

LEAD IMAGE

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How Big Tech Killed Brazil's "Fake News Bill"

Bill 2630 changed the relationship between tech companies and the far right and revealed the menu of lobbying strategies against regulation

By Laura Scofield and Natalia Viana (edit by Marina Amaral)

When Jair Bolsonaro walked into Facebook's office in Brasília, the capital of Brazil, housed in the imposing building *Corporate Financial Center*, on the late afternoon of April 2, 2025, the tension was palpable. For Meta's leadership in Brazil, it was crucial that the meeting did not make to the news. After all, former president Bolsonaro was a defendant for attempting a coup d'état with the help of the military, and a friendly meeting would send the wrong message.

But the mood was quickly broken by the impulsiveness of a maintenance worker, who cut through the crowd to hug the former president. She bypassed two federal police officers, the president of the Bolsonaro's Liberal Party, Valdemar Costa Neto and the rest of Bolsonaro's entourage. She even bypassed Meta's own beefed-up security that day — after all, there are protocols for receiving current and former heads of state.

Bolsonaro took advantage of the more relaxed atmosphere to present Murillo Laranjeira, Meta's senior public policy director in Brazil, with a silver medal engraved with his face — the same medal he had given to allies such as Argentina's President Javier Milei.

The group locked themselves in the meeting room. Sitting alongside Laranjeira were other lobbyists: Kaliana Kalache, Marconi Machado, Mário César Vilhena, Lilian Estevanato, Yana Dumaresq, and André Atadeu.

Mr. Laranjeira led the conversation, introducing the team and thanking Bolsonaro for the party's participation in the PL's 1st Communications Summit, [conceived](#) by Michelle Rodrigues. Laranjeira also acknowledged that, in terms of communications, the party was the most well-structured.

Beyond his "uncle at a family gathering" mannerisms, Bolsonaro's breathless speech touched Facebook's leadership, as did the tears in his eyes when he spoke about his possible imprisonment. "If I get arrested, I won't last two days," he said.

After this emotional moment, Meta's executives went on the offensive. They discussed the bills that bothered them, explaining why, in the company's view, the regulations would harm their interests and also the functioning of the internet in Brazil. Among them was Bill 2630, known as the "Fake News Bill," which proposes a regime of accountability and transparency

for social media, as well as other bills concerning the protection of children online and artificial intelligence.

Even though the visit had to be kept away from the spotlight — everyone had to sign a non-disclosure agreement — it had been approved by Meta's higher authorities. It was, therefore, an institutional decision. **It crowned an alliance that would have been unthinkable just two years earlier.** Until early 2023, tech companies were viewed with suspicion by most Bolsonaro-aligned lawmakers.

"Our first meetings with Big Tech were to demand reinstatement of our pages that were taken down," says representative Sóstenes Cavalcante, PL leader in the House, in an interview for **Agência Pública**.

"The relationship improved after Bill 2630. It was the DNA of who wants to censor them, who wants and who doesn't to harm them commercially" he explains. "Before that, we saw them as our enemies. We always had issues with Big Tech because **we always thought Big Tech benefited the left.**"

PHOTO

SUBTITLE: Congressmen who opposed Bill 2630/2020 address the audience on voting day, May 2 2023. Some of them were rep. Eli Borges, Pastor Eurico, e Pasto Marco Feliciano, all from the Evangelical Caucus. [Foto: Bruno Spada/Câmara dos Deputados]

Bill 2630 was passed by the Senate in 2020. In the House of Representatives, the bill was modified by a working group between July and December 2021, but its most advanced version was ultimately removed from the agenda on the fateful day of May 2, 2023.

For Big Tech, it proposed unacceptable interventions, such as liability for third-party content, nationalization of advertising contracts, joint responsibility of ad providers for misleading advertising, production of transparency reports, and payment for the use of journalistic content.

