



**RANKING DIGITAL RIGHTS**

# **2015 CORPORATE** **ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX**

The Ranking Digital Rights 2015 Corporate Accountability Index evaluates 16 of the world's most powerful Internet and telecommunications companies on their commitments, policies, and practices that affect users' freedom of expression and privacy.

To view in-depth results, download data, and access related resources, news, and updates, please visit [rankingdigitalrights.org](http://rankingdigitalrights.org).

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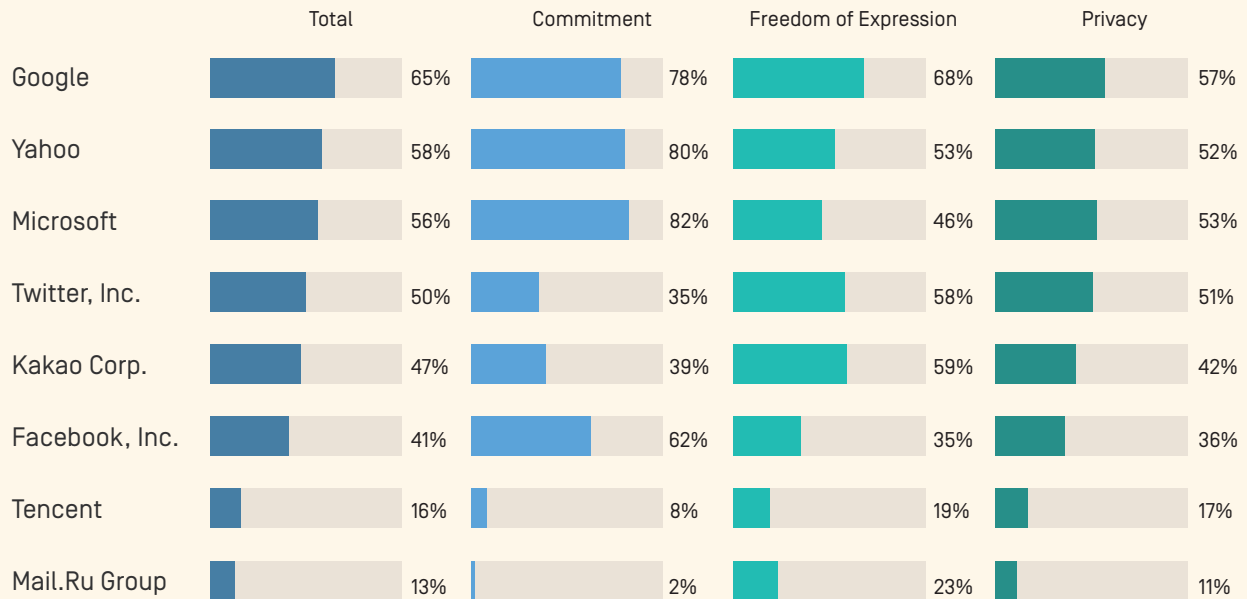
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# CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

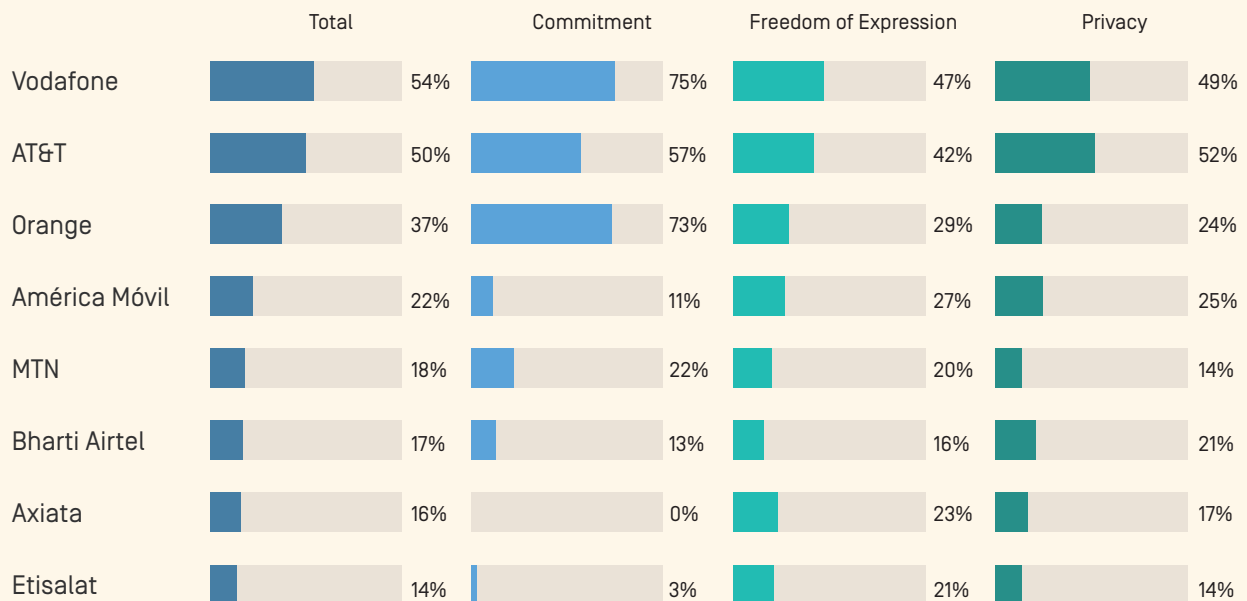
## Overall results for Internet and telecommunications companies

Results are tallied from 31 indicators across three categories: Commitment, Freedom of Expression, and Privacy.

