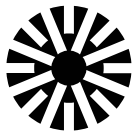


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AUGUST 18, 2021



More Americans now say government should take steps to restrict false information online than in 2018

BY [AMY MITCHELL](#) AND [MASON WALKER](#)

Amid rising concerns over misinformation online – including surrounding the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), especially vaccines – Americans are now a bit more open to the idea of the U.S. government taking steps to restrict false information online. And a majority of the public continues to favor technology companies taking such action, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

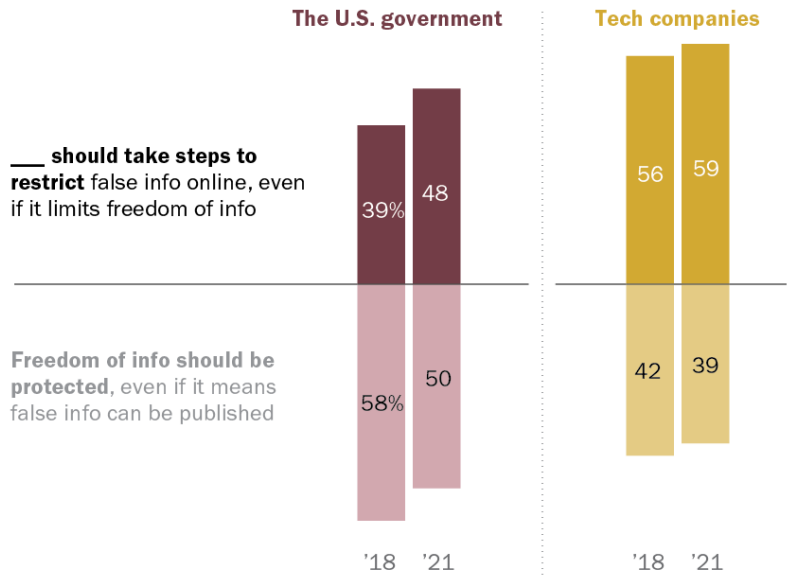
Roughly half of U.S. adults (48%) now say the government should take steps to restrict false information, even if it means losing some freedom to access and publish content, according to the survey of 11,178 adults conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021. That is up from 39% in 2018. At the same time, the share of adults who say freedom of

information should be protected – even if it means some misinformation is published online – has decreased from 58% to 50%.

When it comes to whether technology companies should take steps to address misinformation online, more are in agreement. A majority of adults (59%) continue to say technology companies should take steps to restrict misinformation online, even if it puts some restrictions on Americans’ ability to access and publish content. Around four-in-ten (39%) take the opposite view that protecting freedom of information should take precedence, even if it means false claims can spread. The balance of opinion on this question has changed little since 2018.

Americans now split over whether government should take steps to restrict false information online; majority continue to say tech companies should do so

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer not shown.
Source: Survey conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021.

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How we did this +

Partisan divisions on the role of government in addressing online misinformation have emerged since 2018. Three years ago, around six-in-ten in each partisan coalition – 60% of Republicans and GOP-leaning independents and 57% of Democrats and Democratic leaners – agreed that freedom of information should be prioritized over the government taking steps to restrict false information online. Today, 70% of Republicans say those

freedoms should be protected, even if it means some false information is published. Nearly as many Democrats (65%) instead say the government should take steps to restrict false information, even if it means limiting freedom of information.

Partisan views on whether technology companies should take such steps have also grown further apart. Roughly three-quarters of Democrats (76%) now say tech companies should take

steps to restrict false information online, even at the risk of limiting information freedoms. A majority of Republicans (61%) express the opposite view – that those freedoms should be protected, even if it means false information can be published online. In 2018, the parties were closer together on this question, though most Democrats still supported action by tech firms.

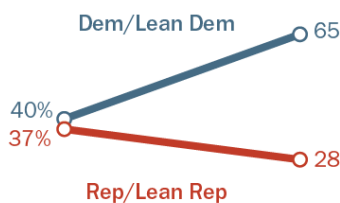
Some demographic differences that existed on these questions in 2018 have now largely disappeared. Three years ago, older Americans and those with less education were more likely than younger and more educated adults, respectively, to say the U.S. government should take steps to restrict false information online, even if means limiting some freedoms. Now, Americans across nearly all age groups are fairly evenly divided between the two views. Similar changes have occurred when it comes to Americans' educational background.

Women still tend to be more open than men to the idea of both the government and tech companies taking action to restrict false information online, though both groups have become a bit more supportive of the government taking such steps.

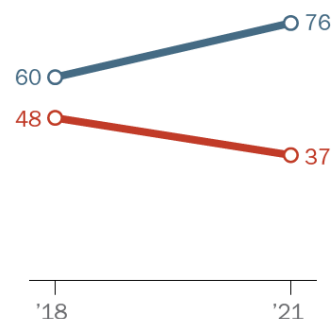
Partisan divisions have widened over role of government, tech firms in restricting misinformation

% of U.S. adults who say ...

The U.S. government should take steps to restrict false info online, even if it limits freedom of info



Tech companies should take steps to restrict false info online, even if it limits freedom of info



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021.

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Majorities within each demographic group now say tech companies should restrict false information

% of U.S. adults who say ...

	Freedom of info should be protected even if it means false info can be published	U.S. govt. should take steps to restrict false info online, even if it limits freedom of info	Freedom of info should be protected, even if it means false info can be published	Tech companies should take steps to restrict false info online, even if it limits freedom of info
2021				
Ages 18-29	53%	43%	41%	58%
30-49	48	50	39	59
50-64	50	48	38	60
65+	49	48	40	57
Men	56	43	44	55
Women	44	52	35	62
High school or less	48	49	38	60
Some college	53	44	43	55
College+	48	51	38	61
2018				
Ages 18-29	65	31	56	42
30-49	62	35	47	52
50-64	53	42	33	64
65+	48	48	34	64
Men	63	34	46	52
Women	53	43	39	59
High school or less	44	50	37	61
Some college	64	33	46	51
College+	68	30	46	53

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021.

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Note: Here are [the questions used](#) for this analysis, along with responses, and [its methodology](#).

Topics [Free Speech & Press](#), [Misinformation Online](#), [Tech Companies](#), [Social Media](#), [Misinformation](#), [Trust, Facts & Democracy](#), [Trust in Media](#)

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