

## Flashback 2012: 'Facebook Is The Perfect Technocracy'

This 2002 article that appeared in The Atlantic describes Facebook as a Technocracy in proper context with the original 1930s Technocracy movement: people-centered government is out and “developer-king” rule is in. This ideology is spreading like wildfire throughout the world. □ TN Editor

Let's stipulate that Facebook is not a country, that real governments fulfill many more functions, and that people are not citizens of their social networks.

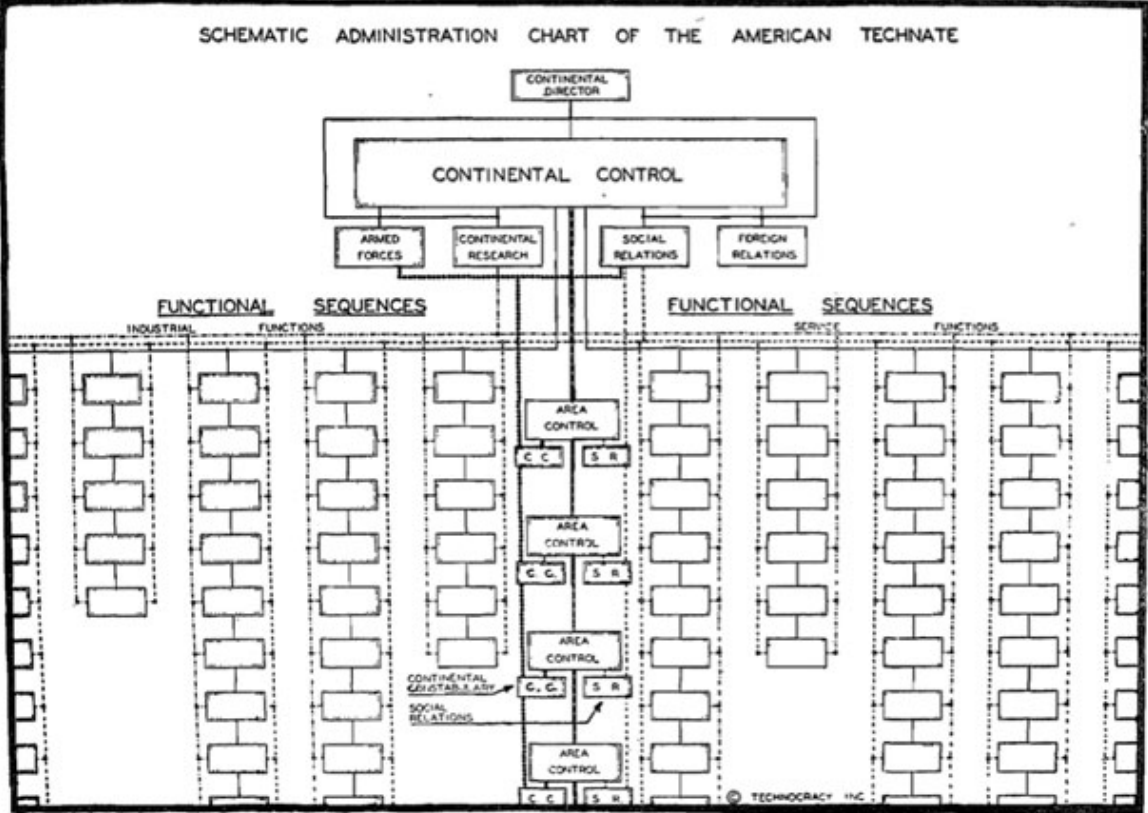
Nonetheless, 900 million human beings do something like live in the blue-and-white virtual space of the world's largest structured web of people. And those people get into disputes that they expect to be adjudicated. They have this expectation in part because Facebook has long said it wants to create a safe environment for connecting with other people. (How else can you get people to be “more open and connected“?) But people also want someone to be in charge, they want an authority to whom they can appeal if some other person is being a jerk.

