

2017 CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

The Ranking Digital Rights 2017 Corporate Accountability Index ranks 22 of the world's most powerful telecommunications, internet, and mobile companies on their disclosed commitments, policies, and practices that affect users' freedom of expression and privacy.



22 COMPANIES **62** SERVICES **35** INDICATORS

INDUSTRY

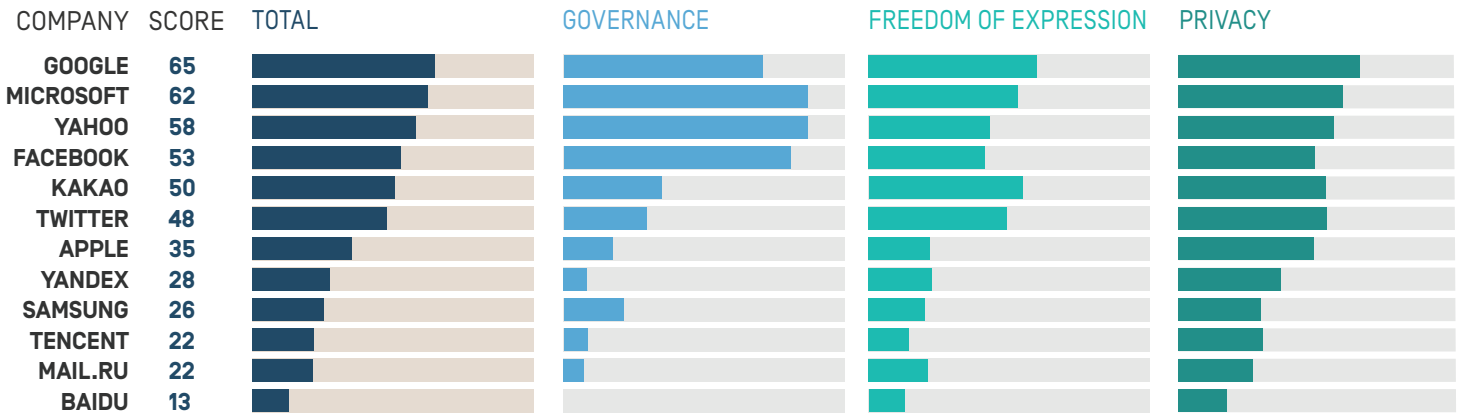
- INTERNET AND MOBILE
- TELECOMMUNICATIONS

COMPANY HQ

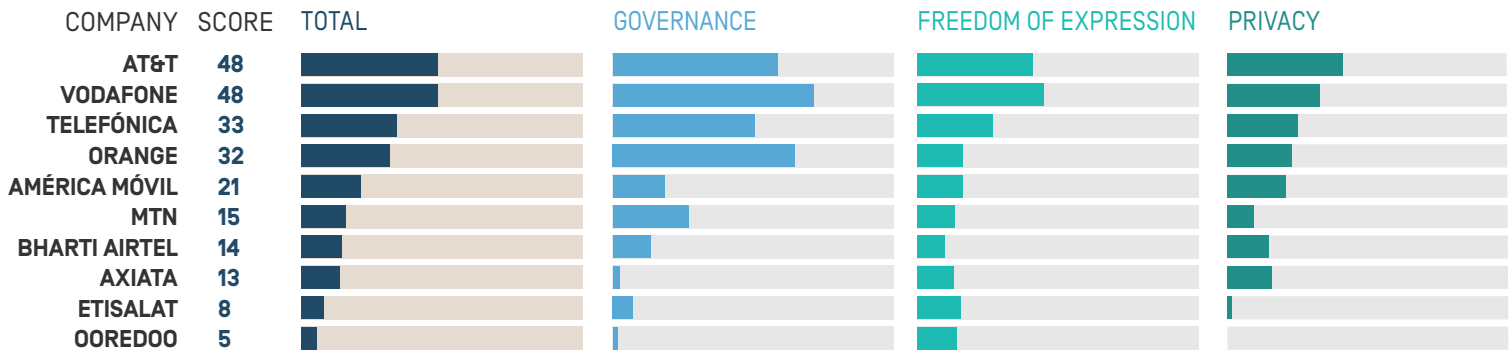


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● INTERNET AND MOBILE



● TELECOMMUNICATIONS



The Ranking Digital Rights 2017 Corporate Accountability Index evaluates 22 of the world's most powerful internet, mobile, and telecommunications companies on disclosed commitments and policies affecting freedom of expression and privacy. Together, the companies evaluated in the Index offer products and services that are used by at least half of the world's 3.7 billion internet users.

Companies were evaluated on 35 indicators examining disclosed commitments and policies affecting freedom of expression and privacy, including corporate governance and accountability mechanisms.

To view in-depth results, download data, and access related resources and news, visit rankingdigitalrights.org

KEY FINDINGS

Companies do not disclose enough information to their users about policies and practices affecting freedom of expression and privacy. As a result most of the world's internet users lack the information they need to make informed choices.

