



RANKING DIGITAL RIGHTS

2019 RDR CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

The 2019 Ranking Digital Rights Corporate Accountability Index evaluated 24 of the world's most powerful internet, mobile, and telecommunications companies on their disclosed commitments and policies affecting freedom of expression and privacy.

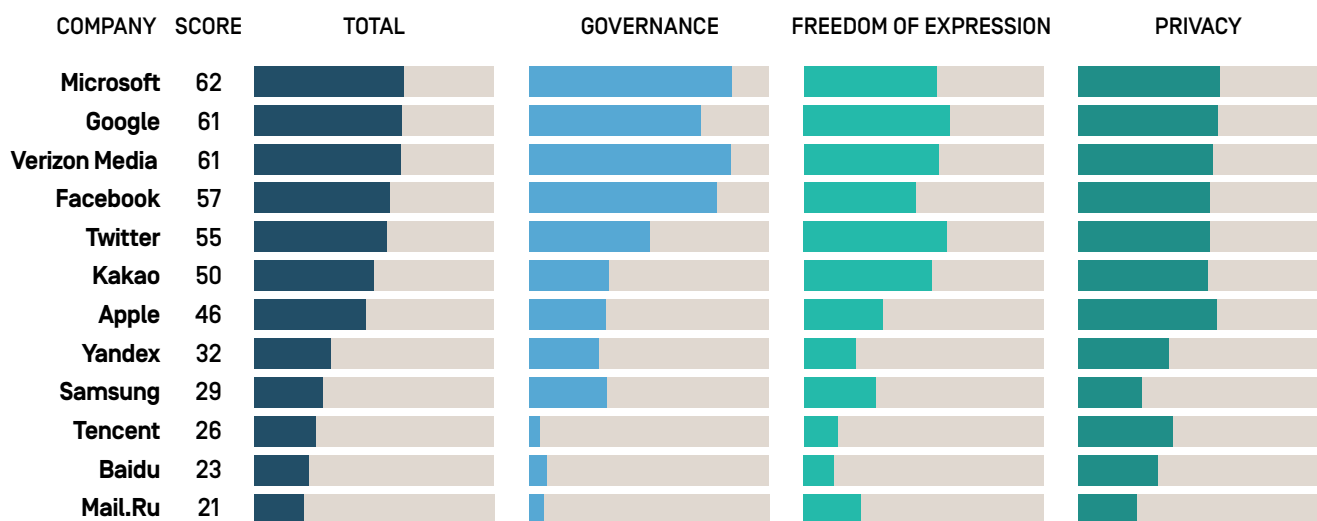


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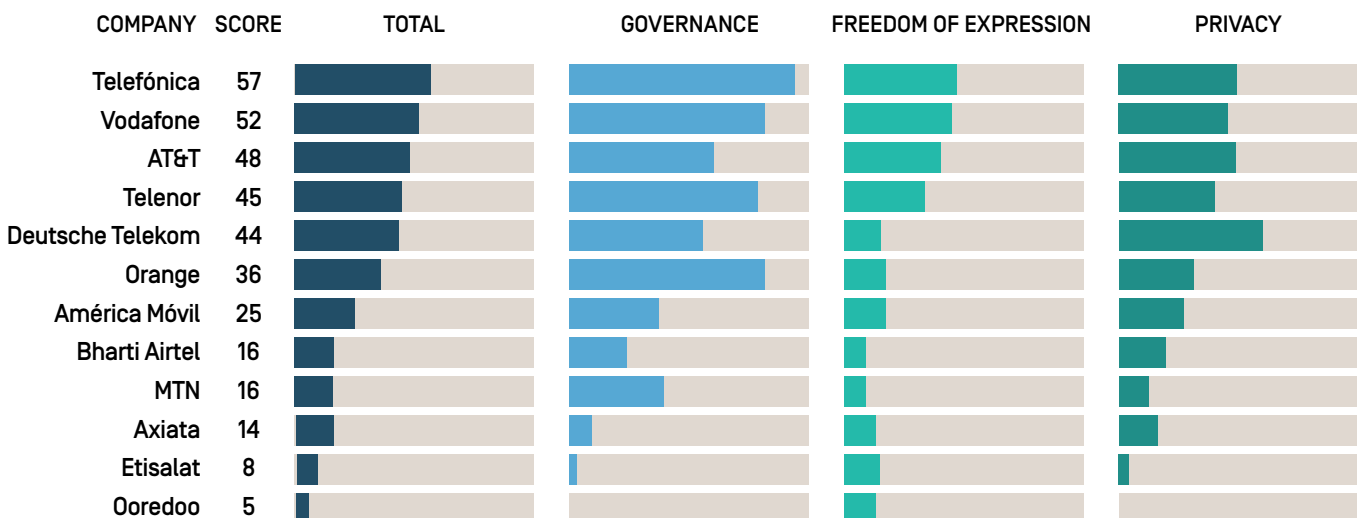
The 2019 Ranking Digital Rights Corporate Accountability Index evaluated 24 of the world’s most powerful internet, mobile, and telecommunications companies on 35 indicators examining their publicly disclosed commitments, policies, and practices affecting freedom of expression and privacy, including governance and accountability mechanisms. Together, the companies evaluated in the RDR Index offer products and services that are used by at least half of the world’s 4.3 billion internet users. These companies held a combined market capitalization of nearly USD 5 trillion.

