

# Digital Disjunction: Platforms in the Age of Conflicting Governance

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*As part of MediaWell's video essay series on transnational digital governance, tech governance scholar Swati Srivastava (Purdue University) explores the uncertainties of what she calls a "new era of platform governance" - the growing divergence between countries in the Global North, the reality of most users living in the Global South, and how platforms are rethinking how they make decisions about governance, power, and authority. Watch or read the transcript below.*

## Introduction

Hi, I'm Swati Srivastava, an Associate Professor of Political Science at Purdue University and a Faculty Associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. My research focuses on global governance of technology, including the politics of Big Tech as well as AI governance. I also direct the [International Politics and Responsible Tech \(iPart\) Lab](#) at Purdue.

What happens when countries take conflicting approaches to digital content moderation? How does (dis) regulation in one locale affect what users are exposed to in another?

We've seen in 2025 that there have been major changes to how social media companies have been thinking about platform regulation. So we started the year with Meta announcing that it was ending third party fact checking in the US, and we also saw it saying it would rely less on AI to find violating content. This was kind of coinciding with a push by the European Commission to ask the very large online platforms to issue more and more self-assessments to deal with how they are handling systemic risk.

And so at the same time where Meta is pulling back in content moderation and platform governance in the U.S., it's issuing more kinds of documentation - including those that are legally required - in the EU. And so we have this sort of discontinuity where you have more regulation and transparency in one part of the world, and then fewer in another part of the world.

Now of course, social media platforms are transnational. They operate everywhere. Facebook operates in over 180 countries. And when it has this sort of transnational scale, of course, it tries to follow rules and regulations everywhere. But it also tries to set its own private regime of rules that sometimes coincides with what states have put forward, and sometimes it doesn't.

You see this all the time in how Global South countries push back against social media firms - arguing that Facebook or TikTok or Twitter have really not paid attention to some of their local contexts. They don't have AI classifiers that deal with their languages or they don't think about the kind of cultural context in which speech might be spoken in. And these are longstanding concerns [that are] not specific to 2025, but it does mean that platforms pick and choose in what type of state regulation they respond to. Europe is, of course, a really important market for companies, so following European regulations is going to be more important than following regulations from these other countries in the Global South that might not have that kind of market power. So in some ways, seeing unevenness in platforms following state regulation is not new.

What's new now is that we're seeing this unevenness not between the Global North and the Global South countries, but between the Global North countries *themselves* - that is, between how platforms think about US and Europe, and how it's sort of modifying their governance and their platform regulation to meet these very different standards and expectations.

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So one implication of this for users is that they're not going to see consistency in how they think about platforms investing in resources. But there *is* a potential for a race to the top.

This is the kind of standard that we think about as having a “[Brussels Effect](#)”: that because Europe is such a big market, when it sets strict standards for how companies should operate, companies sort of adopt them all around the world, because it's easier to do that than try to create one policy for each jurisdiction. We saw a version of this with the “California effect,” and how they managed emissions and cars, because car manufacturers were not going to make one car for California and one for the other 49 states.

But the Brussels Effect has limitations. Part of [those limitations] we're seeing already in

how US platforms have been operating in the second Trump administration, which is that when you have another major market, which is backed by sovereign power where you're based, and they're saying that "we're going to come and protect you against these European regulators," then there are fewer incentives to follow the European rules that are more stringent.

We're seeing this already with X (or Twitter) being fined by the European Union. We're also seeing investigations against other major platforms. And so American platforms might think that maybe it's okay to just give a fine and move on, and sort of let that be the cost of business rather than actually do the Brussels Effect - meaning take on their [the EU's] more onerous laws and regulations and apply them around the world.

It's basically an open question whether or not we will see more examples of the Brussels Effect in this new era of platform regulation - or if we're going to see, in some ways, platforms realizing that they don't *have to* do a lot of these things, because the American government is going to back them when they don't.

Lastly, when you think about social media, you have to always remember that the vast majority of users live in the Global Majority or the Global South. When you think about Facebook's billions of users, they don't live in Europe and Northern America - they live in India and Philippines and Vietnam, right? That's where the billions are.

And so we have to pay a lot more attention to the kinds of regulation happening in those countries, and whether or not platforms are following through with those responsibilities, including whether or not platforms might be right sometimes in pushing back. You might not want European-style regulation in countries that don't have European-style democracy. So in those cases, maybe it's okay if we have some unevenness in platform regulation and compliance.

But these are kind of hard questions to think about, right? And I think one thing that we learn by studying platforms is how they are handling these hard questions - and how what started out as these small platforms have become really big and influential, and are asking and answering these questions about governance and authority and power by themselves every day.

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