

Congress Is Preoccupied by Big Tech

Article

Lately, US lawmakers have been a little obsessed with big tech firms.

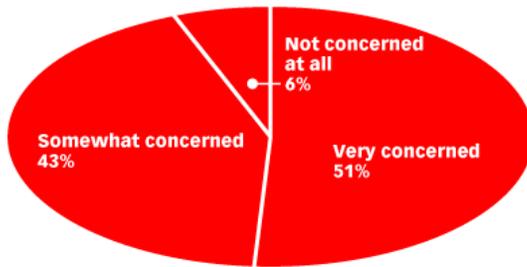
Quorum Analytics, a public affairs research firm, analyzed the content of press releases, newsletters, social media posts and floor statements from members of Congress over the past decade and found that they talk about technology much more than other sectors of the economy. That included finance, auto, retail, transportation—even healthcare. Researchers at Quorum counted 26,609 references that lawmakers have made about technology since 2008. More than half of these references were aimed at Facebook.

Not surprisingly, the Quorum study shows that lawmakers' technology references really picked up during the past year. Facebook, Google and Twitter were called to Capitol Hill for questioning after it became evident that Russian trolls had used their platforms to try to influence US elections. Congressional references to tech peaked during Mark Zuckerberg's testimony in April about how Cambridge Analytica used Facebook data to target political messages.

The increased focus on tech mirrors the concerns of the electorate. In an April survey of US internet users conducted by Janrain, just 6% of respondents said that they're not concerned about the security and privacy of their personal data.

Level of Concern About the Security and Privacy of Their Personal Data According to US Internet Users, April 2018

% of respondents



Note: ages 18+

Source: Janrain, "Consumer Attitudes Toward Data Privacy Survey," May 7, 2018

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The intense focus on Big Tech could presage new efforts to regulate the industry. In May, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) went live and shook up ad tech because the law requires companies to get explicit permission from individuals to utilize their data. Two-thirds of the US internet users Janrain polled said that **they'd support GDPR-style rules** in the US.

There is no GDPR equivalent in the US right now. However, in June, California passed a **new digital consumer privacy law** that gives users the right to opt out of having their data sold. And in May, Vermont passed a law to **regulate data brokers** that sell people's personal information.

It's not certain that more technology regulation is on the way in the US. But with the US population and Congress becoming more cognizant of how big data platforms operate, it's looking more likely that change is coming.

