, and hate speech, to protect children, to promote or restrict political or religious views, and to prevent slander and libel.[14] |

| Feature / Right | | Impacts | Examples |
|-----------------|--|---------|----------|
| **Impacts on Democracy** | Right to free and fair elections | Online censorship often targets opposition, campaigners or activists and restricts their ability to campaign and organise effectively, or scrutinise processes or irregularities (and is often combined with other measures to restrict offline campaigning)<br><br>Online censorship can restrict the public's ability to understand positions or platforms of candidates, discuss political issues<br><br>Online censorship (often combined with other forms of media suppression) restricts the media's ability to | <ul><li>Fighting censorship during the 2018 elections season (Access Now)</li><li>Belarus: Internet Disruptions, Online Censorship (HRW)</li><li>Despite cries of censorship, conservatives dominate social media (Politico)</li><li>Twitter Goofed It: By blocking the URL of a New York Post story without explanation, the company only stoked conspiracy theories (The Atlantic)</li><li>Beyond Platforms: Private Censorship, Parler, and the Stack (EFF)</li><li>Social media helps and hurts Iranian elections. Here's how (Atlantic Council) & Hacktivists Worldwide Help Iranians Bypass Election Censorship (IranWire)</li><li>Tanzania: Laws weaponized to undermine political and civil freedoms ahead of elections (Amnesty)</li><li>Ahead of Vietnam's One-Party Elections, the State Punishes Online Calls for Democracy (The Diplomat)</li></ul> |

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[13] Oxford Reference: Censorship
[14] Wikimedia Foundation: Censorship

| | | scrutinise political parties and candidates, fact-check dis/misinformation, and report on any irregularities or human rights abuses and/or offline violence before, during or after elections<br><br>Online censorship can weaken transparency, integrity, and accountability and therefore overall trust in the electoral process, and obstruct efforts of those (e.g. election observers) scrutinising or documenting irregularities or abuses | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pluralistic system of political parties and organisations | Online censorship restricts the ability of political opposition, activists and civil society to express dissenting positions, organise or scrutinise those in power effectively, resulting in a chilling of expression that undermines democratic processes and/or political plurality (especially in non-democratic contexts) | • [As Turkey went to the polls, a global network was mapping online censorship in real-time](#) (Wired)<br>• [Internet censorship in Kazakhstan: more pervasive than you may think](#) (Open Democracy) & [Why Atajurt's Brief YouTube Suspension Matters: YouTube's temporary suspension of a Kazakh human rights group's channel highlights the risks of civil society's heavy reliance on the tech giants](#) (The Diplomat)<br>• [Russia: Social Media Pressured to Censor Posts](#) (HRW), [Russia Can't Afford to Block Twitter—Yet: Online censorship is bogged down in technical difficulties](#) (FP), [Russia flexes its 'sovereign internet' with move to curb Twitter](#) (FT)<br>• [UN rights experts tell Bahrain to halt crackdown on activists and free speech](#) (Reuters) & [Bahrain: Dreams of reform crushed 10 years after uprising](#) (Amnesty)<br>• ['Facebook doesn't care': Activists say accounts removed despite Zuckerberg's free-speech stance](#) (MENA - NBC News) & [For Many, the Arab Spring Isn't Over](#) (EFF)<br>• [How a Secretive Cyber Unit Censors Palestinians](#) (The American Prospect)<br>• [Internet censorship in Africa threatens democracy, economy](#) (DW)<br>• [Modi's Response to Farmer Protests in India Stirs Fears of a Pattern](#) (NYT)<br>• [Father of Pakistani rights activist arrested on 'terror' charges](#) (Al Jazeera)<br>• [Thailand: NGO Law Would Strike 'Severe Blow' to Human Rights](#) (HRW)<br>• [How Vietnam's 'influencer' army wages information warfare on Facebook](#) (Reuters)<br>• [Feminist activists in China speak out against online censorship despite government pushback](#) (The World), [LGBTQ in China lament 'dark day' after social media crackdown](#) |

