

Social Media Law of Turkey

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Turkey's parliament passed a controversial bill that gives the government greater control of social media, sparking concerns about freedom of expression in the country.

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Under the new law approved, **social media giants such as Facebook and Twitter have to ensure they have local representatives in Turkey and to comply with court orders over the removal of certain content. Companies could face fines, the blocking of advertisements or have bandwidth slashed by up to 90%, essentially blocking access, under the new regulations.**

The law, which targets social networks with more than a million unique daily visits, also says servers with **Turkish users' data must be stored in Turkey.** Human rights groups and the opposition are worried over what they call the erosion of freedom of expression in Turkey, where criminal proceedings for insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on social media are common.

They argue that **increased control of social media will also limit access to independent or critical information in a country where the news media is in the hands of government-friendly businessmen or controlled by the state.** While print and broadcast media platforms are already under government control, social networks are relatively free. Social networks had become one of the few spaces for free and effective expression in Turkey.

Human Rights Watch expressed concerns the law would enable the government to control social media, to get content removed at will and to arbitrarily target individual users. Ahead of the bill's passage, a spokesperson for the United Nations High

Commissioner for Human Rights said the legislation “would give the state powerful tools for asserting even more control over the media landscape”.

The president has frequently criticised social media despite having a large following. He once compared such platforms to a murderer’s knife and said a rise of immoral acts online in recent years was due to lack of regulations. A Turkish court in January lifted a ban on the online encyclopedia Wikipedia after almost three years. According to Twitter’s latest transparency report for the first half of 2019, **Turkey ranked number one for seeking content removal**, with more than 6,000 requests.