Mr. Cavalcante says that nowadays, **"every time a there is bill that will hurt their interests, they come to us here."**

PHOTO SÓSTENES

SUBTITLE: Rep. Sóstenes Cavalcante, head of Bolsonaro's party, explained that the "Fake News Bill" changed the relationship between the far-right and Big Tech. [Photo: Marina Ramos / Câmara dos Deputados]

There have been many meetings in his office with tech lobbyists since then. "I received them every time they asked. I meet with them frequently. I think I must have had at least ten meetings with them."

Two years before aligning with Donald Trump's far-right government, Big Tech executives, especially Google and Meta, were already applying in Brazil the formula they would later use in the U.S.: to avoid regulation, they embraced far-right politicians with radical speeches, who had previously been penalized or suspended from their platforms for violating safety policies.

"The political sorting process of the last decade, which passed through Brazil with Bill 2630, helped produce that iconic photo of Trump's inauguration," says Orlando Silva, rapporteur of the bill. "There was a sorting of the conservative field's political position, and there was an approach of this field by Big Tech, producing an alignment."

PHOTO ORLANDO SILVA

SUBTITLE: Rep. Orlando Silva, rapporteur of Bill 2630, in a presser on May 2, 2023. [Photo: Bruno Spada/Câmara dos Deputados]

In this process of rapprochement, Big Tech lobbyists deployed a full menu of lobbying strategies that would later be refined and adopted in other anti-regulatory battles in Brazil and other countries. They made hundreds of visits to representatives and senators, promoted and funded events, happy hours, and breakfasts, hired heavyweights like former President Michel Temer and dozens of professionals with government experience — a stratagem known as the "revolving door" — and even supported actions that can be classified as "astroturfing," the creation of movements that appear independent but are tied to companies. This is revealed by an investigation carried out by **Agência Pública** as part of the special report *Big Techs' Invisible Hand*, a transnational partnership led by **Pública** and **CLIP – the Centro Latinoamericano de Periodismo de Investigación**, which brings together 17 media outlets working across 13 countries. Read the series [here](#).

The Government's Encircle

The 2022 presidential election had been fiercely contested in Brazil. Lula won by less than 2 percentage points, and was still being challenged without evidence by Jair Bolsonaro supporters. The most-voted representative in that election was Nikolas Ferreira, whose accounts on social media were [blocked](#) by the STF in November 2022 for spreading disinformation. The atmosphere was tense.

Soon after Lula's inauguration, the situation became urgent. On January 8, 2023, a group of roughly 4,000 protesters invaded and vandalized the buildings of the Three Branches of Government, demanding the reversal of the election results based on false information spread online, according to a Federal Police investigation into the attempted coup that led to former president Jair Bolsonaro being charged.

The newly sworn-in government then began working on social media regulation and even met with Justice Moraes to address the issue. "People cannot do online what is prohibited in society," Lula said.

The government held the social media platforms accountable for failing to remove disinformation. Meetings followed with government relations representatives from the platforms — including Elon Musk, who showed up unannounced on an online meeting and refused to commit with enhancing X, though admitting the gravity of January 8, 2023.

Other Big Tech representatives expressed concern and promised to act, but **Agência Pública's** investigation shows that, **instead of fulfilling the promise to improve the moderation of extremist content, Big Tech focused on blocking the progress of the legislative process.**

"The intelligence behind the political offensive against Bill 2630—the whole strategy—comes from Big Tech. There's no doubt about that," says Orlando Silva, the rapporteur of the bill.

The Digital Citizenship Institute and Meta

In early 2023, newly sworn-in rep. Maurício Marcon is in his office when a representative from a technology company enters the room, weaving past the aides' desks to reach a door giving access to his office.

PHOTO

Rep. Maurício Marcon was visited by big tech lobbyists in the most tense moment of Bill 2630 debate in the House. [Créditos: Bruno Spada/Câmara dos Deputados]

The meeting begins.

