

Facebook says government data queries up 13 percent

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Facebook, in its twice-annual "transparency report," says the number of items "restricted" for violating local laws more than doubled compared to the prior six-month period, to 55,827

Facebook said Thursday it had received 13 percent more government requests for user data in the second half of 2015, with more than 46,000 requests worldwide.

The leading social network, in its twice-annual "transparency report," said the number of items "restricted" for violating local laws more than doubled compared to the prior six-month period, to 55,827.

"Overall, we continue to see an increase globally in [government requests](#) for [user data](#) and content restrictions pursuant to local law," Facebook deputy general counsel Chris Sonderby said.

The details come as the technology industry is embroiled in debate on how governments should gain access to user data, and how the requests should be disclosed to users and the public. Facebook and other tech firms have emphasized that they only turn over user data when served with legitimate legal orders such as warrants or subpoenas.

The United States accounted for the largest number of law enforcement queries, with 19,235 queries affecting 30,041 accounts. Facebook said it produced at least some data in 81 percent of those cases.

"We recognize there are serious threats to public safety and that law enforcement has an important responsibility to keep people safe," Sonderby said in a blog post.

"Our legal and safety teams work hard to respond to legitimate [law enforcement](#) requests while fulfilling our responsibility to protect people's privacy and security."

He noted that Facebook "does not provide any government with 'back doors' or direct access to people's data," and that the company examines each request "for legal sufficiency, no matter which country is making the request."

Other countries making large numbers of queries included India (5,561), Britain (4,190), Germany (3,140) and France (2,711).

Giving an example of a case where Facebook blocked or removed content on user pages, Sonderby said the company "restricted access" to more than 32,000 individual photos that almost all stemmed from one original image related to the November 2015 attacks in Paris.

The photo "was alleged to violate French laws related to protecting human dignity," and Facebook restricted the photo, in France only, "in response to a legal request from the French government," Sonderby said.

In the United States, Facebook said it received between zero and 499 "national security letters" which relate mostly to secret FBI investigations, complying with an accord that allows only the range of requests to be reported.

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