Ranking Digital Rights is a non-profit research project housed at New America’s Open Technology Institute. Previous RDR Indexes were released in November 2015, March 2017, and April 2018. For the full 2019 RDR Index data and analysis, report cards for each company, and raw data set, please visit: rankingdigitalrights.org/index2019.

INTERNET AND MOBILE ECOSYSTEM COMPANIES



TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES



KEY FINDINGS

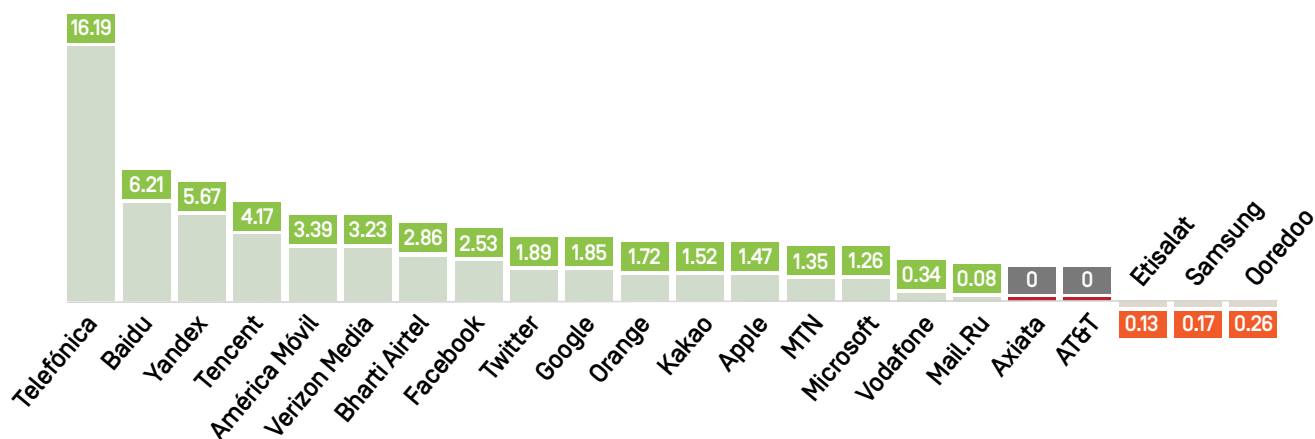
Most companies have taken steps to improve. But they have a long way to go before the internet supports and sustains human rights for everyone. The 2019 RDR Index evaluated 24 companies. Of the 22 also evaluated for 2018, 19 made improvements in the past year—including the new leaders for this year.

1. **Microsoft** ranked first, mainly due to strong governance and consistent application of its policies across all services. It unseated **Google**, whose lead since the first RDR Index in 2015 had gradually narrowed, and which tied with **Verizon Media** (formerly Oath and originally Yahoo) for second place in the Index overall.
2. **Telefónica** shot ahead of all other telecommunications companies, disclosing significantly more than its peers about policies and practices affecting freedom of expression and privacy. The Madrid-based multinational with operations across Latin America and Europe also made more improvements than all other companies in the RDR Index. **Vodafone**, which led in 2018, is now in second place, ahead of **AT&T**, which dropped to third.