The representative says it is "impossible" to implement what is foreseen in the "Fake News Bill" and explains that "there is no artificial intelligence that can decide what can and cannot be done in the way they want here." **Therefore, she continues, "everything will have to be manual."** The result, she says, is that if you are getting married today, "we will approve your story in six months." She explains that it would be like **a passenger getting into an Uber, spitting on someone on the street, and Uber being held responsible."**

Two years later, this is how Marcon recalls the approaches by representatives of technology companies during the most intense period of PL 2630's progress. When asked who visited him, he mentioned "a girl" who acted as "representative of all." According to his office, this was **Rebeca Mota, then coordinator of commissions at the Digital Citizenship Institute (ICD). The Institute, funded by tech associations, served as the secretariat for the Digital Caucus in Congress.**

Among the 25 representatives of tech companies and associations identified by **Pública**, Mota is the one who visited the Congress the most: **she was there 255 times since September 2021** — a number that could be even higher if we consider entries through the Federal Senate, which refused to share its records with our reporters. Her activity illustrates how intermediary associations operate: their lobbyists move freely through Congress to spread documents and even draft legislative texts previously approved by Big Tech that fund them.

Between February and June, there are 203 logged entries of lobbyists from companies such as Meta, Google, Microsoft, TikTok, and Amazon, as well as representatives of the Digital Council and the Brazilian Association of Software Companies (Abes), international associations such as the Latin American Internet Association (ALAI) and the Information

Technology Industry Council (ITI), and law firms and consultancies that work with technology, such as Bialer Falsetti Associados.

But this figure is underreported: according to several internal Big Tech sources, not all visits are logged, and other entries are sometimes recorded vaguely to avoid public scrutiny. Since there is no lobbying regulation in Brazil, companies are not required to register lobbyists' entries, the topics of their meetings, who they met with, or the amount invested in lobbying.

A year earlier, during the first attempt to pass Bill 2630, Rebeca Mota was already using another common strategy to influence matters of interest: drafting suggested amendment texts and sending them to allied lawmakers. According to the metadata of filed documents analyzed by **Pública**, Mota wrote and submitted at least 12 amendment suggestions on April 6, 2022, the day scheduled for the first consideration of a request for urgency status for Bill 2630. The amendments were presented by various representatives.

Among Mota's suggestions were extending the time before the law would take effect, removing joint liability for ad providers, and reducing transparency requirements to protect trade secrets.

The lobbyists' "sensitization" efforts worked. "Prior censorship", or the risk of excessive moderation, was one of the narratives most frequently employed by Big Tech lobbyists during the campaign against the bill.

Experts dispute this argument. "Regulation is not censorship. Bill 2630 was widely debated for years with civil society and is based on democratic models such as the European Union's DSA [Digital Services Act]. Its focus is to increase transparency and accountability of digital platforms, not to control content," explained Artur Romeu, director of the Latin America office of Reporters Without Borders.

"The censorship narrative serves the interests of Big Tech, which rejects any regulation, and is amplified by the far-right for political opposition purposes," he added.

Rebeca Mota's visits represented the Digital Citizenship Institute (ICD), founded in 2019 as a nonprofit entity supported by technology sector associations such as the Brazilian Chamber of the Digital Economy (Câmara-e.net) and the Latin American Internet Association (ALAI).

In a statement, ICD (now renamed as the Digital Council), said: "Every individual, organization, or company has the right to participate in the legislative process. Government relations exist only in democracies, as they are the legitimate channel through which different sectors present their technical, operational, and legal arguments. Elected by the people, lawmakers are responsible for evaluating these contributions. This technical and transparent dialogue improves the debate and strengthens legislative decisions."

Entry records accessed by **Pública** reveal that Meta lobbyists are among the most present in the House. Meta public policy managers Marconi Machado and André Atadeu each logged over 100 visits between July 2022 and May 2025. A survey by [Núcleo Jornalismo](#), one of the organizations involved in **Big Tech's Invisible Hands**, identified Meta as the company with the most professionals in public policy or government relations: 19 out of 75

mapped names. Of those, 73.7% had previous experience in public office, reflecting a “revolving door” strategy.

“The fiercest team is Meta’s,” says a former tech giant employee. “We monitor all the time. If there’s a bill—good or bad—we will dominate and influence it: either to move it faster, because it’s stuck and needs new life, or to kill it. We propose amendments, highlights, mobilize the caucus to get it moving.”