| | | | (Al Jazeera), [Popular science blogs disappear from WeChat, Weibo and Bilibili in Beijing's latest internet content crackdown](#) (SCMP)<br>• [How TikTok's hate speech detection tool set off a debate about racial bias on the app](#) (Vox) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Transparency & accountability | Online censorship is often shrouded in a lack of transparency from both governments and tech companies around government takedown and/or data requests made to platforms, and behind-closed-doors pressure from governments on companies to moderate a wide range of illegal and/or legal (but harmful content), or censor dissenting opinions, leading to a lack of accountability and rule of law, due process and opportunities for redress<br><br>Online censorship is often heightened during sensitive or dangerous political moments (for those in power, e.g. elections, protests) and can provide cover for human rights abuses or abuses of state power (e.g. state violence, corruption), and prevent effective documentation of such abuses | • [Why social media can't keep moderating content in the shadows](#) (MIT Tech Review)<br>• [Facebook, Instagram Lack Transparency on Government-Ordered Content Removal Amid Unprecedented Demands to Censor User Speech, EFF's Annual Who Has Your Back Report Shows](#) (EFF)<br>• [Transparency about how companies, governments, and other entities influence and control online expression remains inadequate](#) (RDR)<br>• [Facebook must be more transparent and accountable over harmful content takedowns](#) & [Side-stepping rights: Regulating speech by contract](#) (Article19)<br>• [Ethiopia's hate speech and disinformation law: the pros, the cons, and a mystery](#) (Access Now)<br>• [Caught in the Net: The Impact of Extremist Speech Regulations on Human Rights Content](#) (Syrian Archive, EFF, Witness)<br>• [Vietnam: Facebook and Google 'complicit' in censorship](#) (BBC News)<br>• [Why are social media platforms silencing Kashmiri voices?](#) (Al Jazeera)<br>• [Vague laws and lack of transparency pose major threats to digital rights in Pakistan](#) (DW)<br>• [Informal Internet Censorship: The Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit](#) (CTIRU) (ORG) |
| | Free, independent & plural media | Online censorship (often combined with other forms of media suppression) restricts the media's ability to scrutinise government and the state, fact-check dis/misinformation, and report on human rights abuses, corruption, political violence etc., and creates a chilling effect on journalism by creating direct or indirect pressure on media to alter editorial lines and/or content of reporting (e.g. through legal costs of attempting to | • [Covid-19 Triggers Wave of Free Speech Abuse: Scores of Countries Target Media, Activists, Medics, Political Opponents](#) (HRW)<br>• [Belarus: Internet Disruptions, Online Censorship](#) (HRW)<br>• [Free Web Turkey: Online censorship marks the end of news](#) (MLSA) & [Turkey Issued New Rules for Social Media. That May Mean That Media Censorship Wasn't Working](#) (Carnegie) |

| | | contest censorship decisions)<br><br>Online censorship prevents public from accessing independent and plural media sources | |
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| **Impact on Human Rights** | Non-discrimination, incitement & minority protections<br><br>Security<br><br>Equal before the law, incitement | During crises, such as widespread protests, political violence, or armed conflict, online censorship can impact public safety, preventing access to essential information, as well as preventing or hindering the documentation of human rights abuses, abuses of state power etc.<br><br>Online censorship is often targeted at marginalised or minority groups, weakening protections against for e.g. incitement by preventing counter-messages (e.g. solidarity, calls for moderation) or preventing effective documentation of abuses<br><br>Exemptions to freedom of expression for national security and incitement in human rights law can be exploited by governments to further online censorship, for example through over-broad definitions, or a lack of effective democratic safeguards (e.g. rule of law, independence of courts etc.) | • When Content Moderation Hurts (Mozilla)<br>• Social Media Platforms Remove War Crimes Evidence: Archive Needed to Preserve Content Deemed Dangerous (HRW)<br>• Hungary's LGBTQ community braces for 'propaganda' bill (France24)<br>• They went out to protest. Then the police attacked them on Facebook: Powerful police unions in Tunisia are using Facebook to doxx, harass, and out LGBTQ people in the country (Wired)<br>• On a day to honor persons who disappeared, Indigenous activists found their Instagram stories gone (US – Daily Dot)<br>• Bangladesh: Crackdown on Critics, Activists: Dangerous Clampdown on Freedoms in Rohingya Refugee Camps (HRW)<br>• How Beijing silences Chinese voices against oppression of Uyghurs (LA Times) |
| | Privacy & defamation | Ad-tech business models have increased the ability of governments to target opposition, activists, civil society etc. dissent through the abundance and availability of data online, with online censorship laws often accompanied by measures that infringe on privacy and/or anonymity online | • Mauritius Is Considering an Unprecedented Attack on Online Freedom: The law would intercept and decrypt all internet traffic in the country (Slate)<br>• India And Tech Companies Clash Over Censorship, Privacy And 'Digital Colonialism' (NPR)<br>• Germany set to force social networks to report hate speech to police (FT) |

