

MARKET RESOURCE

Preventing Viewpoint Based Discrimination

A practical guide to removing restrictions that single out lawful religious, political, scientific, or social views.

7-minute read • Market • Updated July 2026

WHY IT MATTERS

Companies may set reasonable rules for access to their products and services. They may prohibit fraud, threats, unlawful conduct, infringement, and other clearly defined harms. But a policy becomes viewpoint-based when it bans a position because of the belief, opinion, or perspective being expressed.

These restrictions can prevent customers, sellers, creators, advertisers, developers, and nonprofit organizations from participating equally in the marketplace. The risk is especially serious when a company controls an important channel for communication, commerce, advertising, payments, or distribution.

The Core Principle

Regulate harmful conduct, not the viewpoint that motivates or accompanies lawful expression.

What This Resource Covers

Review policies governing core products and services when they condition access, distribution, monetization, advertising, payment, or use on what a customer or organization may say or believe.

- Terms of service and acceptable-use policies
- Advertising and publisher policies
- Marketplace seller and product-listing rules
- Community, content-moderation, and monetization standards
- Developer, platform, and algorithmic-use policies
- Risk, reputation, social-impact, and human-rights policies when they govern access to service

Viewpoint Discrimination is Different from Vague Language

An unclear policy gives the company broad discretion because users cannot tell what the rule means. A viewpoint-based policy is more direct: it identifies a topic or position and prohibits one side of the debate.

Unclear or Imprecise	Viewpoint-based
"Offensive," "objectionable," or "controversial" without a definition.	"Ads may not advocate against vaccination."
Risk: discretionary enforcement against disfavored views.	Risk: one identified position is prohibited outright.

Common Viewpoint-Based Restrictions

A policy may discriminate by viewpoint when it prohibits advocacy, denial, criticism, or support concerning a disputed issue. Common subjects include:

- Abortion, marriage, sexuality, gender identity, pronoun use, or conversion therapy;
- Vaccination, medical treatment, public-health policy, or disputed scientific claims;
- Climate change, fossil fuels, environmental policy, or “climate denial”;
- Gun rights, gun control, immigration, or other political issues;
- Religious advocacy, proselytizing, exclusivity claims, doctrine, or criticism of religion; and
- Political affiliation, ideology, campaigns, or issue advocacy.

The presence of a topic alone does not determine the result. The key question is whether the policy bars a particular position while permitting competing views or ordinary commercial activity on the same subject.

Current Policy Examples That Need Revision

The examples below illustrate different forms of viewpoint-based restriction. They do not establish that the company has enforced the policy against a particular customer or organization.

Alphabet | Google Publisher Policies

“We do not allow content that ... promotes harmful health claims, or relates to a current, major health crisis and contradicts authoritative scientific consensus. Examples include anti-vaccine advocacy ... gay conversion therapy ... [and content that] contradicts authoritative scientific consensus on climate change.”

Why it is problematic: The policy expressly bars identified positions on vaccination, conversion therapy, and climate change rather than defining a specific unlawful or commercial harm.

A clearer approach: Address fraud, deceptive commercial claims, or demonstrable safety risks through narrowly defined rules that apply regardless of the speaker’s position.

Source: Google Publisher Policies, Unreliable and harmful claims, accessed 09/02/2025

[View evidence](#)

Amazon | Global prohibited products and services

“The following products and services are prohibited globally: ... Religious services, advocacy, fundraising, proselytizing, or discriminatory religious content.”

Why it is problematic: The policy restricts broad categories of lawful religious activity, including advocacy, fundraising, and proselytizing.

A clearer approach: Prohibit unlawful transactions or objectively harmful conduct without excluding religious services or expression because they are religious.

Source: Prohibited products and services across all supply, accessed 11/12/2025.

[View evidence](#)

AppLovin | Prohibited Content: Politics and Elections

“Ads cannot include ... content that advocates for or against political issues. Examples of political issues include gun control, immigration policy, or abortion rights.”