PHOTO META

SUBTITLE: Among Big Tech, Meta has the largest lobbying team [Photo: Marcello Casal Jr./Agência Brasil]

The Power Game

On the other side, in favor of the bill’s approval, representative Orlando Silva counted on a heavyweight: the lobbying of Brazil’s Globo Communication Group, one of the largest media conglomerates in Latin America.

Together with organizations representing traditional media, Globo fully backed the project in 2021, when it began requiring platforms to pay for the use of journalistic content through private agreements with newspapers and websites. **The new rule emulated legislation approved or under discussion in Australia and Canada.**

O Globo, the newspaper of the Globo Group, even argued in an editorial that “approving the Fake News Bill will be a civilizational advance.” Globo Group’s support for the bill did not go unnoticed and brought a burden to the bill’s rapporteur, rep. Orlando Silva, who was criticized by opponents as defending private broadcasting interests in the clash with tech companies. “Broadcasting is losing money to social media and wants to use Congress to regulate this,” says Bolsonaro’s party representative Sóstenes Cavalcante.

Bill 2630 rapporteur Orlando Silva counters: “Journalism is also an industry, a Brazilian industry. If I see that a business model is destroying this industry, why wouldn’t I debate it?” he asks. “Contracts are signed outside Brazil and are not subject to bidding or tax rules here, producing a brutal asymmetry against the Brazilian industry. Why can’t Brazilian law address this?”

When asked if it wished to comment on its actions regarding Bill 2630, Grupo Globo did not respond.

The Day-to-Day Battle in Congress

Winning over a legislator takes time and investment in personal relationships, explained internal Big Tech sources interviewed by this investigation. Even when no projects are under

debate, policy teams are seen walking the hallways of the Congress, trying to secure time in the lawmakers' schedules. People with closer ideological alignment are tasked with approaching like-minded deputies. A "hot contact," such as Jair Bolsonaro, is guarded closely. "In our world, our greatest treasure is our contacts. Whoever has the person's WhatsApp number doesn't share it," explained a lobbyist.

One of the biggest advantages, however, is related to the products that Big Techs offer. If any ordinary person has problems accessing their social media account — i.e.: if their TikTok or Instagram profile was hacked—they have to go through an excruciating process trying to reach a human being. For politicians, the service is VIP.

"It could be 3 a.m., I open a ticket," says a lobbyist. "We can intervene in the process to restore a politician's page faster, for example. We send it to someone who will solve it," he explains. "Who sets the priorities of who will respond and when is our team."

Moreover, training for teams becomes a tool of influence. Meta, X, Google, TikTok, and Kwai attended the 1st Communication Seminar of the Liberal Party (Bolsonaro's party), held in January 2025.

Engagement with a new generation of politicians—those coming from outside traditional power circles or parties with grassroots militancy—is key for Big Tech operators. In Brazil, the vast majority of them, since 2018, are right-wing.

"Why do these right-wing folks help us? Where did all these people come from? Social networks. They occupied a space previously reserved for those with access to TV. They have a sense of gratitude toward social media," says a lobbyist.

Mobilizing Evangelicals

On April 20, an internal message from Meta's team in Brazil alerted the global policy team that the vote on the bill could happen shortly after the urgency vote, scheduled for April 27. However, the message assured that "we are working with party leadership and influential congress members to strengthen opposition to critical measures."

That same week, Meta's team met with São Paulo Mayor Ricardo Nunes (MDB) to "communicate the negative impacts if Congress approves the current version of the 'Fake News Bill.'" According to internal messages analyzed by **Pública**, the mayor was to speak with congress members from his political party to "warn about the negative impacts of the bill." Sao Paulo is the largest city in population in Latin America.

The support that ultimately turned the tide came from one of the largest and most influential blocs in Congress: the Evangelical Caucus. It was secured through a coordinated effort led by Meta's lobby, confirmed by three internal sources at the company to **Pública**. The mastermind behind this shift was an up-and-coming star among their lobbyists, Public Policy Director Kaliana Kalache.