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| | | Burden for online censorship often placed primarily on online platforms first, who may then be required to share information with law enforcement outside of formal legal processes, undermining rule of law and due process | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Freedom of belief<br><br>Freedom of expression<br><br>Freedom of assembly<br><br>Political participation<br><br>Freedom to receive and impart information | While there are legitimate justifications (such as national security, public health, or protecting minorities from incitement) for online censorship outlined within the scope of key human rights documents, online censorship either by governments or tech companies can produce a chilling effect on freedom of expression, belief and association, assembly and political participation (e.g. through censoring information about protests), and often disproportionately targets minority or marginalised groups<br><br>During crises, such widespread protests, political violence, armed conflict or a public health emergency, online censorship can impact public safety, preventing access to essential information, as well as preventing or hindering the documentation of human rights abuses, abuses of state power etc.<br><br>An inversion of typical understandings of online censorship, "censorship through noise" – i.e. the spread of large volumes of content or disinformation to drown out alternative viewpoints or dissenting voices is also becoming increasingly common (see Dis/misinformation above) | • French constitutional authority rejects law forcing online platforms to delete hate-speech content (TechCrunch)<br>• Russia: New Law Expands Government Control Online (HRW) & China Censors the Internet. So Why Doesn't Russia? (NYT), Russia puts feminist activist on trial for pornography (AP)<br>• The Attacks on Palestinian Digital Rights (7amleh), Sheikh Jarrah: Facebook and Twitter silencing protests, deleting evidence (Article19) & Digital apartheid: Palestinians being silenced on social media (Al Jazeera)<br>• 'Lost memories': War crimes evidence threatened by AI moderation (Reuters)<br>• Oman blocks Clubhouse app, fuelling regional censorship fears (Al Jazeera)<br>• Egypt's women are rising up against sexual violence. Others are still being jailed for TikToks (WP), Co-opting cybersecurity in Egypt (Atlantic Council)<br>• Uganda: Government to license online posts in fresh assault on freedom of expression (Amnesty)<br>• How social media regulations are silencing dissent in Africa (Al Jazeera)<br>• India's internet law adds to fears over online speech, privacy (Al Jazeera)<br>• Pakistan to 'review' controversial internet censorship rules (Al Jazeera)<br>• How YouTube's rules are used to silence human rights activists: Instead of protecting communities, online safety policies are being used to silence them. Just ask those documenting oppression in Xinjiang (MIT Tech Review)<br>• No cults, no politics, no ghouls: how China censors the video game world (Guardian)<br>• Viet Nam: Tech giants complicit in industrial-scale repression (Amnesty)<br>• Thailand: Authorities using repressive laws to intensify crackdown on online critics (Amnesty)<br>• Singapore fake news law a 'disaster' for freedom of speech, says rights group (Guardian)<br>• Cambodia: Internet Censorship, Control Expanded (HRW) |

