



Primer: The Left's Ministry of Truth

Summary

The First Amendment is under assault by a sophisticated network of government agencies, left-wing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and private entities working in tandem to monitor and stifle speech that threatens elite political and ideological consensus. Over the last few years, this dynamic has become known as the “censorship industrial complex.” The Center for Renewing America has written about this global nexus, including the inherently corrupt National Endowment for Democracy,¹ and the threat it poses to American citizens and the constitutional order.²

While much attention has been paid to social media platforms and tech giants such as X (formerly known as Twitter) and Meta, as well as government agencies such as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the censorship ecosystem extends much further: It includes efforts to destroy news sources that are neutral or unaligned with progressive narratives. The leader of this insidious effort is NewsGuard, an organization masquerading as a neutral arbiter of trustworthiness in news and “global leader in information reliability.”³

In truth, NewsGuard is a poorly disguised weapon of the totalitarian far left that strikes at the very heart of free speech by attacking the financial viability of entities that do not adhere to the progressive worldview. The evidence of its harms is unambiguous, and the consequences of its actions are dire. Simply put, NewsGuard is a direct threat to free speech and the ability of Americans to receive truthful information.

Vanguard of the Censorship Industrial Complex

The censorship industrial complex takes a “whole of society” approach to monitoring, policing, and suppressing speech. Here’s how the system operates:

¹CRA Staff (February 7, 2025). “Primer: The National Endowment for Democracy and an NGO Ecosystem Actively Undermining America,” *Center for Renewing America*.

<https://americarenewing.com/primer-the-national-endowment-for-democracy-and-an-ngo-ecosystem-actively-undermining-america/>

²Miller, W. (February 7, 2025). “Policy Brief: Dismantle Entities Actively Censoring Americans,” *Center for Renewing America*.

<https://americarenewing.com/policy-brief-dismantle-entities-actively-censoring-americans/>

³NewsGuard Homepage (Accessed January 15, 2026). *NewsGuard*. <https://www.newsguardtech.com/>

- A government agency such as CISA or the State Department’s now-defunct Global Engagement Center identifies a disfavored narrative that is gaining traction—for example, skepticism over the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines or concerns about the Chinese lab origins of the coronavirus.
- Universities and NGOs such as the Stanford Internet Observatory provide the data and academic clout for suppressing such speech as “misinformation,” “disinformation,” or “malinformation.”
- Big Tech entities and advertising networks then execute an Orwellian censorship campaign by de-amplifying, banning, or demonetizing their target, using the above labels and arguing that such tactics are needed to protect people and preserve the truth.

This strategy allows the federal government to circumvent free speech rights and accomplish indirectly what the Constitution expressly prohibits: infringing on the free speech rights of American citizens. But the proverbial dagger of the censorship industrial complex is wielded by NewsGuard Technologies Inc.

NewsGuard is a critical component of the censorship nexus because, unlike social media platforms that remove individual posts or accounts, it assaults the *financial infrastructure* of independent media outlets and organizations that question the prevailing narrative of the ruling progressive elites. Founded in 2018 by two corporate media veterans, the journalist Steven Brill and the publisher Gordon Crovitz,⁴ NewsGuard enforces the will of the censorship industrial complex and establishment corporate media outlets through its dubious ratings system. This system rates news outlets and websites on a scale of 0–100 based on entirely subjective criteria that purportedly measure credibility and transparency.⁵

Importantly, these ratings are not merely advisory but are packaged and sold to advertising agencies, internet service providers, and even government agencies (including, until recently, the Department of Defense).⁶ When NewsGuard tags a site or organization as unreliable due to low credibility and transparency scores within its subjective ratings system, that rating is made widely available to programmatic advertisers, who often blacklist the site. This starts a financial spiral for many independent outlets that rely on advertising revenue to operate and survive.

