

Big Tech Backlash?

Public opinion is turning against companies like Facebook and Google

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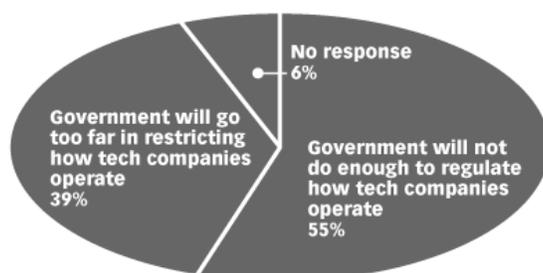
Ross Benes

The public is getting fed up with what's trending.

According to a February 2018 survey of US internet users by [SurveyMonkey](#) for [Axios](#), 55% of respondents said they are concerned that the government will not do enough to regulate the way tech companies operate. These results indicate that public opinion is turning against the giant tech firms that have come to dominate the US economy. In November 2017, only 40% of those surveyed by SurveyMonkey/Axios said they were concerned about the government not regulating tech enough.

US Internet Users' Primary Concern About Government Regulation of Technology Companies, Feb 2018

% of respondents



Note: n=3,574 ages 18+

Source: Axios survey conducted by SurveyMonkey, Feb 28, 2018

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The increasing skepticism toward tech companies stretches across the political aisle. While Republicans are often staunch opponents of business regulations, 45% of Republicans surveyed said they worry the government won't go far enough in policing tech firms, up from 31% who said the same in November.

People are amplifying their calls for the government to place controls on tech companies at a time when Facebook, Google and Twitter have been called to Capitol Hill for questioning after their **platforms were used by Russian entities** to influence US politics. Two-thirds of respondents in the SurveyMonkey/Axios poll said that these companies have a major responsibility to prevent their platforms from being used by foreign governments to interfere in US politics. Most of the respondents said that social media does more to hurt democracy and free speech than to promote it.

"While there is certainly more attention about the growing power of 'big tech,' it certainly hasn't translated into consumer pushback or rejection of those companies in any significant way yet," said Simulmedia CEO Dave Morgan, who is a lawyer by training and used to serve as a lobbyist for the newspaper industry.

Although consumers are becoming more vocal about criticizing large tech companies, very few people stop their services. The ad businesses of Google, Facebook and Amazon continue to grow at an impressive pace.

"Fundamentally, they are delivery high-value services to consumers at very low or no cost," Morgan said. "That seems to be what is most important to most people."

Within the media landscape, several **industry insiders** are also calling for more government oversight of Facebook and Google since the so-called duopoly reaps **more than 60% of net US digital ad revenues** per year, eMarketer estimates. But just because publishers and advertisers are getting crushed by powerful platforms doesn't mean that their lobbying efforts will find success in the US.

However, Europe is more willing to regulate tech companies. Last year, antitrust officials in Europe **fined Google \$2.7 billion** for favoring its

own services. According to Politico, the European Commission is **looking into taxing digital companies'** gross revenues based on where their users are located. In May, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) goes live and will **force many tech companies to get user consent** before using people's personal data.

But in the US, the outlook is quite different. The five largest US companies in terms of market capitalization **are all tech firms**. And the current political climate in the US has tilted toward less, not more, regulation of tech companies.

"The problem for consumers is there is a gap between consumer attitudes and lobbying firms," said Fred Lane, an attorney and author who writes about emerging technology.

In December 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) repealed **net neutrality**, which effectively gave ISPs even more power over consumers than what currently exists in their **regional monopolies**. The repeal happened even though more than 80% of US respondents in a **University of Maryland poll** said they wanted to keep net neutrality.

The US Congress also **killed internet privacy protections** last year so that ISPs no longer have to ask users for consent to obtain their web browsing history. Google is so unregulated that its publicly traded parent company **doesn't even have to break out revenues** for its **digital video powerhouse** YouTube.

"I've seen how hard it is to pass legislation, and how easy it is to slow it down or stop legislation from passing," Morgan said. "I don't think that there is any kind of widespread support for regulating big tech companies, other than from older big companies who don't like the competition. I don't see anything happening in this area anytime soon."