In the same week that they met with São Paulo Mayor, another meeting took place that included rep. Sóstenes Cavalcante and rep. Pastor Eurico, as well as the founder of ICD, Felipe França, and Meta's lobbying squad, led by Kaliana Kalache. During the meeting, amid exchanged pleasantries—Cavalcante called Mark Zuckerberg “red”—Felipe França presented arguments from the ICD playbook, finalized days earlier.

FOTO

Public Policy Director Kaliana Kalache [Créditos: Kayo Magalhães/Câmara dos Deputados]

During the meeting, rep. Sóstenes Cavalcante received a document produced by Meta stating that the obligation to prevent potentially illegal content could lead to the banning of “biblical passages” that are often classified as prejudice, discrimination, or gender-based violence.” As usual, the document was delivered on paper to avoid leaving a digital trail.

The text cited verses that could be “banned,” such as Leviticus 20:13, which states, “If a man lies with another man as with a woman, both have committed an abomination and shall be put to death,” which could be classified as “prejudice” and incitement to violence; and 1 Timothy 2:12, which says that women should “remain silent,” which could be classified as “gender-based violence.”

“In this way, Bill 2630 will result in undue restrictions on religious freedom by providing for the removal of religious content,” the text argued. Sóstenes reacted: “Eurico, we need to call our friends.”

The argument set the Evangelical Caucus on fire.

“There were several Bible passages that would be censored. And the platforms, in an effort to avoid problems—because the fines were in the millions—would choose to remove them. And we would, therefore, have a total compromise of the Bible's exposure,” explained to Pública rep. Eli Borges, then leader of the Evangelical Caucus.

Borges joined the coordination for this reason: “I mobilized the entire religious segment in Brazil to intervene in the House, because we couldn't have this matter approved. (...) I did my homework. We spoke to all the representatives, and they received calls, because when elections come, they go after religious leaders and want to secure votes.”

The pressure also spread across evangelical media, which began publishing texts mobilizing the base.

The Censorship Bill

Beyond Congress, pressure was growing on social media, centered around a term that went viral: “Censorship Bill.” Its authorship is disputed. A [website](#) cemented the new name: “Censorship Scoreboard”. The site published the positions of representatives and encouraged the public to pressure deputies. Those who opposed the bill were labeled as the ones who “vote for freedom,” and the others, “vote for censorship.”

The site was a project of *Boletim da Liberdade*, an ultraliberal news outlet. Founded in 2016, it was bought by the couple Paulo and Sara Ganime at the end of January 2023, shortly before the start of the campaign against Bill 2630. Ms. Ganime said she promoted the site to representatives, but their reactions surprised her. The pressure was so intense that they began contacting her to change their positions on the site. “We would say, ‘Look, it’s no use just talking, you have to post it on social media.’ So, they would post it, send the link, and we would update the scoreboard accordingly.”

Although she stated that there was no “involvement with Bolsonaro supporters to conceive” the site, allies of the former president were its main promoters. Representatives shared the link, asked the audience to contact other lawmakers, and participated in promotional videos.

The pressure was so intense that then-House Speaker and right-wing representative Arthur Lira would later describe it as an “act of horror by Big Tech.”

Rep. Jadyel Alencar recalls receiving emails and messages on social media, but does not believe the pressure affected him. According to his aide responsible for monitoring the deputy’s inbox, “there were hundreds of emails arriving, even coming out of the spam folder, directly into the inbox.”

The pressure worked. On April 26, 2023, there were 193 representatives opposed to the bill and 236 in favor. Three days later, the scoreboard [shifted](#), with 228 deputies against the bill, 223 in favor, and 62 undecided.

“Astroturfing”: Protests at the Airport

FOTO

Protest against Bill 2630 at Brasília airport. Photograph taken by an employee of the Digital Citizenship Institute, which is funded by associations representing technology companies. [Photos: Reprodução/Boletim da Liberdade/Frente Digital/Laura Campos]

Another movement that may have links to technology companies occurred at Brasília airport. It was a demonstration on April 25, 2023, at the passenger arrivals area, targeting deputies returning from their states.

