

Examining Extremism Research Takedowns Online

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Articles & Testimony

A data-driven look at how research into terrorism and extremism is often hindered by tech companies with ill-suited content filters.

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Since 2019, researchers examining, archiving, and collecting extremist and terrorist materials online have increasingly been taken offline. In part a consequence of the automation of content moderation by different technology companies and national governments calling for ever quicker takedowns. Based on an online survey of peers in the field, this research highlights that up to 60% of researchers surveyed have had either their accounts or content they have posted or stored online taken down from varying platforms. Beyond the quantitative data, this research also garnered qualitative answers about concerns individuals in the field had related to this problem set, namely, the lack of transparency on the part of the technology companies, hindering actual research and understanding of complicated and evolving issues related to different extremist and terrorist phenomena, undermining potential collaboration within the research field, and the potential of self-censorship online. An easy solution to this would be a whitelist, though there are inherent downsides related to this as well, especially between researchers at different levels in their careers, institutional affiliation or lack thereof, and inequalities between researchers from the West versus Global South... ❖

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