

# Social media platforms should do more to prohibit harmful speech, even beyond what is limited by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

## General background

Social media platforms are sometimes described as modern versions of the public square where people can freely share their opinions and engage in discussions. There are ongoing debates, however, over what kinds of speech should be allowed online.

In Canada, the [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) guarantees that all Canadians have the right to express their thoughts, beliefs, and opinions in public without fear of censorship or punishment by the government or other authorities.

While many forms of expression that could be considered hateful or hurtful are protected by the Charter, Canadians' right to freedom of expression is not absolute, and there are limits on what can be expressed publicly. For example, the Charter does not protect speech that advocates genocide or that incites hatred against an identifiable group.

The question of freedom of expression becomes more complicated when applied to social media, as the companies that own them are private entities and can have their own policies and guidelines that users are expected to follow.

Currently, all major social media platforms restrict expression beyond what is limited by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For example, Tiktok's policies prohibit content it defines as hate speech, content that promotes or incites violence, as well as harassment and bullying on its platform. When users sign up to use a platform, they must agree to these "terms of service." These policies can result in users being banned, suspended, or being given limited reach on their posts for a given amount of time.

While some argue that even current online policies go too far in prohibiting speech, others argue that social media companies need to do even more to limit the spread of harmful content.

## **For More Information**

- [WATCH — Free speech in Canada has limits. Here's why | videoclip | Kids News](#)
- [Freedom of Expression: Social Media Platforms | BC Civil Liberties Association](#)
- [Who decides what is acceptable speech on social media platforms? | PBS New](#)