

Claim of anti-conservative bias by social media firms is baseless, report finds

Adam Gabbatt, Mon 1 Feb 2021

Republicans including Donald Trump have raged against Twitter and Facebook in recent months, alleging anti-conservative bias, censorship and a silencing of free speech. According to [a new report](#) from New York University, none of that is true.

Disinformation expert Paul Barrett and researcher J Grant Sims found that far from suppressing conservatives, social media platforms have, through algorithms, amplified rightwing voices, “often affording conservatives greater reach than liberal or nonpartisan content creators”.

Barrett and Sims’s report comes as Republicans up their campaign against social media companies. Conservatives have [long complained](#) that platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube show bias against the right, laments which intensified when Trump was [banned](#) from all three platforms for [inciting the attack](#) on the US Capitol which left five people dead.

The NYU study, released by the Stern Center for Business and Human Rights, found that a claim of anti-conservative bias “is itself a form of disinformation: a falsehood with no reliable evidence to support it”.

“There is no evidence to support the claim that the major social media companies are suppressing, censoring or otherwise discriminating against conservatives on their platforms,” Barrett said. “In fact, it is often conservatives who gain the most in terms of engagement and online attention, thanks to the platforms’ systems of algorithmic promotion of content.”

The report found that Twitter, [Facebook](#) and other companies did not show bias when deleting incendiary tweets around the Capitol attack, as some on the right have claimed.

Prominent conservatives including Ted Cruz, the Texas senator, have sought to crack down on big tech companies as they claim to be victims of suppression – which Barrett and Sims found does not exist.

The researchers did outline problems social media companies face when accused of bias, and recommended a series of measures.

“What is needed is a robust reform agenda that addresses the very real problems of social media content regulation as it currently exists,” Barrett said. “Only by moving forward from these false claims can we begin to pursue that agenda in earnest.”

A [2020 study](#) by the Pew Research Center reported that a majority of Americans believe social media companies censor political views. Pew found that 90% of Republicans believed views were being censored, and 69% of Republicans or people who leant Republican believed social media companies “generally support the views of liberals over conservatives”.

Republicans including Trump [have pushed](#) to repeal section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects social media companies from legal liability, claiming it allows platforms to suppress conservative voices.

The NYU report suggests section 230 should be amended, with companies persuaded to “accept a range of new responsibilities related to policing content”, or risk losing liability protections.