NewsGuard’s tactics are not dissimilar to a social credit score system, which is a spine-chilling tool used in communist nations such as China to debank and financially ruin individuals or

⁴Press Release (March 5, 2018). “Brill and Crovitz Announce Launch of NewsGuard to Fight Fake News,” *NewsGuard*. <https://www.newsguardtech.com/press/announcing-newsguard/>

⁵NewsGuard Rating Page (Accessed January 17, 2026). “Website Rating Process and Criteria,” *NewsGuard*. <https://www.newsguardtech.com/ratings/rating-process-criteria/>

⁶Johnson, T. (December 19, 2024). “Attacking the Watchdog: How Media Rating Site NewsGuard Ended Up as Target for GOP Lawmakers and Regulators,” *Deadline*. <https://deadline.com/2024/12/newsguard-newsmax-trump-fcc-1236202249/>

entities that do not conform to the prerogatives of the ruling regime.⁷ In fact, NewsGuard launched not long after China announced its intention to establish a nationwide social credit system to ensure citizen compliance with regime edicts.⁸

Of course, NewsGuard bills itself as a neutral watchdog dedicated to fighting disinformation and preserving truth. However, its ratings system, methodology, and operational paradigm prove such sentiments to be disingenuous even under the most charitable reading. As a gatekeeper for the political elite's preferred narratives, NewsGuard has repeatedly demonstrated its own unreliability and lack of credibility.

NewsGuard has consistently penalized sites for reporting on stories that were later proven to be true or eminently plausible, including the Hunter Biden laptop story⁹ and the COVID-19 lab leak hypothesis.¹⁰ Many entities that broke or reported these stories received a red label from NewsGuard regarding their alleged lack of reliability and suffered financial punishment and censorship from other parts of the censorship machine.¹¹ This is due to two inherently subjective criteria for NewsGuard's credibility rating: 1) "Does not repeatedly publish false or egregiously misleading content" and 2) "Gathers and presents information responsibly." Together, both of those criteria are worth forty points in NewsGuard's rating system, with ultimate judgment of what constitutes "responsible presentation" and "egregiously misleading content" in the hands of the progressive activists employed by NewsGuard.¹²

It should be noted that corporate media and progressive outlets that falsely characterized the Hunter Biden laptop story as debunked or the lab leak hypothesis as a conspiracy possessed green labels indicating their trustworthiness. Outlets such as *Politico* and *The Washington Post* also promoted the debunked Steele dossier and spread multiple race hoaxes without consequence under NewsGuard's rating system.¹³ When the COVID-19 lab leak hypothesis was given support by the Department of Energy in 2023,¹⁴ NewsGuard updated its criteria quietly, without

⁷Chin, J. (November 28, 2016). "China's New Tool for Social Control: A Credit Rating for Everything," *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-new-tool-for-social-control-a-credit-rating-for-everything-1480351590?>

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹PowerPoint Presentation (November 2, 2020). "Media Analysis of the U.S. Election: Hunter Biden's Laptop 'Scandal,'" *Pressrelations*. https://www.pressrelations.com/files/de/reports/pressrelations_report_HunterBiden-Laptop_Scandal.pdf

¹⁰Yang, E. and Magness, P. (August 11, 2021). "Who Fact Checks the Fact Checkers? A Report on Media Censorship," *The Daily Economy*. <https://thedailyeconomy.org/article/who-fact-checks-the-fact-checkers-a-report-on-media-censorship/>

¹¹Nelson, S. (October 30, 2024). "Facebook Execs Suppressed Hunter Biden Laptop Scandal to Curry Favor with Biden-Harris Admin: Bombshell Report," *The New York Post*.

<https://nypost.com/2024/10/30/us-news/fbi-tried-to-minimize-hunter-biden-laptop-bombshell-days-before-scoop-as-facebook-exec-warned-against-offending-dems/>

¹²NewsGuard Rating Page (Accessed January 17, 2026). "Website Rating Process and Criteria," *NewsGuard*. <https://www.newsguardtech.com/ratings/rating-process-criteria/>

¹³Fischer, S. (November 14, 2021). "The Media's Epic Fail," *Axios*.

<https://www.axios.com/2021/11/14/steele-dossier-discredited-media-corrections-buzzfeed-washington-post>

¹⁴Gordon, M. and Strobel, W. (February 26, 2023). "Lab Leak Most Likely Origin of Covid-19 Pandemic, Energy Department Now Says," *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-origin-china-lab-leak-807b7b0a>

acknowledging the financial damage it had already inflicted on its nonprogressive media targets.¹⁵

Arguably, the most dangerous element of NewsGuard's operational approach is its integration with major advertising firms and groups such as the now-defunct Global Alliance for Responsible Media to pitch advertising firms on "brand safety."¹⁶ Advertisers are told to avoid "high-risk" sites and outlets, which are defined as such using NewsGuard's subjective rating criteria. NewsGuard licenses its exclusion lists to major advertising agencies. When an advertiser sets its campaign to avoid "misinformation" under NewsGuard's recommendations, algorithms automatically block ads on sites that NewsGuard has rated as red, or untrustworthy.

