

# Vietnam Cyber Law Threatens Free Speech

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The Vietnamese government has passed a sweeping new cybersecurity law which critics claim will help the one-party state continue to crack down on free speech.

The law will force internet companies like Facebook and Google to open offices in the country, store data on users locally and allow access to that data at the request of the authorities.

Social sites will be forced to remove any content deemed “toxic” — effectively giving the authorities a free hand in online censorship.

Businesses now have 12 months to comply with the new legislation, which was passed back in June.

Yet with tens of millions of active users in the country, the likes of Facebook could theoretically push back — especially as Hanoi needs the help of globally connected platforms as part of its ongoing bid to turn Vietnam into a south-east Asian technology hub.

“In the country’s deeply repressive climate, the online space was a relative refuge where people could go to share ideas and opinions with less fear of censure by the authorities. With the sweeping powers it grants the government to monitor online activity, this [law] means there is now no safe place left in Vietnam for people to speak freely,” argued Amnesty International’s director of global operations, [Clare Algar, in June](#).

“This law can only work if tech companies cooperate with government demands to hand over private data. These companies must not be party to human rights abuses, and we urge them to use the considerable power they have at their disposal to challenge Vietnam’s government on this regressive legislation.”

The legislation brings Vietnam into line with repressive one-party states like China, whose censorship apparatus is notoriously effective.

It remains to be seen whether Hanoi’s latest move will stifle tech innovation and commercial digital development in the country, as has been predicted.