Why it is problematic: The policy bars issue advocacy itself, rather than limiting fraud, unlawful targeting, or deceptive advertising practices.

A clearer approach: Apply neutral advertising standards to all issue advocacy and regulate defined harms rather than the political subject or position.

Source: Prohibited Content: Politics and Elections, Additional Guidelines, accessed 11/19/2025.

[View evidence](#)

Comcast | Advertising Content Guidelines

“The following forms of religious advertising are unacceptable: advertising that states (or implies) superiority/exclusivity ... [or] proselytizes sectarian doctrine or dogma.”

Why it is problematic: Many religions make exclusive truth claims and seek converts. The policy singles out ordinary religious advocacy because of its viewpoint and purpose.

A clearer approach: Allow religious advertising under the same neutral standards applied to other advocacy, subject to clear rules against fraud, threats, or unlawful discrimination.

Source: Advertising Content Guidelines, Religious Advertising, p. 14, accessed December 4, 2025.

[View evidence](#)

Meta | Advertising Standards

“Ads must not discourage people from vaccination or advocate against vaccines.”

Why it is problematic: The rule prohibits one side of a public-policy and medical debate while allowing advocacy favoring vaccination.

A clearer approach: Regulate false commercial representations or specific safety claims through a viewpoint-neutral evidentiary standard.

Source: Introduction to the Advertising Standards, Vaccine Discouragement, accessed 11/12/2025.

[View evidence](#)

Pinterest | Community Guidelines

“We limit the distribution of or remove ... denial of an individual’s gender identity or sexual orientation, and support for conversion therapy and related programs.”

Why it is problematic: The policy identifies disfavored positions on gender identity, sexual orientation, and counseling and removes or suppresses them as viewpoints.

A clearer approach: Prohibit targeted harassment or deceptive conduct without treating a position on a contested social issue as harmful by definition.

Source: Community guidelines, Hateful activities, accessed 12/05/2025

[View evidence](#)

Better Approach vs. Problematic Approach

Better approach

- Defines prohibited conduct and harm
- Applies the rule regardless of viewpoint
- Allows lawful advocacy and disagreement
- Uses neutral standards for evidence and enforcement

Problematic approach

- Bans advocacy for one side of a disputed issue
- Treats religious or political expression as prohibited by category
- Permits favored views while excluding opposing views
- Uses “consensus” or institutional approval as a substitute for a conduct-based rule

A Seven-Step Policy Review

- 1. Inventory:** Collect every operative policy governing access, use, distribution, advertising, payments, listings, or monetization.
- 2. Search:** Identify rules tied to religion, politics, health, science, climate, sexuality, gender, firearms, immigration, or other disputed issues.
- 3. Compare viewpoints:** Ask whether the policy permits one position while restricting the opposing position.
- 4. Identify the harm:** Determine whether the rule addresses fraud, illegality, safety, or another concrete harm, or merely disfavors an opinion.
- 5. Rewrite neutrally:** Replace topic- or viewpoint-based bans with objective conduct standards.
- 6. Check incorporated rules:** Review linked, subsidiary, product-specific, and third-party policies for conflicting restrictions.
- 7. Publish and preserve:** Make the current policy public, date it, retire superseded language, and retain evidence of the change.

What the Viewpoint Diversity Score Evaluates

The Viewpoint Diversity Score reviews whether core product and service policies expressly restrict lawful speech, advocacy, products, services, or participation because of a religious, political, scientific, or social viewpoint. It distinguishes viewpoint-based restrictions from neutral rules addressing unlawful conduct or clearly defined commercial harms.

A strong policy does not require the company to endorse every view. It requires the company to apply the same access and conduct standards to competing viewpoints.

Source note: Company examples are drawn from current 2026 Viewpoint Diversity Score research records; links lead to the underlying public evidence.

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