

Net Neutrality Rules Are 21st Century Digital Civil Rights

Every day the open internet connects billions of people and ideas. For communities of color and others misrepresented by mainstream media or excluded by an unequal economy—the open internet is often the only place to speak for yourself.

But what is the open internet?

The open internet, or Net Neutrality, is the idea that the internet should be accessible to everyone so that every voice has an equal chance to speak and be heard. Net Neutrality rules are civil rights protections that prevent internet service providers (ISPs) such as Verizon or AT&T, and government actors from creating a “pay to play” internet where some content is provided in a separate, faster lane to paying consumers, effectively censoring those who cannot pay by denying them the same access.

But, Net Neutrality only works when backed by Title II of the Communications Act of 1934, the law giving the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the legal authority to keep the internet open. *Without Title II, policymakers cannot enforce Net Neutrality.*

“The fight to save Title II Net Neutrality protection is about guaranteeing every citizen’s right to dissent.”

— Rep. John Lewis, Congressman and civil rights leader

FACTS: Why Net Neutrality is crucial for digital civil rights



70%

of the country's cable, internet, and phone services are provided by only four companies.

“A free and open internet is an **antidote to authoritarianism.”**

—Malkia Cyril, co-founder and executive director of the Center for Media Justice

“It is because of Net Neutrality rules that the internet is the only communication channel left where Black voices can **speak and be heard, produce and consume, on our own terms.”**

— Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

Net Neutrality prevents discrimination. The majority of U.S. digital communications are controlled by four companies. These **four companies** (AT&T, Verizon, Charter and Comcast) **provide cable, phone and internet services to 70% of the country.** While these companies can pick and choose which cable channels their customers can access, they can't discriminate against access to content online. **Net Neutrality requires ISPs to treat all internet traffic equally.**

(Source: “Overcharged and Underserved: How a Tight Oligopoly on Steroids Undermines Competition And Harms Consumers in Digital Communications Markets” by Mark Cooper).

People of color own fewer media outlets. Today, people of color make up more than 36 percent of the U.S. population but hold just over 7 percent of radio licenses and 3 percent of TV licenses.

(Source: “The Lack of Racial and Gender Diversity in Broadcast Ownership & The Effects of FCC Policy: An Empirical Analysis” by S. Derek Turner and Mark N. Cooper).

People of color have less access to home broadband.

30%

of all American households lack access to broadband technology. The majority of those households are Black and/or Latinx and make under \$30,000/year.

People of color are more likely to access the internet via cell phones and use mobile internet for a broader range of activities. Nearly one-third of households earning less than \$25,000 a year exclusively use mobile internet to browse the web.

(Source: Pew Research Center and “Counting Everyone in the Digital Age: The Implications of Technology Use in the 2020 Decennial Census for the Count of Disadvantaged Groups” by The Leadership Conference Education Fund and Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality).

(Source: “Overcharged and Underserved: How a Tight Oligopoly on Steroids Undermines Competition And Harms Consumers in Digital Communications Markets” by Mark Cooper).