Some companies have made meaningful improvements since our first Index was launched in 2015. Yet company disclosure remained inadequate on key issues that affect what a user can and cannot say or do, or who knows what about their activities.

- **Google** and **Microsoft** were the only companies in the entire Index to score more than 60 percent overall. However, Google's lead over the other companies near the top of the Index has narrowed since 2015, while Microsoft moved from third to second place primarily due to improved disclosures about its policies affecting freedom of expression.
- **AT&T** and **Vodafone** tied for the highest score among the 10 telecommunications companies. Vodafone scored better on disclosures related to its governance mechanisms as well as policies affecting freedom of expression. AT&T offered more detailed disclosure on policies and practices affecting users' privacy.
- **Apple** ranked seventh among the 12 internet and mobile companies evaluated. A major reason for this relatively low score was poor disclosure about the company's commitments and policies affecting users' freedom of expression. Next to its peers, Apple also disclosed little information about how it has institutionalized its commitments to users' rights.
- **Kakao**, a South Korean company that offers internet search, email, and mobile chat services, earned high scores on 10 of the 35 indicators across the Index.

For more details, data, and analysis visit: rankingdigitalrights.org/index2017

Across the 22 companies evaluated, several issues stood out:

- **Mobile ecosystems: We don't know enough about the impact of smartphones on our digital rights.** Smartphones are chokepoints for freedom of expression and gatekeepers for digital security. We evaluated three "mobile ecosystems": Apple's iOS ecosystem, the Google Android mobile ecosystem, and Samsung's implementation of Android. All three offered poor disclosure about policies affecting freedom of expression and privacy. Google disclosed the most about policies and practices affecting users of its own Android smartphones. Apple was most competitive on privacy-related disclosures and generally had better disclosure than Samsung-controlled Android devices.
- **Freedom of expression is getting short-changed.** How do company actions affect our ability to publish, transmit, or access content? With a couple of notable exceptions, most companies disclosed much less information about policies that affect users' freedom of expression than about policies affecting privacy.
- **Handling of user information is opaque.** How and for what purpose is our information collected, shared, retained, and used? If somebody were to build a profile on you using this information what would it look like? Companies don't disclose enough for users to understand risks and make informed choices.
- **Security commitments lack sufficient evidence.** In order to trust a service, users need to know that credible efforts are being made to secure their information. Most companies communicated less about what they are doing to protect users' security than about what users need to do to protect themselves. Disclosure about policies related to responding to data breaches was especially poor.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Companies can take practical and immediate steps to improve. They include:

Provide concrete evidence that the company has institutionalized its commitments to freedom of expression and privacy. Otherwise, how do users know whether policies and practices will change or stay the same after key individuals leave the company? Evidence includes: Board and executive oversight, staff training, whistleblowing mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and mechanisms for grievance and remedy.

Undertake due diligence. Does the company have a systematic way to understand and address the impact of products, services, and business operations on users' rights? Responsible companies disclose that they conduct human rights impact assessments that cover freedom of expression and privacy. In order to be credible assessments should be independently assured.

Explain to users why speech, access to information, or access to service may be blocked or constrained. Who has the ability to ask the company to remove or block content or otherwise restrict speech? How does the company handle these requests? Are there effective grievance and remedy mechanisms? Companies controlling mobile ecosystems should disclose information

about how and why app store content is restricted. Telecommunications companies should disclose information about how and why network shutdowns happen, and whether network traffic is managed in ways that might favor certain types of content.

Publish "transparency reports." Companies should regularly release data and other information that helps users understand how companies are handling requests by governments and all other parties to access user information or to restrict content, accounts, or users' access to service.

Inform users about what happens to their information. What organizations, governments, or other entities have access to user information, and under what circumstances? How are requests and data sharing relationships handled?

Demonstrate a credible commitment to security. Does the company maintain industry standards of encryption and security, conduct security audits, monitor employee access to information and educate users about threats?

We must all work together to build legal, regulatory, and corporate standards that make the protection of human rights possible—and common—in the digital age.

About the Ranking Digital Rights Corporate Accountability Index

Ranking Digital Rights (RDR) is a nonprofit research project housed at New America's Open Technology Institute. It produces a Corporate Accountability Index that ranks the world's most powerful internet, mobile, and telecommunications companies on their disclosed commitments and policies affecting users' freedom of expression and privacy. In 2015, RDR's inaugural Corporate Accountability Index ranked 16 internet and telecommunications companies. See: rankingdigitalrights.org/index2015

The standards the Index uses to evaluate companies build on more than a decade of work by the human rights, privacy, and security communities. The Index data and analysis inform the work of human rights advocates, policymakers, and responsible investors and are used by companies to improve their own policies and practices.

For the full 2017 Index data and analysis, report cards for each company, downloadable report, and raw data set, please visit rankingdigitalrights.org/index2017