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**Facebook's desire for efficiency means democracy is out and**

**technocratic, developer-king rule is in. People don't get to vote on the rules**, and even when Facebook offered its users the opportunity to vote on a new privacy policy last week, voter turnout was 0.038 percent. People know that Facebook controls a large slice of their digital lives, but they don't have a sense of digital citizenship. And that apathy gives Facebook's technocracy a chance to succeed where its historical antecedents did not.

The original technocrats were a group of thinkers and engineers in the 1930s who revived Plato's dream of the philosopher-king, but with a machine-age spin. Led by Thorstein Veblen, Howard Scott and M. King Hubbert, they advocated not rule by the people or the monarchy or the dictator, but by the engineers. The engineers and scientists would rule rationally and impartially. They would create a Technocracy that functioned like clockwork and ensured the productivity of all was efficiently distributed. They worked out a whole system by which the North American continent would be ruled with functional sequences that would allow the Continental Director to get things done.



Technate org chart, Technocracy Study Course, 1934.

Technocracy, as originally conceived, was explicitly not democratic. Its proponents did not want popular rule; they wanted rule by a knowledgeable elite who would make good decisions. And maybe they would have, but there was one big problem. Few people found the general vision of surrendering their political power to engineers all that appealing. With Facebook, people seem to care much more about individual decisions that Facebook makes than the existence of the ultraefficient technocratic system. They are not challenging the principles or values of the system, so much as wanting them to be applied quickly to resolve their particular dispute. And desire for speed, of course, drives the efficiency-first mindset that makes it hard to deal with nuanced problems. None of the accusations leveled at Facebook's administrative system read to me like criticisms of its core structure. [Read full story here...](#)

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## **White House Eyes Nationalizing 5G Network Via**

# Single Partnership

# Public-Private

Ex-CEO of Google is right in the middle of this process. Although nothing is set in stone just yet, the logic from the military's point of view is unmistakable. The downside is that the government (military) would dictate the terms of use throughout civilian populations. □ TN Editor

White House chief of staff Mark Meadows is leaning on the Pentagon to move ahead with a plan to stand up a 5G wireless network, sources tell Axios, and the idea, despite opposition from key government and private-sector players, could well outlive the Trump administration.

**Why it matters:** The Department of Defense could lease out capacity to wireless carriers and other companies in need of the ubiquitous, high-speed connectivity that 5G technology promises. That prospect makes this the Trump administration's most serious push toward a federally backed national 5G network since it first floated the idea in 2018.

**What we're hearing:** Meadows has taken a strong recent interest in the idea and is behind the White House nudging the Pentagon to move it along, people familiar with the state of play said.

- DoD is gathering input until next week on whether and how to move forward with the plan, which, if it happens, would likely take the form of a private company landing a federal contract to operate a 5G network on the government's behalf, using airwaves held by DoD.
- The upshot would be a public-private partnership analogous to FirstNet, the dedicated communications network for first responders that AT&T operates under a federal contract.
- Wireless providers are firmly opposed to the idea, viewing it as the government hand-picking a single winner in the deployment of nationwide 5G, though some in Washington believe they could change tacks and vie for the contract if DoD moves ahead with the plan.

**The White House is urging DoD**, sources said, to move quickly to follow the outstanding request for information with an actual solicitation for proposals from companies that would bid to run the network.

- DoD is already at work drafting that request, the Wall Street Journal reported Friday, and one telecom industry official Axios spoke with expects the request to be issued within the next two weeks..

**Yes, but:** There's also a chance the process will derail. The push has rankled some top DoD officials, sources say, with Defense Secretary Mark Esper said to be among those wary of the idea.

- Some officials at the Federal Communications Commission are also troubled by the national 5G plan. There's bipartisan consensus at the FCC against establishing a federally backed 5G network. (The FCC is also working to auction off a decent-sized chunk of 5G-friendly airwaves now controlled by the Pentagon.)

**Between the lines:** Proponents of past proposals for federally backed 5G in the Trump camp have pushed the national-network idea as a way to edge out China in the race to build the best next-generation wireless technology.

