Facebook: Governments Demanded Data on 38K Users

MATT APUZZO, Associated Press

Washington (AP) — Government agents in 74 countries demanded information on about 38,000 Facebook users in the first half of this year, with about half the orders coming from authorities in the United States, the company said Tuesday.

The social-networking giant is the latest technology company to release figures on how often governments seek information about its customers. Microsoft and Google have done the same.

As with the other companies, it's hard to discern much from Facebook's data, besides the fact that, as users around the globe flocked to the world's largest social network, police and intelligence agencies followed.

Facebook and Twitter have become organizing platforms for activists and, as such, have become targets for governments. During anti-government protests in Turkey in May and June, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called social media "the worst menace to society."

At the time, Facebook denied it provided information about protest organizers to the Turkish government.

Data released Tuesday show authorities in Turkey submitted 96 requests covering 173 users. Facebook said it provided some information in about 45 of those cases, but there's no information on what was turned over and why.

"We fight many of these requests, pushing back when we find legal deficiencies and narrowing the scope of overly broad or vague requests," Colin Stretch, Facebook's general counsel company said in a blog post. "When we are required to comply with a particular request, we frequently share only basic user information, such as name."

Facebook and other technology companies have been criticized for helping the National Security Agency secretly collect data on customers. Federal law gives government the authority to demand data without specific warrants, and while companies can fight requests in secret court hearings, it's an uphill battle.

Facebook turned over some data in response to about 60 percent of those requests.

It's not clear from the Facebook data how many of the roughly 26,000 government requests on 38,000 users were for law-enforcement purposes and how many were for intelligence gathering.

Technology and government officials have said criminal investigations are far more common than national security matters as a justification for demanding information from companies.

The numbers are imprecise because the federal government forbids companies from revealing how many times they've been ordered to turn over information about their customers. Facebook released only a range of figures for the United States.

The company said it planned to start releasing these figures regularly.

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Online:

Facebook Global Government Requests Report:
https://www.facebook.com/about/government_requests [1]

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