

# Biggest Pros and Cons of Censorship

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Censorship is defined as the suppression of ideas, images, or words that some people find to be offensive to them in some way. It happens whenever there are personal, moral, or political values from one group that get placed onto another in some way. Although it is often viewed through the lens of government policies, this process can be carried out by anyone, including private groups, religious organizations, and even schools.

It must be mentioned that a private group or individual can organize boycotts, demonstrate in protest, and take other actions that are defined as free speech. When taken to the extreme, even rights protected by the First Amendment can become dangerous. The ACLU notes that the Hollywood Blacklists during the McCarthy period were from private pressure groups and not the government.

What is unique about American society is the amount of ambivalence there is toward censorship. Even the 1996 Communications Decency Act in the United States is a form of it, even if the “intentions are good” from the point of view of the majority.

That’s why we must be proactive about the perceived pros and cons that there are with censorship. When it becomes permissible to restrict the actions, words, and thoughts of one group of people, it can create opportunities to target other groups in society too.

## List of the Pros of Censorship

### **1. Censorship can reduce the impact of hate speech in society.**

The idea that all speech is equal is arguably false. There are words that people use as an effort to shut down the right to speak of others. It took over a century for minorities and women to gain a semblance of equal rights because of the presence of hate speech. Even if it is clothed in the ideas of religious freedom, state’s rights, or patriotism, that doesn’t change what it is to others.

Censorship gives us the opportunity to stop this hate before it can get started. We already live within the confines of education, family, entertainment, commerce, and more. This limiting process creates more opportunities for equality.

## **2. Censorship can protect children from unhealthy content.**

Parents have plenty of work to do in today's society to protect their children from unhealthy influences. There is content everywhere, including items that slip through parental filters and kid-friendly apps, that could lead to harmful encounters in the future. Children have fewer qualms about talking with strangers online than adults do primarily because of the way kids see the world. They have more innocence, curiosity, and might even be shy and lonely. Censorship allows us to point out potential threats so that a child's inexperience and lack of foresight doesn't get them into trouble. By stopping people before they can act (or the child can respond) to a situation, we can keep everyone safer because of certain restrictions.

## **3. Censorship can reduce the amount of conflict in society.**

If you look on the Internet long enough, there will be something that can offend anyone. The goal of censorship isn't to eliminate access to anything that anyone might find to be problematic. We wouldn't get to go online if that were the case. What we can do with this process is to limit access to information that could have an adverse impact on the overall culture of our homes, communities, or countries. Netflix and Saudi Arabia work together to create targeted areas of censorship based on this principle. Whether you agree or disagree with the practice, this work removes access to content that might be disruptive to society.

## **4. Censorship can provide another level of security to a country's profile.**

We also use censorship as a way to limit the amount of information that the general public receives every day from their government, businesses, and large institutions. Without this concept, top secret files could be made public with a simple request. Proprietary ingredients wouldn't be available because of the need for disclosure. By limiting certain types of data from the primary flow of society, there is less of a potential for harm.

## **5. Censorship protects the rights of artists, innovators, and inventors.**

Did you know that copyright laws are a form of censorship? The same is said for patents and any other legal construct that gives someone exclusive access to a specific form of content or work without allowing others to do the same. We have these protections in place to protect the "creation rights" of the first person who pursued this idea.

Preventing plagiarism and IP theft gives us the foundation of an economy. If your work doesn't receive some level of protection, then it can be stolen by someone who can put it together cheaper than you. Small businesses get to stay competitive because of the acceptable elements of censorship that we maintain in society.

## **6. Censorship provides us with a vehicle to stop false content.**

There are censorship laws in place that prevent businesses from lying to you about their products or services. Advertisements must be a direct reflection of what you can expect if you make a purchase. Failing to remain honest can result in fines and penalties. Without this advantage, businesses could say or do anything in an attempt to get you to buy their stuff. You can avoid the risks of false pretense thanks to the protections that remain in place because of this advantage.

