

India leads Facebook's global list for content restriction

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The 'Facebook' logo is reflected in a young Indian woman's sunglasses as she browses on a tablet in Bangalore on May 15, 2012. AFP Photo / Manjunath Kiran

Facebook restricted access to almost 5,000 pieces of content from India during the first six months of 2014 following requests by government agencies, a report by the social networking giant said.

The company on Tuesday released its third "Government Requests Report"—an aggregation of every appeal made by governments across the world for user data, individual accounts and content restrictions.

"We restricted access in India to a number of pieces of content reported primarily by [law enforcement officials](#) and the India Computer Emergency Response Team under local laws prohibiting criticism of a religion or the state," said the India Facebook page for the Government Requests Report.

The world's biggest democracy is Facebook's second largest market after the US with over a 100 million users.

On a visit to India in October, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said he wanted to help India's new prime minister Narendra Modi connect remote villages to the Internet.

In Facebook's report listing 83 countries, India topped the chart with as many as 4,960 registered requests to regulate content. Trailing behind were Turkey with 1,893 requests and Pakistan with 1,173.

India had the second highest number of [government requests](#) to access user accounts with 5,958, behind the US which asked to track 23,667 accounts.

Even as India is known to have nurtured a tradition of free speech with a vibrant media industry, laws governing its cyber space have come under public scrutiny for their restrictive nature.

Two years ago police sparked outrage and fierce debate about India's Internet laws by arresting two young women over a Facebook post criticising the shutdown of India's financial hub Mumbai after the death of a local hardline politician.

Internet users have also fallen foul of laws against offending religious sensibilities in a multi-faith country with a history of sectarian blood-letting.

Chris Sonderby, Facebook's Deputy General Counsel, wrote in a blog post Tuesday that the latest numbers reported a 24 percent increase in government requests for data and content globally compared to the second half of last year.

"We scrutinize every government request we receive for legal sufficiency under our terms and the strict letter of the law, and push back hard when we find deficiencies or are served with overly broad requests," Sonderby wrote.

He added that Facebook was working to "push governments for additional transparency and to reform surveillance practices necessary to rebuild people's trust in the Internet."

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