- They also see it as a bid to bring high-speed wireless internet to rural America.
- Both arguments could motivate the pre-election timing of this latest push for the plan.

**The intrigue:** There's agreement in Washington telecom circles that the national-network idea won't die even if Trump loses.

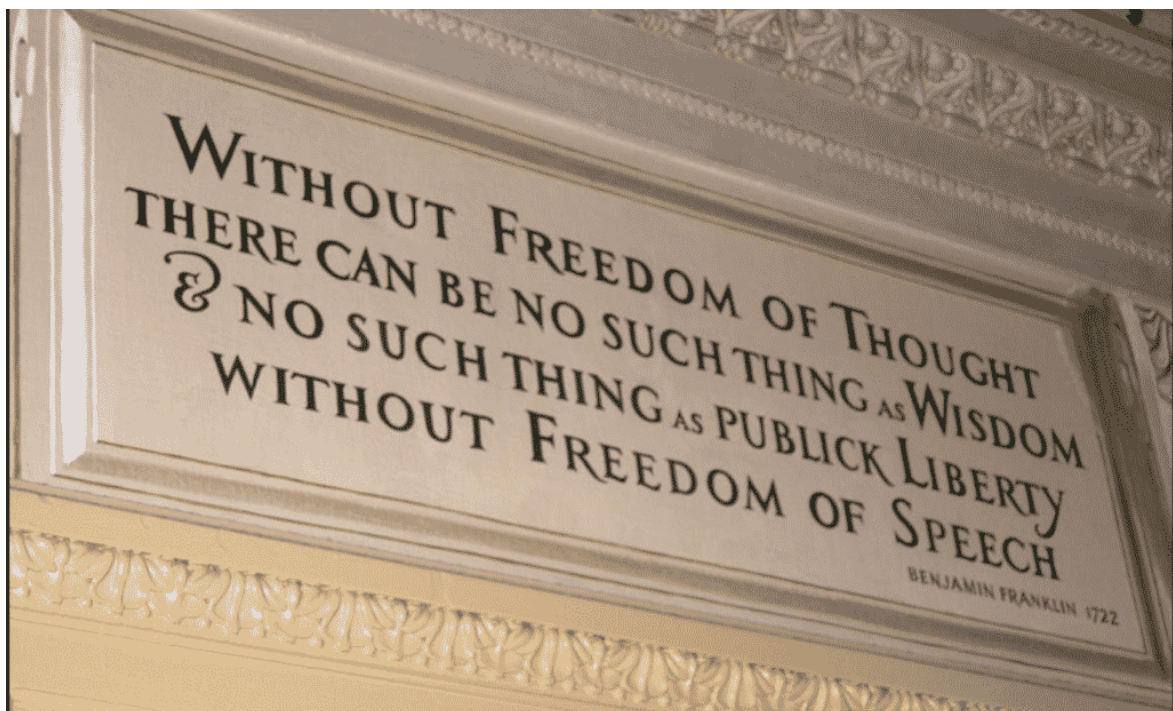
- Telecom firm Rivada Networks has been a central player throughout the national 5G saga, enlisting GOP figures including Karl Rove and Newt Gingrich to advocate for its proposal to run a network that matches the contours of the one now under consideration.
- But telecom insiders believed the politically connected Rivada could also pivot quickly to lobby a Biden administration — and

that other, larger firms could be interested in bidding and pitch Democrats on the benefits the national 5G might confer for security, connectivity and global competitiveness.

**Our thought bubble:** Democrats could well bite — the idea tracks with their arguments that the internet is critical infrastructure akin to a utility and merits more federal resources.

Read full story here...

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## Free Speech Is Dying As Governments Clamp Down

A dangerous new legal theory is introduced and setting precedents around the world: “legal but harmful”. This leaves the censors in total control of arbitrarily determining what is “harmful” and then imposing punishment. This is currently the essence of Big Tech censorship. □ TN Editor

Even as the world wrestles with a pandemic and overbearing public

health measures, some legislative bodies are taking the opportunity to tighten the screws on speech they don't like. Several bills have passed, others are pending, and one was gutted by court review, but all represent new fronts in government efforts to impose censorship.