This effort is the shiv into the ribs of independent media outlets, and it pushes corporate brands to cater to only half of Americans with their products. The brand safety scam perpetuated by NewsGuard is also an audience mitigation tool that harms its own clients' profit capabilities by limiting the target audiences for their products.

The agenda is obvious, and its methodology is so perverse that NewsGuard has even rated Chinese regime propaganda outlets such as the *Global Times* higher than conservative media outlets such as *The Federalist*.¹⁷ In the eyes of NewsGuard's operators, communist adversaries committed to violently suppressing the speech of their own citizens are to be trusted over domestic political opponents who simply have a different perspective.

Some of NewsGuard's ratings include the following, as of 2024:

- *The Washington Post*: 100/100 (Green)¹⁸
- *The Huffington Post*: 87.5/100 (Green)¹⁹
- *CNN*: 80/100 (Green)²⁰
- *MS NOW* (formerly MSNBC): 49.5/100 (Red)²¹
- *The New York Times*: 87.5/100 (Green)²²
- *Newsmax*: 20/100 (Red)²³
- *One America News Network*: 22.5/100 (Red)²⁴

¹⁵Gregory, J. and McDonald, K. (Accessed January 16, 2025). "Special Report: COVID-19 Myths," *NewsGuard*. <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/covid-19-myths/>. See Editor's Note added November 2023.

¹⁶Press Release (December 7, 2022). "NewsGuard Launches New Brand Safety Tiers, Enabling Greater Control for Advertisers to Support Credible News and Avoid Misinformation," *NewsGuard*.

¹⁷Vazquez, J. (December 12, 2023). "MRC Exposes NewsGuard for Leftist Bias Third Year in a Row," *Media Research Center*. <https://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/free-speech/joseph-vazquez/2023/12/12/mrc-exposes-newsguard-leftist-bias-third-year-row>

¹⁸Oremus, W. and Nix, N. (December 24, 2024). "This Company Rates News Sites' Credibility. The Right Wants It Stopped," *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/12/24/newsguard-disinformation-censorship-free-speech/>. See NewsGuard Rating Chart.

¹⁹Oremus, W. and Nix, N. "Company Rates News Sites' Credibility."

²⁰Oremus, W. and Nix, N. "Company Rates News Sites' Credibility."

²¹Oremus, W. and Nix, N. "Company Rates News Sites' Credibility."

²²Oremus, W. and Nix, N. "Company Rates News Sites' Credibility."

²³Oremus, W. and Nix, N. "Company Rates News Sites' Credibility."

²⁴Oremus, W. and Nix, N. "Company Rates News Sites' Credibility."

- *Breitbart*: 49.5/100 (Red)²⁵
- *FOX News*: 69.5/100 (Yellow)²⁶
- *The New Republic*: 92.5/100 (Green)²⁷
- *Mother Jones*: 69.5/100 (Yellow)²⁸
- *National Public Radio*: 100/100 (Green)²⁹
- *BuzzFeed News*: 100/100 (Green)³⁰
- *The Federalist*: 12/100 (Red)³¹
- *Real America's Voice*: 22.5/100 (Red)³²
- *Jacobin*: 92.5/100 (Green)³³

While BuzzFeed shut down in 2023, it held its perfect NewsGuard rating despite its role in perpetuating the Steele dossier and Russia collusion hoax.³⁴ And despite MS NOW's lower rating than FOX News, advertising boycotts are still almost exclusively aimed at FOX.

The Media Research Center found that the average NewsGuard score for left-leaning outlets is 91, while the average NewsGuard score for right-leaning outlets is 66.³⁵ This dynamic creates a monetizable category that rewards progressives with financial viability among advertisers and a demonetized category that actively seeks to bankrupt conservative or independent entities. Unlike some other parts of the censorship industrial complex, NewsGuard has actual teeth because of its rating system and can measure its impact by the financial damage it inflicts on its ideological adversaries.