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| | | | • [Indonesia: Suspend, Revise New Internet Regulation](#) (HRW)<br>• [Timor-Leste's internet freedoms at risk](#) (Jakarta Post)<br>• [Mexico: Online Free Speech at Risk - Proposed Social Media Regulations Violate International Norms](#) (HRW)<br>• [Colombians 'save the evidence' as they denounce social media censorship of protests](#) (Global Voices) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Right to health | Online censorship can lead to the suppression of legitimate information on public health, or criticism of government or public health authorities' actions that could improve responses, or highlight failings or corruption, thereby infringing on the right to health<br><br>Exemptions to freedom of expression for public health in human rights law can be exploited by governments to further online censorship, for example through over-broad definitions, or a lack of effective democratic safeguards (e.g. rule of law, independence of courts etc.) | • [India: Instagram's censorship of COVID-19 posts jeopardises free speech](#) (Article19) & [COVID-19 Is Devastating India. Its Government Is Trying To Censor Social Media](#) (Buzzfeed)<br>• [Sri Lanka: Concern over detention of individuals for social media comments about the pandemic](#) (IFEX)<br>• [China Covid-19: How state media and censorship took on coronavirus](#) (BBC News)<br>• [Russian News Outlets Ordered to Take Down 'Fake' Coronavirus News](#) (Moscow Times)<br>• [Egypt forces Guardian journalist to leave after coronavirus story](#) (Guardian)<br>• [Many countries used COVID to justify free speech curbs: HRW](#) (Al Jazeera), [Rush to pass 'fake news' laws during Covid-19 intensifying global media freedom challenges](#) & [Tracker on Press Freedom Violations Linked to COVID-19 Coverage](#) (International Press Institute) |

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| Harm | Infringements of Privacy | |
|---|---|---|
| **Definition** | Online privacy is the freedom of users from illegal or unauthorized intrusion online, including the non-consensual use, processing or sharing of personal data or information. <br><br> Under certain limited circumstances, governments or law enforcement agencies may intercept personal data or surveil individuals online, but such infringements on privacy must be limited, proportionate, and receive prior authorisation attained via due process and with respect to the rule of law in order to be legal and not violate human rights. <br><br> Tech companies' ad-tech business models (tools and services that connect advertisers with target audiences and publishers to finance services provided[15]) rely on the collection of personal data in order to target advertising at specific subsets of online users. This collection of data is legal with the consent of the user, but is typically a condition of access to services and/or content, and (legal) consent is often secured through processes marked by stark information and power differentials (e.g. lengthy and highly legalistic and inaccessible Terms of Service[16]) that call into question the possibility of *meaningful* consent. | |
| **Feature / Right** | **Impacts** | **Examples** |
| **Impacts on Democracy** | Right to free and fair elections | Ad tech business models, and the data collection and micro-targeting that underpins them, can enable targeted voter suppression (through online advertising, disinformation, threats etc.) of specific, minority or marginalised groups <br><br> Invasive data collection and ad-targeting can lead to the atomisation of political campaigning, enabling highly specific targeting of different messaging to different voters, with limited or no transparency to |

(continued in Examples column:)
- The basics on microtargeting and political ads on Facebook (Mozilla)
- Why we're concerned about profiling and micro-targeting in elections (Privacy International)
- Weaponizing the Digital Influence Machine: The Political Perils of Online Ad Tech (Data & Society)
- It's Not Just the Content, It's the Business Model: Democracy's Online Speech Challenge (RDR)
- Online Political Advertising and Microtargeting: The Latest Legal, Ethical, Political and Technological Evolutions (IDEA)
- Revealed: Trump campaign strategy to deter millions of Black Americans from voting in 2016 (Channel 4 News)
- How The Facebook Ads that Targeted Voters Centered on Black American Culture: Voter