For free speech advocates, the luckiest break might have been the fate of a law passed by the French National Assembly in May. While existing requirements give companies 24 hours to take down content alleged by the government to glorify terrorist activity or to constitute child pornography, the new law would have changed that to *one* hour. In addition, online publishers would have been allowed a day to remove so-called "hate speech."

"The same 24-hour obligation would have applied to content reported for violation of a law that criminalizes speech that promotes, glorifies, or engages in justification of sexual violence, war crimes, crimes against humanity, enslavement, or collaboration with the enemy; a law that criminalizes sexual harassment; and a law that bans pornography where it could be seen by a minor—among others," reports Jacob Schulz at *Lawfare*. "The law did not carve out any exceptions; the 24-hour rule would have applied even in the case of technical difficulties or temporary surge in notifications."

In June, France's Constitutional Court struck down the vast majority of the law as an unconstitutional threat to freedom of expression. That's really the only good news to report so far.

France's blocked hate-speech law was inspired by Germany's notorious NetzDG law, which makes online platforms liable for illegal content.

"Germany's Network Enforcement Law, or NetzDG ... requires social media companies to block or remove content that violates one of twenty restrictions on hate and defamatory speech in the German Criminal Code," Diana Lee wrote for Yale Law School's Media Freedom and Information Access Clinic. "In effect, the NetzDG conscripts social media companies into governmental service as content regulators," with millions of euros in fines hanging over their heads if they guess wrong.

That model of delegated censorship has proven to be as infectious as a

viral outbreak, taking hold in over a dozen other countries.

“This raises the question of whether Europe’s most influential democracy has contributed to the further erosion of global Internet freedom by developing and legitimizing a prototype of online censorship by proxy that can readily be adapted to serve the ends of authoritarian states,” Justitia, a Danish judicial thinktank, warned in a 2019 report.

It’s no surprise when countries like Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela emulate intrusive legislation from elsewhere—they don’t need much encouragement. But we’ve already seen that French legislators followed in Germany’s lead, and lawmakers in the U.K. are poised to do the same.

“In the wrong hands the internet can be used to spread terrorist and other illegal or harmful content, undermine civil discourse, and abuse or bully other people,” fretted a 2019 British government paper on “online harms.” The paper specifically cited NetzDG as a potential legislative model.

Last week, British lawmakers debated the *very* broad powers that the government seeks.

Their proposals “introduce a new concept into law—‘legal but harmful’ for online speech,” cautions Ruth Smeeth of Index on Censorship. “It’s conflating what is already illegal, such as incitement and threat, with speech which we may disagree with, but in a free society is, and should be, legal.”

Austria is also considering a NetzDG-inspired law that would require the removal of “content whose ‘illegality is already evident to a legal layperson’” explains Martin J. Riedl, a native Austrian and Ph.D. student at the University of Texas at Austin’s School of Journalism and Media. The law would further encourage compliance by “forbidding their debtors (e.g., businesses who advertise on platforms) to pay what they owe to platforms” that don’t conform to the law.

That’s expected to encourage even more “overblocking” by platforms worried that they’ll face a financial death penalty if they guess wrong as



to content's legal status.

Still, Austrians may not be able to out-flank their role models. Germany this summer moved to make NetzDG even more restrictive by adding mandatory "hate speech" reporting requirements.

Brazilian lawmakers, too, are considering legislation that started as NetzDG-inspired before morphing into a campaign against so-called "fake news" (because, apparently, any excuse for controlling speech is a good excuse when you work in government).

"It is vague on the matter of what's considered fake news, which it describes as false or deceptive content shared with the potential to cause individual or collective harm," wrote Brazilian journalist Raphael Tsavkko Garcia for the *MIT Technology Review*. "This ambiguity leaves it to the state to decide what kind of content is considered false or potentially harmful, and could allow those in power to manipulate the definition for political gain."

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