

Politics prime target in take-down requests: Google

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Political commentary remains a prime target as governments increase the number of requests for Google to remove material from the reach of Internet users.

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The [Internet giant](#) on Sunday released its fifth semi-annual Transparency Report providing insights into requests by countries around the world to "take down" content from search results or Google venues such as [YouTube](#).

"Just like every other time before, we've been asked to take down political speech," Google senior policy analyst Dorothy Chou said.

"It's alarming not only because free expression is at risk, but because some of these requests come from countries you might not suspect -- Western democracies not typically associated with [censorship](#)."

The number of requests from the United States doubled in the second half of last year. Ukraine, Jordan and Bolivia showed up for the first time on the list of countries out to have online material removed, according to Google.

Google reported that it went along with slightly more than half of the approximately 1,000 requests it received to remove material or links.

The transparency report doesn't provide insights regarding countries such as China where tight Internet controls allow for blocking of content, eliminating the need to ask Google to take down content.

From the start of July through December of last year, Google complied with approximately 65 percent of the more than 467 court orders to remove material and with 47 percent of the more than 561 request without judicial backing.

"We noticed that government agencies from different countries would sometimes ask us to remove political content that our users had posted on our services," Chou said.



A Chinese flag flies near Google's China head office in Beijing. Google's Transparency Report doesn't provide insights regarding countries such as China where tight Internet controls allow for blocking of content, eliminating the need to ask Google to take down content.

Google said the number of requests has grown steadily during the past two years.

Spanish regulators asked Google to remove 270 search results that linked to blogs and articles in newspapers referencing private individuals or public figures, including mayors and public prosecutors.

In Poland, a public institution asked Google to remove links to a website criticizing it. Chou said that Google did not comply with those requests in either country.

An electoral court order from Brazil resulted in Google removing four profiles from its Orkut social network for political content.

Broad defamation laws in Brazil allow for obtaining court orders to remove even truthful information from the Internet, according to Google.

The law there also reportedly bans showing parodies of candidates during elections, leading to requests for removal of material such as bits by celebrity comedians.

Among the requests turned down by Google was one from Canadian officials for the removal of a YouTube video of a Canadian citizen peeing on his passport and flushing it down a toilet.

The number of content removal requests received by Google in India was 49 percent higher in the second half of last year than in the first six months.

Pakistan's Ministry of Information Technology asked Google to remove six YouTube videos that satirized the country's military and senior politicians. Google did not comply with that request.

Google said it did terminate five YouTube accounts at the behest of the United Kingdom Association of Police Officers, which contended they promoted terrorism.

The Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology in Thailand asked Google to remove 149 YouTube videos for allegedly insulting the monarchy there. Google restricted 70 percent of the videos from view online in Thailand.

Requests from Turkish information technologies officials centered on videos of the founder of modern-day Turkey, and [Google](#) responded by making the targeted clips unavailable in that country.

"We realize that the numbers we share can only provide a small window into what's happening on the Web at large," Chou said.

"But we do hope that by being transparent about these government requests, we can continue to contribute to the public debate about how government behaviors are shaping our Web."

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