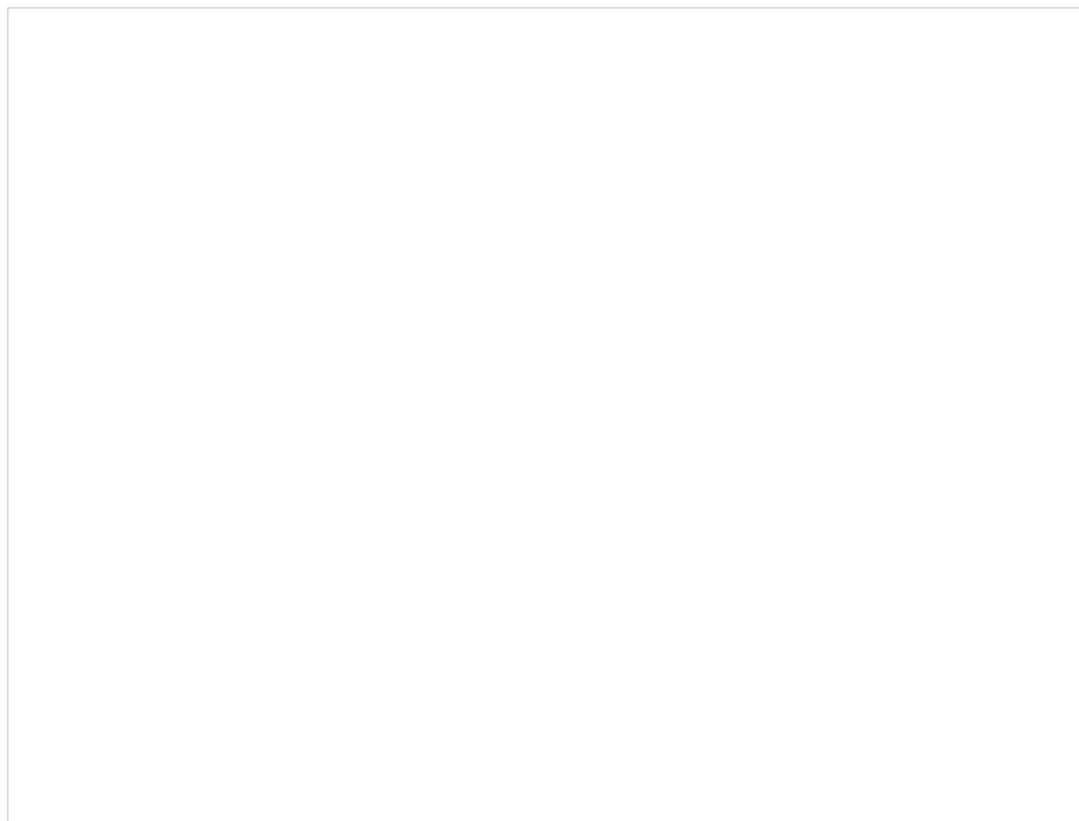


ELON MUSK TURNS OUT TO BE ONE OF THE WORST ABUSERS OF PUBLIC DATA

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Story by Max Hoppstedt • 9h

['There's no such thing as an intelligent woman': With a father who once held a view like this, is it any wonder that the world's richest man, Elon Musk, has such a very complicated love life – with at least 11 children by 3 different women?](#)



Elon Musk has three children with Canadian singer Grimes (left). He was once besotted with Amber Heard (top right) and also dated actress Talulah Riley (bottom right). Last month, an explosive biography about the billionaire blamed the differences between father and son on Errol's relationship with his 35-year-old stepdaughter Jana (with whom he had two further children). It is alleged Elon, 52, was completely 'creeped out' and went on to accuse his dad of being a manipulative, abusive father and husband.



Under Musk, Twitter is handing over more data to investigators © Tom Brenner for The Washington Post/For the Washington Post

SAN FRANCISCO — Since Elon Musk [bought Twitter](#) last year, he has said he's on a crusade to make the platform stand for protecting free speech — as far as the law allows. He even went so far as to [cost the company \\$350,000](#) in fines for delaying handing over former president Donald Trump's Twitter data in the investigation into the events leading up to the Jan. 6 attack.

On Friday, another court filing was unsealed [showing prosecutors](#) had accessed 32 direct messages from Trump's Twitter account.

But the balance between free speech and following the law is proving vastly more complicated in much of the rest of the world, where speech can be constrained by more restrictive laws. While Twitter, now known as X, has generally followed the law, in the past it touted its position on fighting back against overreaching government requests — particularly when it came to prosecuting speech online.