The result is an ecosystem that rewards compliance over accuracy, which structurally penalizes outlets for being right first. The subjective double standard by which NewsGuard rates opinions allows for categorizing conservative opinions as lies and progressive activism as responsible journalism. And the criteria favor corporate media with large bureaucracies that can game the system and maintain compliance with NewsGuard's operators over smaller independent and citizen-led outlets.

This last point is evident when using a NewsGuard-provided web browser extension on Microsoft Edge. The ratings for the NewsGuard browser extension as of January 26, 2026, show

²⁵Wagner, L. (June 30, 2024). "A Lifelong Media Maven Grapples with the Misinformation Crisis," *The Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/media/2024/06/30/steven-brill-death-of-truth/>

²⁶Wagner, L. "A Lifelong Media Maven."

²⁷Wagner, L. "A Lifelong Media Maven."

²⁸Wagner, L. "A Lifelong Media Maven."

²⁹Fondacaro, N. (April 12, 2024). "Will NewsGuard Demote NPR's Perfect Rating After Revelations of Liberal Bias?," *Media Research Center*.
<https://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/nb/nicholas-fondacaro/2024/04/12/will-newsguard-demote-nprs-perfect-rating-after-revelations>

³⁰Bradley, B. (February 22, 2022). "Cultural Manipulation? NewsGuard Defends Perfect Rating of Dossier-Slinging BuzzFeed," *Media Research Center*.
<https://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/free-speech/brian-bradley/2022/02/22/cultural-manipulation-newsguard-defends-perfect-rating>

³¹Vazquez, J. "MRC Exposes NewsGuard."

³²NewsGuard Browser Extension for Microsoft Edge (Search Term: Real America's Voice)

³³NewsGuard Browser Extension for Microsoft Edge (Search Term: Jacobin)

³⁴Bradley, B. "Cultural Manipulation?"

³⁵Vazquez, J. "MRC Exposes NewsGuard."

that since the time of the rankings cited above, *The New York Times* has returned to a 100 percent rating, *The New Republic* is down modestly to an 80 percent rating, *Mother Jones* is up significantly to an 87.5 percent rating, and *The Federalist* is up slightly to a 17.5 percent rating. Larger corporate, progressive-minded media companies that play NewsGuard's game and share NewsGuard's ideological proclivities have the resources and connections to boost their reliability scores. Meanwhile, the ideologically opposed site *The Federalist*, an unapologetically conservative publication that routinely breaks news stories, sits at 17.5 percent while *Jacobin*, a longstanding communist publication dedicated to erasing free speech, which enjoys a comically unserious 92.5 rating.

NewsGuard is an organization fundamentally at war with free speech, structurally predisposed toward suppressing the truth, and actively engaged in surreptitious efforts to undermine the God-given free speech rights of American citizens. It is a Ministry of Truth in all but name.

The Emerging Threat of AI Censorship

NewsGuard is leading the next phase of the censorship industrial complex's war on free speech through its database Misinformation Fingerprints.³⁶ This database keeps track of alleged false narratives, which are then packaged and sold to government agencies (as was the case with NewsGuard's former \$750,000 contract with the Department of Defense)³⁷ as well as tech platforms and AI companies to train their algorithms. This has the effect of automatically suppressing disfavored narratives to contain their spread.

As AI continues to evolve, NewsGuard is actively advancing the censorship machine's efforts to crush free speech. Future iterations of the "Misinformation Fingerprints" service will likely become AI-oriented programs that cannot be easily identified, blocked, or mitigated. This could readily result in a repeatable and easily programmable individualized censorship service that leaves independent or conservative outlets playing whack-a-mole against algorithms that do NewsGuard's dirty work for them.

Freedom-loving policymakers must be forward-thinking to prevent a censorship industry from taking root in the world's most free-thinking and free-speaking nation.

Defeating Twenty-First-Century Authoritarians

Throughout the first year of the Trump administration, extensive efforts were made to dismantle the censorship industrial complex. There have been successes, such as the refusal to reauthorize

³⁶NewsGuard Process Page (Accessed January 19, 2025). "False Claim Fingerprints Process," *NewsGuard*.
<https://www.newsguardtech.com/ratings/false-claim-fingerprints-process/>

³⁷Contract Summary (Accessed January 16, 2025). "Contract to NewsGuard Technologies Inc.," *USAspending.gov*.
https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_FA864921P1569_9700_-NONE_-NONE-

the State Department's censorship-minded Global Engagement Center³⁸ and the elimination of taxpayer funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.³⁹ But much work remains to be done.