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[15] Privacy International, Ad Tech
[16] See Visualizing the Length of the Fine Print, for 14 Popular Apps (Visual Capitalist)

| | | highlight contradictions in political parties' messaging or platforms<br><br>The abundance of online data has increased the dangers posed by the targeted hacking of political parties and candidates during elections, with stolen information used to fuel dis/misinformation, hate or online abuse | • [Suppression was the End Game](#) (Stop Online Violence Against Women)<br>• [How Facebook, Google and Twitter 'embeds' helped Trump in 2016](#) (Politico)<br>• [Why Everyone Is Angry at Facebook Over Its Political Ads Policy](#) (NYT)<br>• ['It might work too well': the dark art of political advertising online - has the rise of micro-targeting become a threat to democracy?](#) (Guardian)<br>• [Further questions on Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the 2017 Kenyan Elections and Privacy International's investigations](#) (Privacy International)<br>• [Hacking democracy: how cyber attacks are undermining trust in voting](#) (New Statesman)<br>• [The weak link in election security: Europe's political parties](#) (Politico)<br>• [In Ukraine, digital political campaigning ramps up - with little oversight](#) (Open Democracy) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pluralistic system of political parties and organisations | Invasive data collection can enable violations of privacy through surveillance or hacking (either from domestic or foreign governments, or non-state actors), which can have a chilling effect on political dissent, and/or lead to a variety of online harms (dis/misinformation, abuse, harassment, offline violence) targeting political opposition, activists, civil society etc. | • [New Database Ties NSO Group to Improper Spying and Violence](#) (Bloomburg) & [The Experience of Being Surveilled: Human Rights Defenders Targeted by NSO Group's Pegasus Speak](#) (digitalviolence.org)<br>• [Hackers hit UK political parties with back-to-back cyberattacks](#) (Reuters)<br>• [German politicians targeted in mass data attack](#) (BBC News)<br>• [Malta political party data hack: Personal details of 21,000 people leaked and uploaded to a forum on the dark web](#) (Sigma)<br>• [Australian political parties hit by cyber attack](#) (FT)<br>• [Hacking democracy: Indonesia was once a bright spot for digital freedom in Southeast Asia. Now activists are being hacked, and authorities are using internet blackouts to curb dissent](#) (Rest of World)<br>• [Russian Hackers Have Targeted 200 Groups Tied to U.S. Election, Microsoft Says](#) (WSJ) |
| | Transparency & accountability | The weakness of data privacy laws and/or general lack of (effective) transparency for the public on how tech companies collect, use and share their data (e.g. inaccessible T&Cs) limits public understandings of and meaningful consent to these practices<br><br>Oversight by governments or regulators (if in place) | • [Facebook faces investigation over data breach](#) & [Facebook downplays data breach in internal email](#) (BBC News)<br>• [553,000,000 Reasons Not to Let Facebook Make Decisions About Your Privacy](#) (EFF)<br>• [Mexico: Public Accountability, Privacy Under Threat](#) (HRW)<br>• [Corporate Accountability Index 2019 – Privacy](#) (RDR)<br>• [Online targeting: Final report and recommendations](#) (CDEI)<br>• [Data rights: consumers expect transparency and instant access to their personal information](#) (Medium) & [The Data Privacy Feedback Loop: 2020 polling](#) (Transcend) |