The protest was organized by Youth and Liberty Union ([UJL](#)), a right-wing group involved in student politics. In [protest photos](#), published on the *Boletim da Liberdade* website — where UJL has a column — the students are seen wearing the group’s shirts and holding signs saying, for example, “Those who vote for censorship don’t have my vote.”

But one detail stands out: the group was composed of older men and women who were not wearing UJL shirts and did not appear to be part of the student movement — in UJL, technically, only young people up to 29 years old may participate, except in special cases approved by the group.

The practice could constitute “astroturfing,” meaning the use of front groups to give the impression of a popular mobilization on a topic.

A week later, the UJL doubled down: on May 2, it repeated the action in eight Brazilian capitals, with support from the YouTube channel *Ideias Radicais*, according to a report published by *Boletim da Liberdade*. Our investigation found that the movement was noted in Meta’s internal channels, which recorded the occurrence of “public mobilizations.”

The Narrow Urgency Vote

On the morning of Tuesday, April 25, 2023, the day the urgency motion was to be voted on, YouTube launched a [campaign](#) against PL 2630, targeting content creators, claiming that the project could give the government power to “control core aspects of the platform” and force the network to “remove a large amount of legitimate content.”

The campaign was shared on the platform’s internal channel for creators, via email, and on the company blog, urging the dissemination of the hashtag #MaisDebate2630 [#MoreDebate2630]. YouTube also encouraged influencers “to make their voices heard.”

Several influencers made [videos](#) repeating the arguments, and the hashtag began to be used in content opposing the bill.

For Victor Hugo Criscuolo Boson, a Law and Labor Process professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), YouTube’s campaign “could take on the contours of abuse of economic power.” “In theory, there is no prohibition against a company taking a stance in public debates. The problem arises when a company mobilizes people who are economically dependent or at a disadvantage in the power relationship to defend corporate interests,” he explained.

The online campaign that day, combined with the presence of lobbyists in Congress and coordination with political parties, was led by Bolsonaro’s Liberal Party. On April 25, the House’s leaders’ meeting ended with an agreement: the urgency motion would be voted on and approved that day.

The initial plan was for the bill to be voted on the following day, but it gained an extra week for further coordination, pushing the vote to May 2.

A week later, Lira would express regret: “We gave eight days for Big Tech to do the horror they did with the House. And I didn’t see anyone here defend! In a country with even the minimum seriousness, Google, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Globo, and whoever else, all media should have been held accountable.”

The Week That Changed Everything

Between April 25 and May 2, Big Tech’s pressure took on unprecedented dimensions.

Google invested millions in advertising. It paid approximately US\$111,000 to the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo for a full-page [ad](#) claiming that the bill “could increase confusion about what is true or false in Brazil” and urging people to “contact your deputy on social media today.” On the same day, the company also spent US\$72,000 on an ad in Brasilia-based national newspaper Correio Braziliense.

The company argued that having to pay for content could make it “financially unfeasible for platforms to offer free services.” In addition, the platform claimed that by trying to protect journalistic content, the bill “ends up protecting those who produce disinformation, resulting in more disinformation.” Google also repeatedly described the proposal as a “serious threat to freedom of expression.”

Overall, between April 27 and May 2, Google spent more than US\$350,000 on ads in print newspapers, television, and social media. It [paid Meta](#) about US\$112,000 and almost US\$35,000 to Spotify. On the latter, it had planned to spend an additional US\$74,000, but the campaign was halted because Spotify prohibits ads with political content.

On May 1, a Monday national holiday, the company placed two sentences on its search page that were considered exaggerated even by Big Tech executives interviewed by **Pública**: “The Fake News Bill could increase confusion about what is true or false in Brazil” and “The Fake News Bill could worsen your internet experience.” Clicking the phrases redirected users to Google posts defending its stance against the law. The messages were seen by millions of Brazilians, precisely because of market dominance: Google [controls](#) 85% of the search engine market in Brazil.

