

# America First Legal Obtains Explosive Documents Revealing U.S. Censorship Scheme



America First Legal (AFL) on Thursday released [newly obtained documents](#) exposing a vast, taxpayer-funded censorship network allegedly coordinated by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC), the British government, and several media and technology firms. The documents were obtained through [ongoing litigation](#) against the State Department.

The records, which include internal USAID communications and a confidential disinformation primer, reveal what AFL called a "disturbing Orwellian" strategy to combat what the agencies label "misinformation," "disinformation," and "malinformation"—terms critics argue have been used broadly to target legitimate speech and dissenting political opinions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and 2020 election cycle.

According to AFL, the documents show the U.S. government, in coordination with international partners, developed artificial intelligence-powered censorship tools and media-monitoring programs designed to identify and suppress online content. This included efforts to de-bunk narratives before they went viral, shadow-ban individuals, and manipulate online algorithms to demote disfavored speech.

The records suggest the U.S. government was not merely monitoring public conversations—it was actively working with foreign governments and private firms to shape them, which is a flagrant violation of Americans' constitutional rights.

Among the materials disclosed is an internal USAID "Disinformation Primer" that lays out a framework for identifying and countering various forms of speech categorized under the "MDM" acronym—misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. The primer describes misinformation as "false, but not necessarily deliberately spread," disinformation as "false information deliberately spread," and malinformation as "true information used with ill intent."

The inclusion of true information as a threat under the malinformation category has drawn criticism from free speech advocates, who argue the term is vague and can be used to justify censorship of inconvenient facts.

The primer, dated during the height of global concern about "information disorder," outlines strategies for partnering with social media companies, media outlets, and academic institutions to monitor and flag content. It also references the use of AI and natural language processing tools to automate content moderation and detect "problematic" speech in real-time.

One document references an initiative supported by both USAID and the UK government called the "Rapid Response Mechanism" (RRM), which reportedly seeks to preemptively combat

narratives deemed harmful by governments. The RRM leverages partnerships with organizations like Logically, a UK-based company that uses machine learning to track “misinformation actors” and assess online risk.

Logically has supported governments in identifying and countering narratives that challenge official policies—sometimes labeling legitimate political expression as a threat. This is exactly the type of state-sponsored censorship the Founding Fathers warned against.

Another document highlights USAID’s partnership with the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), a media and information literacy nonprofit that AFL says played a central role in building the ideological foundation for censorship policies. IREX has received tens of millions in federal funding and, according to the documents, works closely with the GEC and other government entities to shape what constitutes “truthful” information in the public square.

Additionally, the USAID supported the “Harmony Square” project, an interactive online game developed to “inoculate” users against disinformation by exposing them to psychological manipulation techniques. According to the documents, the game was part of a broader behavioral science-based strategy to condition public opinion and reinforce government-approved narratives.

The documents suggest that these programs were not solely intended for foreign audiences, as originally claimed by the GEC and USAID, but were also applied domestically, potentially violating longstanding prohibitions against using State Department resources to influence U.S. public opinion.

AFL’s findings come amid growing scrutiny of the federal government’s role in online censorship. The Supreme Court is currently reviewing *Missouri v. Biden*, a landmark case alleging that federal officials coerced social media platforms

into censoring Americans. A district court in that case previously found that the Biden administration “likely violated the First Amendment” by engaging in what amounted to state-sponsored viewpoint suppression.

AFL’s litigation seeks to uncover additional communications between GEC, USAID, and outside censorship partners, including entities such as the Atlantic Council, the Center for Countering Digital Hate, and the Aspen Institute, all of which have played prominent roles in shaping online content moderation policies in recent years.

Free speech advocates and civil liberties groups have raised alarms over the expanding reach of what is often described as the “censorship-industrial complex,” a term popularized by journalist Michael Shellenberger to describe the nexus of government agencies, tech firms, academia, and NGOs that work together to control digital discourse.

Despite official denials from USAID and the State Department, AFL argues the documents contradict previous claims that the GEC and USAID do not engage in domestic information control. One email exchange obtained through the litigation discusses ways to “counter domestic misinformation before it spreads” and references U.S.-based social media users.

These revelations make it clear that U.S. taxpayer dollars are being used to fund anti-democratic speech suppression campaigns both at home and abroad,.

AFL has filed multiple Freedom of Information Act lawsuits targeting the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and the White House regarding similar censorship operations. These documents are the latest in a string of disclosures by AFL, which has positioned itself as a leading watchdog on issues involving government transparency, censorship, and civil liberties. The group says its litigation will continue until all responsible parties are identified and held accountable.