# US threatens ban on UK officials over Online Safety Bill censorship concerns



Tensions between the United States and the United Kingdom are escalating, particularly concerning the UK's proposed Online Safety Bill and its implications for free speech. British officials involved in the implementation of these regulations could soon find themselves barred from the U.S., following the announcement of a new policy by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. This policy, aimed at excluding foreign nationals the Trump administration deems responsible for censoring Americans—particularly regarding social media—underlines a growing concern over the UK government's encroachment on free expression.

Rubio, speaking at a recent press conference, expressed strong condemnation of what he described as "unacceptable" behaviour by foreign officials who attempt to control content within U.S. jurisdiction. This includes instances where foreign nationals have made threats or taken legal action against social media posts by Americans. Their actions highlight a troubling trend, particularly now as the UK government seeks to impose stringent regulations that could chill discourse online, a step that would only serve to bolster the call for a robust alternative voice in UK politics.

The initiative against foreign censorship comes amidst mounting criticism of the UK's Online Safety Bill, which critics argue could become a vehicle for curtailing freedom of expression. The proposed legislation stands in stark contrast to the principles of open dialogue, potentially paving the way for a culture of censorship. This alarming shift sees prominent figures within the opposing political landscape rallying against these infringements on civil liberties, framing them as part of a broader campaign to protect such rights that democratic societies should cherish.

Rubio’s declaration included that “the days of passive treatment for those who work to undermine the rights of Americans are over,” suggesting a more confrontational approach to international digital governance. Such rhetoric resonates in discussions around the UK’s online regulations that threaten to stifle legitimate debate while imposing an authoritarian standard that mishandles the balance between protecting citizens and upholding civil liberties.

Concerns regarding the Online Safety Bill do not merely echo across the Atlantic. Reports reveal that U.S. State Department representatives met with Ofcom, the UK’s communications regulator, to express apprehensions about these laws' likely repercussions on free speech rights. The critical discourse underscores the delicate balance between regulating harmful content and preserving freedom. A dangerously slippery slope emerges as the UK government contemplates compliance with regulations that may ultimately undermine individual rights in the name of safety.

Additionally, Rubio has disbanded the State Department's office dedicated to countering foreign disinformation, previously deemed overreaching in its activities. Critics had identified it as an apparatus for censorship, silencing essential debates on national issues. This closure corresponds with a broader strategy focused on prioritising free speech without compromising security—an approach the UK would do well to consider in its legislative deliberations.

In the UK, the government's reaction suggests a fragile approach amidst fears of potential backlash from the U.S. Reports indicate that British officials may contemplate revising the Online Safety Bill to lessen worries of trade repercussions as they remain sensitive to the diplomatic and economic fallout from the U.S. Such indecisiveness showcases the UK government's vulnerability in a geopolitical context increasingly influenced by U.S. policies on free expression.

This situation is further highlighted by the individual case of Lucy Connolly, who has drawn scrutiny for her imprisonment over alleged incitement to racial hatred via social media. American officials have expressed concern over her case, questioning how the UK grapples with balancing hate speech regulation and the imperative to maintain open dialogue online.