Now, in Germany, X under Musk's ownership is complying with requests to turn over more information about its users to prosecutors in online hate-crime investigations. The country has strict hate-speech laws forbidding certain defamation of politicians and promotion of white supremacy, and the company under Musk has turned over reams of user data to prosecutors to help identify those who break the law, according to three prosecutor offices who spoke with The Washington Post. As a result, hundreds of new cases are being pursued, they said.

In one recent case, prosecutors in the German state of Bavaria used data provided by X to identify a suspect who mocked Markus Söder, the leader of the conservative CSU party there, as "Södolf," a play on his last name and the first name of Adolf Hitler.

Prosecutors in the German state of Bavaria used data provided by X to identify and prosecute a suspect who mocked far-right politician Markus Söder, left. © Christof Stache/AFP/Getty Images

X shares data in 50 to 100 cases per month with Bavarian authorities, up significantly from before the acquisition, said Sebastian Murer, a spokesman for the Munich public prosecutors office overseeing hate-speech investigations.

Musk [restored thousands of users](#) previously banned for rule-breaking. Now, German prosecutors are going after the same types of accounts.

"Before Elon Musk, Twitter would regularly evaluate and eventually push back against government requests if they were a threat to dissidents or free speech," Yoel Roth, [the former head](#) of the company's trust and safety team, said in an interview. But that requires vast resources. "Compliance, on the other hand, is the easy option."

X did not respond to requests for comment.

Musk has [previously said](#) that people should be able to speak freely within the bounds of the law, in response to a question about what the platform could do to support citizens in countries like China and Iran.

But human rights advocates point to a concerning trend under Musk's ownership when it comes to cooperation with foreign governments. One report by international news site [Rest of World](#) that analyzed data from Harvard University's Lumen database — where X was still auto-reporting takedowns — showed an uptick in the social media company's overall compliance with government requests for censorship and surveillance from November through April. Most of the cases were in Turkey, Germany and India.

Australia in August [threatened](#) to fine X over the surge in hate speech online. Germany [threatened](#) to fine the company over not removing illegal content on the site in April.

X's last public transparency report on government requests, published shortly before Musk's purchase, showed that the company had shared user data with German authorities in 285 cases in the second half of 2021. That went beyond just hate-speech user data requests, including those for terrorism or child sexual abuse investigations. The company turned down more than half of the requests.


Cologne public prosecutor Christoph Hebbeker said the uptick in X's compliance was particularly notable in hate speech, an area in which he's worked for years.

"Before Musk, we almost never got data for digital hate-crime cases. After the acquisition, we almost always did," Hebbeker told The Post.


Musk (in white) boards his private jet before departing from Beijing Capital International Airport in May. © Jade Gao/AFP/Getty Images

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Elon Musk launches free speech lawsuit over California's content moderation law

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In the U.S., the First Amendment provides protections for most speech. That means that social media companies are generally left to make rules and police the sites for violative content themselves.

Under Musk, X has loosened the rules governing speech on the site and researchers have said that misinformation and hate speech have surged on the site under the new ownership. The Post [found the site's "For you"](#) timeline amplified hate speech, and recently [a study by the European Commission](#) showed that the network's new policies led to a spread of Russian propaganda and hate speech.

Musk [tweeted in reply](#) to a post on the study, "Where is all this pro-Russia propaganda? We don't see it."

And in court records unsealed in mid-August, X fought back against giving private messages to U.S. federal prosecutors in the criminal investigation into Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election results, albeit unsuccessfully, prompting a federal judge to question if Musk was just pushing back in that case to "cozy up with the former president." The judge criticized X for delaying special counsel Jack Smith's investigation and ordered the company to pay \$350,000.

"It is frankly ludicrous seeing them going to great lengths to protect Donald Trump's data, but seemingly not vulnerable activists in authoritarian regimes, who rely on the platform to voice dissent," added Roth, the former executive. Roth criticized the recent developments as a "double standard."

German prosecutors in Frankfurt, Cologne and Munich — who are among the most active in that country investigating digital hate crimes — say it's unclear what exactly sparked the apparent increase in cooperation with their requests for user data. There is also more problematic content on the site overall.

Prosecutors typically request information like names, email addresses or IP addresses from the tech giants to help track down users.

The company has shed roughly 80 percent of its workforce since Musk acquired the company, prompting chaos and confusion as entire teams and departments were eliminated. X stopped publishing its biannual transparency report on government requests after Musk took over.

"It's been quite painful. But I think, at the end of the day, it should have been done," [Musk said](#) of the layoffs during an April interview. "Were there many mistakes made along the way? Of course, you know. But all's well that ends well."