## **7. Censorship can work to improve a person's knowledge.**

People tend to believe what they see when consuming media and the various forms of content which are available. By removing items that could create a panic from public view, government and law enforcement officials can provide better protection, reduce the spread of rumors, and encourage individuals to review the information they see before coming to a conclusion. People can use this technique to promote the flow of negative data to create a specific result, but this process is also useful for the times when you want to create a positive outcome as well.

## **8. Censorship can limit the impact of identity theft.**

There are over 15 million reports of identity theft each year. In a recent data breach reported by Experian, the information of over 120 million people was exposed. When there is so much information floating around on the Internet and in other public places that is readily accessible, then it is possible for people to become victims of a crime without realizing it until they need to apply for credit or receive a notice in the mail.

Children can become victims of identity theft as well. Their clean profiles make for a tempting target, especially if there is no verification of age or data during the application process. Censorship of this information can provide a layer of protection because it stops access to it while holding those who keep it responsible for their conduct.

## **9. Censorship helped to create our ratings system.**

There are times when censorship can get out of hand, but it is also a process that can be used for good. An excellent example of this benefit comes from the ratings systems that we use for entertainment products, including movies, video games, and music. Until 1984, films went from PG to R, which eventually led to a PG-13 rating being developed after parents called for action after taking their children to Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.

Ratings on music allow us to see if lyrics are explicit so that we can decide if we want to listen to the song. TV ratings give us a guide to see if a show is appropriate for our needs or what our families want to watch. Movie ratings do the same.

## List of the Cons of Censorship

### **1. It represses one group of people in favor for what the majority wants.**

A museum director was once arrested because sexually explicit photographs from Robert Mapplethorpe were included in an art exhibited that was being managed. Although the artist's work displays images, often black and white, that feature nudity and a certain amount of suggestiveness, it was far from violent or suggestive content that would encourage lawlessness.

Under the laws of the United States, it would be fair to say that the country is the most speech-protective nation in the world. When it comes to sexual speech, things are different because there are still remnants of the country's Puritan heritage remaining in the law. Even the Supreme Court has affirmed that censorship on moral grounds is permissible.

### **2. It allows people to create a specific narrative in society to call it truth.**

You will often hear calls for censorship on violence when they see it in video games, read it in books, or see examples of it in film or on TV. The reality of fictional violence is that it does not cause otherwise stable people to suddenly want to hurt someone. If we start suppressing material based on the actions of unstable people, then nothing would be safe from the censorship process.

The work most often cited by people as a way to justify their harmful actions against others is the Bible. As the ACLU points out, Ted Bundy collected cheerleading magazines. If there were a clear cause-and-effect argument that could be proven, then a limit on expression here could be warranted. Until there is such an example, it is not.

### **3. It stops people from pursuing career opportunities.**

If we live in a world where everything receives censorship, then it would be a place where nothing could get done without specific permission from someone in charge. That means every business, each idea, and even the foods that you would eat each night would come with an official stamp of approval. It creates an Orwellian landscape where direct supervision by an authoritative figure or state becomes "necessary" for the greater good of all.

Because of this disadvantage, there is always at least one person who sits above the societal constructs. They receive permission to do whatever they want because it is

their responsibility to approve everything else. If you have enough wealth or influence, then you could get approvals for things that others would not have.

#### **4. It reduces the overall intelligence of the general public.**

Censorship requires that the general population be under tight controls so that specific outcomes are achievable every time. It is an attempt to prevent individuals from discovering what the truth of any situation happens to be. Even an attempt at suggesting that content is fake or untrustworthy, as the Trump Administration does so often with the news media, is a way to create censorship from an official capacity. It's one thing to have a person say, "I don't like watching CNN because I feel like their news stories are fake." When the president of a country says that the news media is the enemy of the state, then it creates a position from authority, especially when he says that it has a "major role to play as far as tone and as far as everything."

#### **5. It prevents an individual from expressing themselves freely.**

In a no-rules environment that is completely free of censorship, anyone could post anything that they want without fear of reprisal. The United States walks a fine line along this path by preventing the use of "obscene" items. Other countries take this issue a little further, outlawing social media posts that are determined to be at odds with the official position of the nation's government.