| | | is typically retrospective, with any sanctions or remedies enforced after-the-fact, undermining the extent to which accountability can lead to practical changes or limit negative impacts (e.g. when employed following an election) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Free, independent & plural media | Invasive data collection can enable violations of privacy through surveillance or hacking (either from domestic or foreign governments, or non-state actors), which can have a chilling effect on journalists and the media, and/or lead to a variety of online harms (dis/misinformation, abuse, harassment, offline violence)<br><br>Data-driven ad tech business models have undermined traditional media business models (i.e. big tech dominating advertising revenues, resulting in cutting staff, local or investigative reporting for many outlets etc.) and changing editorial incentives (e.g. encouraging clickbait articles that are cheap to produce and drive ad revenues over in-depth, investigative or local reporting) – with the overall impact of undermining the independence and plurality of media<br><br>*(With the caveat that online platforms have also provided opportunities for non-traditional outlets to grow their audiences, even if these are often more partisan/less balanced to thrive in the online environment)* | <ul><li>[How a hacked phone may have led killers to Khashoggi](#) (CNN)</li><li>[Al-Jazeera's Ghada Oueiss on hacking, harassment, and Jamal Khashoggi](#) (CPJ)</li><li>[Dozens of Al Jazeera journalists allegedly hacked using Israeli firm's spyware](#) (Guardian)</li><li>[What are the latest threats to journalist's cybersecurity?](#) (Journalism.co.uk)</li><li>[New York Times journalist Nicole Perlroth on the secret trade in tools used to hack the press](#) (CPJ)</li><li>[Journalism, media, and technology trends and predictions 2021](#) (Reuters Institute)</li><li>[Big Tech versus journalism: publishers watch Australia fight with bated breath](#) (FT)</li><li>[Big Tech Has Crushed the News Business. That's About to Change](#) (NYT)</li><li>[How advertisers defund crisis journalism: In the pursuit of avoiding risk, ad tech might have created a new headache](#) (The New Humanitarian)</li><li>[Technology and the Free Press: The Need for Healthy Journalism in a Healthy Democracy](#) (Microsoft)</li></ul> |

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| Impact on Human Rights | Non-discrimination, incitement & minority protections<br><br>Security<br><br>Equal before the law, incitement | Discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics enabled by data collection and ad targeting (e.g. targeting or excluding specific groups with employment ads, pay-day loans etc.)<br><br>Discriminatory outcomes from AI systems trained through invasive data collection (e.g. AI content recommendation amplifying disinformation, hate speech/incitement or abuse/harassment, AI content moderation failing to address harms or censoring legal content from minority activists, or discriminatory facial recognition etc.)<br><br>Impacts on individuals' security as a result of invasive data collection - i.e. a lack of privacy online can enable targeted online disinformation, hate, harassment or abuse that leads to offline violence<br><br>Use of national security or minority protections by governments as pretexts to justify further erosions of online privacy | • [Google Has a Striking History of Bias Against Black Girls](#) (Time)<br>• [Algorithms that "Don't See Color": Comparing Biases in Lookalike and Special Ad Audiences](#) (arXiv)<br>• [Discrimination through optimization: How Facebook's ad delivery can lead to skewed outcomes](#) (arXiv)<br>• [The ethical questions that haunt facial-recognition research](#) (Nature)<br>• [Facial recognition: strict regulation is needed to prevent human rights violations](#) (Council of Europe)<br>• [Technology is Enabling Surveillance, Inequality During the Pandemic](#) (HRW)<br>• [The right to privacy in the digital age (focus on surveillance): report](#) (OHCHR)<br>• [WhatsApp sues Indian government over new privacy rules – sources](#) (Reuters)<br>• [China's Techno-Authoritarianism Has Gone Global: Washington Needs to Offer an Alternative](#) (HRW)<br>• [Turkey Doubles Down on Violations of Digital Privacy and Free Expression](#) (EFF)<br>• [FAQ: Why Brazil's Plan to Mandate Traceability in Private Messaging Apps Will Break User's Expectation of Privacy and Security](#) (EFF)<br>• [Myanmar: Scrap Sweeping Cybersecurity Bill - Proposed Law Poses Risks to Privacy, Free Expression, Access to Information](#) (HRW)<br>• [Digital dominion: new report exposes the depth of Syrian regime's mass surveillance](#) (Access Now)<br>• [When Algorithms Don't Account for Civil Rights: Do lucrative deals with advertisers have to come at the expense of users' civil rights?](#) (The Atlantic) |
| | Privacy & defamation | Direct impacts on users of privacy abuses or failings (i.e. data breaches) by tech companies, exacerbated by invasive data collection, processing and sharing practices, often disproportionately impacting minority or marginalised groups, or political opposition, activists, civil society etc. that may be more at risk from excessive data collection | • [The right to privacy in the digital age: report](#) (OHCHR)<br>• [Tech giants watch our every move online. Does that violate our human rights?](#) (Guardian)<br>• [Germany tightens online hate speech rules to make platforms send reports straight to the feds](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [FTC Imposes $5 Billion Penalty and Sweeping New Privacy Restrictions on Facebook](#) (FTC) & [Facebook settles with FTC: $5 billion and new privacy guarantees](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [ICO issues maximum £500,000 fine to Facebook for failing to protect users' personal information](#) (ICO) |