Building off of Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's successful termination of NewsGuard contracts at the Pentagon and past successful efforts by Chairman James Comer (R-KY) of the House Oversight Committee to investigate NewsGuard's activities,⁴⁰ lawmakers at the federal and state levels should consider the following policies:

Federal

- **Prohibition on Censorship Vendors:** Congress should pass legislation that explicitly bans agencies from using taxpayer funds to provide grants, coordinate trainings, and contract with entities that rate or rank domestic news organizations based on subjective, ideological, or "misinformation" criteria.
- **Transparency Requirements:** Congress should pass legislation that requires digital advertising intermediaries to disclose when they use third-party "credibility" and "brand safety" programs or algorithms to filter ad inventory. Further, targeted entities should be provided a statutory right of action if they can prove they have been unfairly targeted. Publishers have a right to know if they are being targeted or blacklisted for political or ideological reasons.
- **Penalties for Government Censorship:** Congress should pass legislation that holds individuals in government civilly liable for issuing grants, coordinating trainings, or contracting with entities that engage in censorship. This should include termination of employment, loss of retirement benefits, and up to \$1 million in fines.
- **Amending AI Moratorium to Stop Censorship:** The Executive Branch and Congress should agree to amend efforts to freeze state AI regulations by allowing a carveout for both federal statutes and state laws that prohibit the use of AI algorithms or programs to engage in automatic, targeted, or service-oriented censorship efforts that rank, blacklist, or suppress media outlets under the guise of "misinformation," "disinformation," or "malinformation."

³⁸Phillips, M. and Dorgan, M. (December 26, 2024). "State Department's 'Global Engagement Center' Accused of Censoring Americans Shuts Its Doors," *FOX News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/state-departments-global-engagement-center-accused-censoring-americans-shuts-its-doors>

³⁹Zimmerman, D. (January 5, 2026). "Board Vote Dissolves Defunded Corporation for Public Broadcasting," *The Washington Examiner*. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/business/4407252/board-vote-dissolve-defunded-corporation-for-public-broadcasting/>

⁴⁰Chairman James Comer (October 25, 2024). "House Oversight Letter to NewsGuard," *House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform*. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/NewsGuard-Followup-Request_10.25.2411.pdf

- **Continued Hearings on NewsGuard:** Congress should task the House Judiciary Committee and Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government with investigating NewsGuard and its advertiser collusion for a potential breach of antitrust laws, with an eye toward potentially amending antitrust laws to include provisions that designate organized censorship activities as violations of antitrust.

State

- **Deceptive Trade Practices:** Attorneys general should open investigations into NewsGuard for potential deceptive trade practices. If NewsGuard claims to be neutral in its marketing to consumers and clients but demonstrably applies a subjective, partisan bias in its products, it may be perpetuating massive consumer fraud.
- **Prohibition on State Benefits:** Lawmakers should pass legislation that strips entities engaged in censorship activities, including clients of organizations such as NewsGuard, from access to state grants, tax benefits, and subsidies.
- **State Right of Action:** Lawmakers should pass legislation that holds organizations and individuals civilly liable under state law for participating in censorship activities that financially target outlets using subjective, ideological, or “misinformation” rankings.

Conclusion

Elected officials must take immediate action to permanently sever NewsGuard’s connection to taxpayer-funded institutions and use the findings of previous hearings to expose its participation in collusion to suppress free speech and bankrupt independent news sources. Free speech is a God-given right recognized in the Constitution and is a vital part of a healthy and virtuous society. NewsGuard and similarly aligned efforts are designed to eradicate free speech under the guise of protecting them. They are a privately funded Ministry of Truth undermining the very principle they publicly claim to support.

Dismantling the censorship industrial complex requires decisive action from congressional lawmakers, committed efforts to educate American citizens on the threat, and clarity of purpose for every entity that truly supports freedom of speech and a free society.

Once this mission is accomplished, the next great battle will be preventing the weaponization of artificial intelligence that seeks to silence, censor, or suppress the views of those who do not follow the dictates of the left’s neo-Marxist secular religion. There is no time to waste.