Nicholas Demas from Mic completed a profile of eight social media users who were arrested for what they said online in 2013. Matt Woods posted inappropriate comments about a 5-year-old at a time when he was drunk, earning him three months in jail. Some governments use their power to arrest those who are deemed to be in opposition.

#### **6. It shifts where the responsibility of consumption is in society.**

When the government is responsible for what people can access for information, then there is no longer any personal accountability for one's actions. This process cedes control of ethics, morality, and standards to whomever is in charge of implementing these policies. Once someone is willing to allow another individual, company, or elected official to tell them how to think, feel, and act, it becomes much easier to let more control over life's decisions disappear as well. Instead of being individuals, censorship turns people into commodities.

We already see the impact of this disadvantage in China. If someone adds comments that are anti-government, violent, or sexually graphic, then the content is subject to automatic deletion. Do it enough times and the account will be deleted.

### **7. It creates an adverse impact on the economy at all levels.**

When censorship starts blocking any form of content because it doesn't mean a decency standard or offends someone, then there are fewer economic opportunities that become available at all levels of society. Businesses can no longer promote themselves because their advertising might be offending someone. Companies can't train workers because the processes could be considered offensive by someone. It creates a world where our actions are dictated by others, so those with the loudest voices will typically have the most control.

### **8. It allows a false narrative to become the truth.**

If you ask the average person living in North Korea what they think of the world, they'll tell you that the United States is one of the worst countries in the world, that their standard of living is excellent, and that life is beautiful all of the time. Never mind that the average person in that country earns \$3 per month or less, that 18 million people need food assistance to avoid malnutrition, and there is no access to basic medical care. There are also extreme human rights issues, such as a complete curtailing of a freedom of expression, religious practices, or even independent civil society organization. It is a land of torture, arbitrary arrest, and public executions. The Trump Administration wants to label anything in opposition to its viewpoint as being fake because that indicates their content is the truth. It is another form of a false narrative intended to get a specific reaction out of supporters as a way to keep power.

### **9. It is expensive to be engaged in the practice of censorship.**

The cost to shut down the Internet to prevent specific content items from being viewed by the general public was over \$2 billion in 2015. Cutting connectivity in just one country can be more than \$100 million. Those expenses are only the tip of the iceberg to consider when looking at the practical enforcement of censorship on others. China on its own pays more than \$2 billion each year just to keep its firewall in place to limit information access online. There are hundreds of thousands of workers who monitor individual activities, with some sites allowing back-end access to facilitate this work. When you look at the direct and indirect expenses in every other category, the world likely spends over \$100 billion to create altered information flows that people accept in fact.

### **10. It creates repression so that it encourages compliance.**

One of the most-banned books in the world today is *The Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien. What is so remarkable about that fact is that the author was a devout Catholic and a good friend of C.S. Lewis. He once wrote a letter to Lewis to say that his trilogy and *The Hobbit* were unconsciously written from a Christian perspective at first, and then edited consciously to incorporate those themes.

Christian churches and schools are the most likely places where you will see these works banned because they are viewed as being anti-religious or anti-Christian. That's why a singular viewpoint being in charge of censorship is so dangerous to society. It can be an ill-informed opinion that is completely contrary to the work in question, yet the power it has to condemn can influence countless others.

## **Verdict on the Pros and Cons of Censorship**

Some people look at the idea of censorship as a way to add common-sense restrictions to our daily routines so that we can stay safe and protect our children. The other side of that equation is that families can set their own limits, establish rules, and create circumstances that fit their needs without imposing their morality or beliefs on others.

That's not to say that all forms of content should be allowed in society. Murder videos, child pornography, and similar items that encourage violence against others or promote actual harm in the images is a safety factor that we cannot ignore.

That's why the crux of the pros and cons of censorship work to distinguish fictional content from factual items. We don't outlaw murder mystery novels because someone in the story dies. We would outlaw content that showed a murder because a real person was harmed in the process of its creation.