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| | | or data breaches<br><br>Unlawful infringements on citizens' privacy by governments (e.g. mass surveillance or bulk data collection by intelligence agencies or law enforcement), enabled and exacerbated by invasive data collection, processing and sharing practices of tech companies<br><br>*(See also Privacy & defamation sections in other harms, sections above / below)* | • [France fines Google $120M and Amazon $42M for dropping tracking cookies without consent](#) (TechCrunch) & [CNIL fines Google and Amazon for the unlawful use of cookies](#) (Privacy International)<br>• [First major GDPR decisions looming on Twitter and Facebook](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [Apple takes on the internet: the Big Tech battle over privacy](#) (FT)<br>• [Answers being sought from Facebook over latest data breach](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [UK resumes privacy oversight of adtech, warns platform audits are coming](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [Adtech 'data breach' GDPR complaint is headed to court in EU](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [Behavioural advertising is out of control, warns UK watchdog](#) (TechCrunch)<br>• [GCHQ's mass data interception violated right to privacy, court rules](#) (Guardian)<br>• [Hong Kong dismisses Google, Facebook warning over privacy laws](#) (Al Jazeera)<br>• [How Europe's privacy laws are failing victims of sexual abuse: The proliferation of nonconsensual pornography has prompted countries to act unilaterally](#) (Politico) |
| | Freedom of belief<br><br>Freedom of expression<br><br>Freedom of assembly<br><br>Political participation<br><br>Freedom to receive and impart information | Invasive data collection, processing and sharing practices of tech companies enable mass state (or private) surveillance or hacking, or increases risks of data breaches and/or threats to anonymity online, which have a chilling effect on freedoms of expression, belief, assembly and political participation, disproportionately impacting minority or marginalised groups, or political opposition, activists/dissidents, civil society, whistleblowers etc., especially in non-democratic contexts<br><br>Freedom of thought impaired by tech companies' dominance of the information environment – invasive data practices combined with coercive design distorts the free flow and accessibility of information, and can result in the manipulation of user choices, attitudes or beliefs | • [Two sides of the same coin – the right to privacy and freedom of expression](#) (Privacy International)<br>• [UN Report: The Link Between State Surveillance And Freedom Of Expression](#) (Privacy International)<br>• [Surveillance and censorship: The impact of technologies on human rights](#) (European Parliament)<br>• [13 Principles for a Human Rights Respecting State Surveillance Framework](#) (Access Now)<br>• [Why we should preserve anonymity on social media](#) (politics.co.uk)<br>• [Why ending anonymity would not make social media better](#) (Columbia Journalism Review)<br>• [#SaveAnonymity: together we can defend anonymity](#) (ORG)<br>• [A gender lens to the anonymity on social media debate](#) (Privacy International)<br>• [Social Media: Should people be allowed to be anonymous online?](#) (BBC)<br>• [Why human rights groups are concerned about Australia's online surveillance bill](#) (SBS)<br>• [Impact of new technologies on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of assemblies, including peaceful protests: report](#) (OHCHR)<br>• [The Real Dangers of Surveillance: What Americans can learn from the protests in Hong Kong](#) (NYT) & [Hong Kong security law: What is it and is it worrying?](#) (BBC News)<br>• [Anonymity helps #MeToo extend its reach into new communities: Women from conservative cultures are encouraged to speak out on sexual abuse](#) (FT) |

# Digital Action

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- [Everything You Need to Know About Facebook's Controversial Emotion Experiment](#) (Wired)