### INTERNET COMPANIES



### TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES



# FINDINGS

## There are no “winners.” Even companies in the lead are falling short.

Across the board, companies need to improve their disclosure of policies and practices that affect users’ freedom of expression and privacy, as well as their commitments to these human rights.

- Only **six companies** scored at least 50 percent of the total possible points. The highest score was only 65 percent.
- **Nine companies** scored at least 30 percent, the minimum threshold for companies to demonstrate meaningful effort to respect users’ rights.
- **Seven companies**—nearly half—scored between 13-22 percent, demonstrating a serious deficit of respect for users’ freedom of expression and privacy.

## Users are left in the dark about many company practices that affect freedom of expression and privacy.

No company in the Index provides users with sufficiently clear, comprehensive, and accessible information about the practices they have in place that affect freedom of expression and privacy. These practices include companies’ handling of user information, terms of service enforcement, and government and private requests to restrict content or share user information. Without such information it is difficult to hold companies, governments, and other actors accountable when users’ rights are undermined.

- **Disclosure about collection, use, sharing, and retention of user information is poor.** Even companies that make efforts to publish such information still fail to communicate clearly with users about what is collected about them, with whom it is shared, under what circumstances, and how long the information is kept.
- **Disclosure about private and self-regulatory processes is minimal and ambiguous at best, and often non-existent.** Few companies disclose data about private third-party requests to remove or restrict content or to share user information – even when those requests come with a court order or subpoena, or are made in

accordance with established legal processes such as a copyright “notice-and-takedown” system. Even fewer companies disclose any information about whether – let alone how – they receive or respond to private or informal requests. Further, no companies in the Index disclose any information about actions they have taken to enforce their terms of service.

- **In some instances, current laws and regulations make it more difficult for companies to respect freedom of expression and privacy.** However, companies can still take actions to improve. All of the ranked companies face some legal or regulatory requirements that hinder their performance on certain indicators. For example, laws in many countries forbid companies from disclosing national security-related government requests. Some companies face more domestic political, legal, and regulatory obstacles to respecting users’ rights than others because some countries’ political and legal frameworks are less compatible with international human rights standards than others. Nonetheless, we have identified ways that all companies can improve their performance, even without changes to their political, legal, and regulatory environments.

## There is also good news:

- **Each of the companies in the Index is doing something well.** All of the companies we evaluated have at least some practices and/or policies in place that help to protect freedom of expression or privacy.
- **“Transparency reporting” is becoming a standard practice.** Nine of the 16 ranked companies publish some information about requests they receive from governments or private parties to share user information, and/or to remove or block content, deactivate accounts, or deny access to service.
- **Seven of the companies (nearly half) have backed up their commitments to freedom of expression and privacy by disclosing the concrete measures they have taken to implement those commitments.** Such measures include employee training and

whistleblowing mechanisms, internal oversight and accountability processes, and human rights impact assessments. Notably, these companies are members of the Global Network Initiative (a multi-stakeholder initiative committed to

upholding principles of freedom of expression and privacy in relation to government requests) or the Telecommunications Industry Dialogue (an industry organization also focused on freedom of expression and privacy).

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we developed a set of practical and immediate steps that companies can take to better respect their users' freedom of expression and privacy, thereby boosting user trust and winning the confidence of responsible investors. Find the complete set of recommendations at [rankingdigitalrights.org](http://rankingdigitalrights.org)

- **Disclose and communicate information that all stakeholders can understand, not just telecommunications regulators or Internet policy specialists.** Some companies state that they are compliant with the law but provide little or no explanation of how that compliance affects users. Companies need to disclose information in an accessible and user-friendly manner so that people understand the potential risks they may face.
- **Communicate clearly with users about what happens to their information.** If somebody were to create a dossier or file on users based on the information the company holds about them, what would it look like? For users to know the answer to that question, companies need to disclose sufficient information about what data they collect, how they use it, how long they keep it, with whom they share it, and under what circumstances they share it.
- **Demonstrate a credible commitment to security.** Companies should provide evidence that they maintain industry standards of encryption and security, educate users about potential threats, and disclose basic information about their security practices, including whether employee access to user information is monitored and whether the company conducts security audits.
- **Carry out due diligence to understand and address the impact of products, services, and business operations on users' rights.** Companies that are serious about respecting

users' human rights need to undertake regular impact assessments that examine potential risks to freedom of expression and privacy. In order to be credible, the quality and scope of these assessments should be verified by an independent multi-stakeholder organization committed to human rights principles.

- **Provide concrete evidence that the company has institutionalized its commitments.** While it is important for company leaders to demonstrate strong personal commitments to users' rights, it is even more important that such commitments be clearly institutionalized. Otherwise, users, investors, and other stakeholders have no way of knowing whether practices will change or stay the same after key people leave the company.
- **Establish effective grievance and remedy mechanisms.** Companies should develop channels for users and other affected parties to file grievances if they feel that their freedom of expression and/or privacy have been violated in connection with use of the company's service. Companies must also develop concrete processes for responding to and remedying these complaints.

**We must all advocate for legal and regulatory changes that enable companies to respect users' freedom of expression and privacy.** Everyone—companies, civil society activists, citizens, responsible investors, and policy-makers—must all advocate for change. Full corporate accountability will only be achieved when governments are also held accountable. We must work together to build legal, regulatory, and corporate standards that make it possible to protect and respect human rights.

**For more details, data, and analysis visit:**  
[rankingdigitalrights.org](http://rankingdigitalrights.org)