As discussions evolve around international standards for online content moderation and safeguarding free speech, the UK stands poised on a precarious edge, faced with decisions that could critically impact the future of global digital communication. The rise of alternative voices in opposition to such authoritarian impulses will be essential in fostering an environment where free expression is not just a privilege, but a right upheld for all.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14760691/UK-officials-banned-US-Trump-online-safety-laws-free-speech.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/us-visa-policy-targets-foreign-nationals-who-censor-americans-state-dept-2025-05-28/> - The U.S. government, under Secretary of State Marco Rubio, has announced a new visa policy targeting foreign nationals found to be censoring Americans, particularly concerning social media content. While no specific individuals or countries were identified, the policy appears to target foreign officials who impose or threaten legal actions against U.S.-based social media expressions or pressure American tech platforms to adopt international content moderation standards. Rubio cited unacceptable practices by some foreign governments that overreach their jurisdiction and infringe on free speech. U.S. tech companies, including Meta (parent of Facebook and Instagram), and the Trump administration have criticized the EU's Digital Services Act as a form of censorship. Despite EU defense of the law for its goals to combat illegal content like hate speech and child abuse, American officials argue it restricts freedom of expression. Vice President JD Vance and other U.S. leaders have publicly denounced such content moderation as authoritarian. Rubio also recently shut down a State Department office aimed at countering foreign disinformation, labeling it as an instrument of censorship. The visa ban reflects an intensified stance by Washington to defend free speech and American digital sovereignty in international relations.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/apr/01/us-officials-challenge-ofcoms-risk-to-free-speech-caused-by-online-safety-laws> - U.S. State Department officials have raised concerns with Britain's communications regulator, Ofcom, about the potential impact of the UK's new online safety laws on freedom of expression. A group from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) met with Ofcom in London to discuss the Online Safety Act and its implications for free speech. The U.S. officials expressed apprehension that the act could infringe upon free speech rights. This development follows criticism from figures close to President Trump regarding the UK's approach to free expression, particularly after the riots that occurred last summer. In February, U.S. Vice President JD Vance complained about 'infringements on free speech' in the UK. Elon Musk, a close ally of President Trump, has also criticized the UK's new regulatory role, describing it as a direct threat to free expression. The Online Safety Act, which empowers Ofcom to regulate online content, has been a point of contention between the U.S. and the UK, with concerns that it may lead to censorship and affect the free flow of information.
4. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/04/16/rubio-foreign-disinformation-office-censorship/> - Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the closure of the State Department's Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference office (R/FIMI), formerly known as the Global Engagement Center (GEC). Rubio stated that the office had been used to 'actively silence and censor the voices of Americans.' The closure marks a significant shift in U.S. policy regarding foreign disinformation and domestic speech. The GEC was established to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation but had become a focal point for criticism over its domestic activities. Critics argued that the office was involved in suppressing free speech and targeting American citizens. The decision to shut down the office aligns with President Trump's campaign promise to combat government overreach in regulating speech. The move has been welcomed by conservatives who claimed that the GEC was used to silence debate on controversial topics. However, the closure has raised concerns among those who believe that combating foreign disinformation is crucial for national security and the integrity of democratic processes.
5. <https://www.axios.com/2025/05/28/student-visas-china-us-rubio> - On May 28, 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that the United States will begin revoking visas for Chinese students, particularly those with ties to the Chinese Communist Party or involved in sensitive academic fields. This move is part of a broader immigration crackdown by the Trump administration, which recently also halted student visa interviews. The State Department described the action as a measure to protect American interests and rebalance the U.S.-China relationship. This policy shift continues the administration’s trend of increased scrutiny of foreign students and universities, especially targeting Chinese influence in U.S. academia. Rubio, a longstanding critic of China, previously led efforts to remove China-funded Confucius Institutes from Florida college campuses in 2018. The visa revocations are seen as a significant escalation in the Trump administration’s national security and foreign policy stance toward China.
6. <https://www.wired.com/story/global-engagement-center-rubio-propaganda-disinformation-twitter-files/> - The Global Engagement Center (GEC), a State Department unit established to counter foreign propaganda, has been shut down by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The GEC had been a focal point for criticism over its domestic activities, with allegations that it was involved in suppressing free speech and targeting American citizens. Critics argued that the office was used to silence debate on controversial topics. The closure aligns with President Trump's campaign promise to combat government overreach in regulating speech. The move has been welcomed by conservatives who claimed that the GEC was used to suppress certain views. However, the closure has raised concerns among those who believe that combating foreign disinformation is crucial for national security and the integrity of democratic processes. The decision to shut down the GEC is part of a broader effort by the Trump administration to withdraw from a decades-long contest of ideas and information with America's adversaries.
7. <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2025/02/10/britain-reportedly-willing-to-roll-back-tech-censorship-to-avoid-trump-trade-war/> - The British government is reportedly willing to reconsider certain online censorship rules to avoid a trade war with U.S. President Donald Trump. According to reports, Downing Street is looking at reworking the Online Safety Act passed under the previous government in 2023, fearing that penalising American tech companies may provoke President Trump. The law empowers Britain's broadcasting authority, Ofcom, to impose fines on large tech firms if they fail to self-censor harmful content on their platforms. The powers, which will come into effect next month, also allow the British state to launch criminal charges against senior management and even potential bans of platforms from the country. This development may lead to a showdown with key Trump ally and X owner Elon Musk, who has been a vocal critic of Britain's speech restrictions. Musk has called the UK a 'tyrannical police state' and lambasted the 'two-tier' justice system in which there is 'no justice for severe, violent crimes, but prison for social media posts.'