People have a right to know. Companies have a responsibility to show. In the past year more companies made public commitments to respect users' human rights, and demonstrated oversight and accountability around risks to freedom of expression and privacy. New regulations in the European Union and elsewhere also drove many companies to improve disclosures about their handling of user information. Yet few companies scored above 50% in the 2019 Index. When companies fail to meet RDR's standards for disclosure of commitments, policies, and practices, users are exposed to undisclosed risks affecting their freedom of expression and privacy.

1. **PRIVACY: Most companies still fail to disclose important aspects of how they handle and secure personal data.** Despite new regulations in the EU and elsewhere, most of the world's internet users are still deprived of basic facts about who can access their personal information under what circumstances, and how to control its collection and use.
2. **GOVERNANCE: Threats to users caused by companies' business models, and deployment of new technologies, are not well understood or managed.** Most companies are not prepared to identify and manage risks such as those associated with targeted advertising and automated decision making. Nor do companies offer adequate grievance and remedy mechanisms to ensure that harms can be reported and rectified.
3. **EXPRESSION: Transparency about policing of online speech remains inadequate.** As companies struggle to address the harms caused by hate speech and disinformation, they are not doing enough to help users see who has power over their ability to speak or access information through the companies' platforms or services. Insufficient transparency increases the risk of censorship and manipulation by governments, companies, and others.
4. **GOVERNMENT DEMANDS: Transparency about demands that governments make of companies is also inadequate.** Companies disclose insufficient information about how they handle government demands for access to user data, or to restrict speech. As a result, in most countries, government censorship and surveillance powers are not subject to adequate oversight to prevent abuse or maintain public accountability.

Year-on-year score changes [2018-2019]



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPANIES

All companies evaluated in the RDR Index can make improvements immediately, even in the absence of legal or policy reform.

1. **Go beyond legal compliance:** Regulations alone are not always enough to ensure that companies are taking the necessary steps to respect and protect human rights. For companies that have made commitments to respect freedom of expression and privacy as human rights, the RDR Index indicators offer clear standards to follow.
2. **Be transparent:** Disclose comprehensive and systematic data and other information that enables users to have a clear understanding of how online speech can be restricted or manipulated, and how personal information can be accessed and used—by whom, and under what authority.
3. **Get serious about oversight and due diligence:** Board oversight and comprehensive due diligence mechanisms are necessary to identify how freedom of expression and privacy may be affected by the company's business, and to ensure that the company works to maximize the protection of users' human rights.
4. **Offer effective grievance and remedy mechanisms:** Users need to be able to report harms and seek remediation when their freedom of expression or privacy rights are violated in connection with using the company's platform, service, or device.
5. **Innovate for better governance of data and speech:** Work with civil society, investors, and governments to create new approaches for addressing threats to individuals and societies while also protecting users' rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

Governments should uphold their duty to protect human rights if companies are to fully respect human rights. Citizens must be able to hold government accountable for how it exercises power over online speech and personal data.

1. **Uphold human rights standards:** Strong data protection law is essential for protecting privacy. Government also has a duty to protect people from violence and crime. At the same time, all laws affecting online speech, or the use and sharing of personal data by any entity, must uphold human rights standards. Governments should not enact laws that compel companies to violate, or facilitate the violation of, users' rights to freedom of expression or privacy. Any restriction of the right to freedom of expression and opinion or the right to privacy must be prescribed by law, necessary to achieve a legitimate aim (consistent with human rights standards), and proportionate to the aim pursued.
2. **Commit to robust oversight:** Ensure that government power to restrict online speech or access personal data is subject to meaningful oversight against abuse of censorship and surveillance power. Without credible oversight, government measures to address harmful and malicious activities via private
- platforms and services, or to address other social, economic, and security challenges, will be plagued by public and industry mistrust.
3. **Implement and require transparency:** Publish regular and accessible data disclosing the volume, nature, and purpose of government requests made to companies affecting users' freedom of expression and privacy. Companies should also be required by law to disclose meaningful and comprehensive information about the full range of actions they take that may affect users' freedom of expression or privacy.
4. **Require strong corporate governance:** Companies should be required by law to implement board oversight, systematic internal and external reporting, and impact assessments to identify, evaluate, and mitigate potential human rights harms, including violations of users' freedom of expression and privacy.
5. **Ensure access to remedy:** People have a right to meaningful and effective remedy, including legal recourse, when their privacy or freedom of expression rights are violated. Companies should also be required to provide accessible and effective grievance and remedy mechanisms.