



Google UK
1 St Giles High Street
London
WC2H 8AG

16th Nov 2021

Dear Mr Tugendhat

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry into tech and the future of UK foreign policy. This is an important area of debate, particularly given the growing recognition of the importance of multilateralism in protecting a free and open internet, including in the UK's Digital Trade Principles and under its G7 Presidency. During the session, I offered to write to the Committee with further information on some of the topics raised, which you will find below.

Google's Threat Analysis Group

Our Threat Analysis Group (TAG) is at the heart of our efforts to combat government-backed attacks against Google, our products, and our users. The TAG is a team of specialised analysts and security experts that work on many different types of threats including: zero-day vulnerabilities, hacking, phishing and malware attacks, and coordinated influence operations (what many call "disinformation").

On any given day, TAG is tracking more than 270 targeted or government-backed attacker groups from more than 50 countries. This means that there is typically more than one threat actor behind the warnings. And, for the past few years, TAG has been sharing updates about this work on the TAG [blog](#), and Google's Security [blog](#), when the team thinks that sharing details will not harm ongoing investigations. So far in 2021, we've [sent](#) over 50,000 warnings, an increase of nearly 33% from this time in 2020. This spike is largely due to blocking an unusually large campaign from a Russian actor known as APT28 or Fancy Bear.

TAG also publishes a quarterly bulletin, which lists removal actions Google and YouTube have taken on coordinated influence operations over a three month period. Our hope is that this bulletin helps others who are also working to track these groups, such as researchers studying this issue, and we hope these updates can help confirm findings from security firms and others in the industry. The latest Q3 bulletin is available [here](#) and may be of interest to the Committee.

The inquiry comes at a timely moment, when widespread cyberattacks continue to exploit vulnerabilities targeting people, organisations, and governments around the world.



Google has announced it will [invest \\$10 billion](#) over the next five years to strengthen cybersecurity, including expanding zero-trust programs, helping secure the software supply chain, and enhancing open-source security.

Government Transparency Report for Content Removal

We also discussed Google's [Government Transparency Report for Content Removal](#), our six monthly report where we detail removal requests. Over the years, as use of our services has grown, our transparency report shows a rise in the number of government demands for content removal – as to both the volume of requests that we receive and the number of individual items of content we are asked to remove. Our latest [transparency report](#), covering January to June 2021, represents the highest volumes we've seen on both measures to date.

As research by organisations like Freedom House makes clear, all online platforms are seeing a similar trend.

We're also seeing a significant increase in the number of laws that require information to be removed from online services. These laws vary by country and region, and require the removal of content on a very wide range of issues – from hate speech to adult content and obscenity, to medical misinformation, to privacy and intellectual property violations. Many of these laws seek to protect people online and align with Google's own platform policies and community guidelines that help ensure people have a good experience while they are using our services. But laws in some countries can also go significantly beyond those policies, affecting access to information on a range of topics.

Coupled with this, we've also seen new laws that impose individual liability on local employees for actions taken by a company offering online services. These types of laws have [drawn concern](#) from organisations like the Global Network Initiative, from whom the Committee took evidence, because individuals can be pressured, prosecuted, and held personally liable, even when they are not responsible for the content decisions of the company they work for.

While content removal and local representative laws are often associated with repressive regimes, they are increasingly not limited to such nations. Findings from entities like the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), our own transparency report data, and any survey of international laws introduced over the past few years all point to the fact that we are likely to continue to see a rise in these types of laws across more countries around the world.



Google's relationship with news publishers

It was suggested during the session by one of the members that Google takes an 86% share of the advertising revenues with publishers in the UK. For the record, I wanted to note that this is not accurate. In fact, the largest advertisers **keep over 95% of the digital advertising revenue they generate when they use Ad Manager to show ads on their websites.**

Google believes a free and sustainable press is a critical pillar of a healthy democracy. That is why [Google works extensively to support news publishers](#) in the UK. This includes through sending people to publishers sites millions of times a month, with each visit estimated to be worth between £0.03- and £0.05; through our advertising tools; and by paying to licence news content through our new product, News Showcase.

I hope the above information is of use to the Committee's inquiry. If you wish to discuss any topics in further detail, or in confidence, then I would be happy to meet with you.

Yours sincerely

Katie O'Donovan

Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy , Google UK