A man holds a poster reading "internet kills — stop hate and racism at Google, Facebook, Twitter etc" during a vigil in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin in 2020. © David Gannon/AFP/Getty Images

The scaled-down operations could be influencing the new tactics, said David Kaye, a professor at the University of California at Irvine and former United Nations special rapporteur on protecting freedom of opinion and expression.


"It certainly shows that the owners of these platforms have enormous power about what the cooperation with government does and does not look like," he said.

Following World War II, German lawmakers made it illegal to strongly incite hatred against minorities, to deny the Holocaust or to defame and slander elected officials in a way that might impact their ability to serve the public. Those regulations are meant as safeguards against any anti-democratic tendencies and often target neo-Nazis, who represent a rising threat in the country.

But those laws also became increasingly difficult to police in a world in which criminals could hide behind online identities that protected their hate crimes.

In 2017, Germany introduced an online hate law known as NetzDG, which requires companies to delete reported hate speech within 24 hours, generating controversy over further potential restrictions on speech. The European Union recently introduced a similar law that can result in high fines.

Prosecutors have cracked down on online hate after the murder of conservative politician Walter Lübcke by a neo-Nazi in 2019. The local politician in the German state of Hessen had become the subject of online attacks after a video of him defending the country's open policies on migration went viral. Later that year, a radicalized member of a niche neo-Nazi online forum shot two people as he tried to storm a synagogue in an eastern German city.


Mourners attend the memorial service of assassinated German politician Walter Lübcke in 2019. The assassination prompted Germany to crack down on online hate speech. © Sean Gallup/Getty Images

"We know that large amounts of concentrated online hate campaigns can be a threat to a democracy because we repeatedly hear from local politicians or activists who quit because of these attacks," said Josephine Ballon, who is part of Hate Aid, a German organization supporting victims of online harassment. "But these people are important to an open and vital public discourse."

Julia Bussweiler, a spokeswoman for the Frankfurt prosecutors office, said that X shared data in cases where posts were seen as calling for criminal behavior like attacking members of an ethnic minority or violating a law called "incitement to hatred" which is often used to prosecute people stirring up strong forms of hatred against refugees or minorities such as Muslims.

Prosecutors in Frankfurt in July filed charges against an X user who they say posted illegal forms of insult against German Minister of Health Karl Lauterbach based on data they received from X in May. The social Democrat minister, one of the most outspoken supporters of vaccines and masking during the covid pandemic in Germany, is regularly the target of online harassment.

Publicly, Musk called restrictions during the covid pandemic fascist in 2020 and just weeks after buying the site, it ended its ban on covid misinformation.

Still, Germany is democratic, Ballon said, something that starkly contrasts many countries seeking this type of data.

"I would hope that these networks can differentiate between places with robust rule of law like Germany and authoritarian governments," Ballon added.

FBI Agent Elvis Chan over Biden admin collusion with Musk and Big Tech

At issue are the federal government's joint operations with major social media companies to censor disfavored political viewpoints during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mike Benz describes the 'newspeak' used to hide the government's censorship agendaMike Benz, Executive Director of the Foundation For Freedom Online, explains the "Orwell playbook" the government uses to hide its censorship operations.

By [Ben Whedon](#)

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House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan on Friday issued a subpoena to FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the San Francisco Field Office Elvis Chan after the Department of Justice blocked Chan's appearance at a voluntary interview.

"The Committee on the Judiciary is conducting oversight of how and to what extent the Executive Branch has coerced and colluded with companies and other intermediaries to censor speech," Jordan wrote. "As the primary liaison between the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF) and social media companies, you are uniquely positioned to aid the Committee's oversight."

File

[Jordan subpoena to Elvis Chan](#)

At issue are the federal government's joint operations with major social media companies to censor disfavored political viewpoints during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jordan contended that court proceedings and public reporting have "exposed how the federal government has pressured and colluded with Big Tech and other intermediaries to censor certain viewpoints on social and other media in ways that undermine First Amendment principles."

"It is necessary for Congress to gauge the extent to which FBI agents coerced, pressured, worked with, or relied upon social media and other tech companies to censor speech. The scope of the Committee's investigation includes understanding the extent and nature of the FBI's involvement in this censorship," Jordan contended.

Chan was slated to sit for a transcribed interview on Friday, though a dispute between the FBI and the Committee over protocol led to the cancellation of the interview. Accordingly, the committee issued a subpoena.

Jordan's subpoena comes amid the ongoing *Missouri v. Biden* court case in which Republican-led states have challenged the administration's interactions with social media giants. Last week, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals [upheld](#) the decision of Judge Terry Doughty, which found that the administration's efforts likely violated the First Amendment. The Supreme Court will likely decide on the matter.