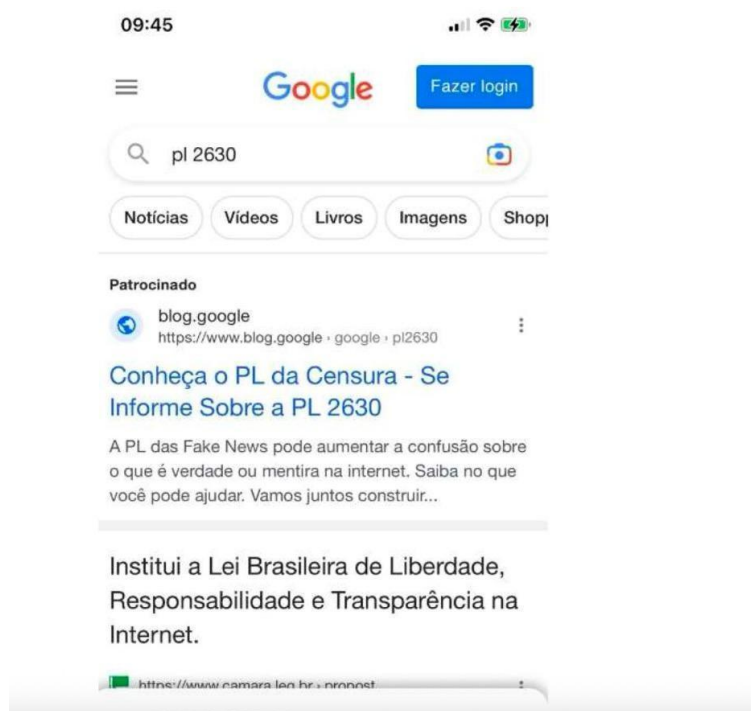
The action prompted the National Consumer Secretariat (Senacon) to issue a measure demanding removal, with a fine of US\$175,000 per hour of non-compliance. According to a lobbyist from another company in the sector, colleagues in the government relations team had been warned that Google would launch a campaign against the bill.

“We knew Google would do some kind of PR and product intervention, but we didn’t know exactly what it would be,” he said. “For Google, the issue of compensation for journalistic content was a matter of life or death.”

Another action involving Google Search drew the attention of Netlab, a research group from the Communication School at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. That weekend, when a user typed “PL,” the tool suggested “PL da Censura” (Censorship Bill) as a search completion. And when someone searched “PL 2630,” the platform suggested questions like “Was the Censorship Bill approved?” and “What is the Censorship Bill?”

They recorded a [sponsored post](#) on Google’s own blog, authored by the government relations director Marcelo Lacerda, with its title modified to “Learn About the Censorship Bill – Get informed about PL 2630.” This post was the first result that appeared for anyone searching for information on the bill, according to various tests conducted in both incognito and regular browser tabs by the team.

Netlab reached the conclusion that, by purchasing ads on its own platform, Google effectively manipulated its own search results.



“We know that the algorithm is heavily influenced by ads, because that’s Google’s business. So when there’s an ad for a specific word, that word becomes more relevant than others, precisely so the advertisers appear more,” explained Marie Santini, founder of Netlab.

In their [report](#), the Netlab researchers stated that Google was taking advantage of its leading position in the search market to “negatively influence users’ perception of the bill in favor of its commercial interests, which could constitute abuse of economic power.”

The companies denied having altered their systems to promote organic content opposing the bill, and Google criticized the Netlab study for “methodological inconsistency.” Google’s lawyers refuted the study before Brazil’s Administrative Council for Economic Defense (Cade), arguing that “no serious and consistent conclusion can be drawn from isolated and decontextualized examples, without a minimally relevant or documented sample.”

“Historically, Google was always considered less aggressive, while Meta was more aggressive. But suddenly, **Google became far more aggressive than Meta itself.** There was a role reversal in this process,” evaluated a lobbyist with extensive experience in Congress.

Google responded with an official statement:

“Like many other companies, we regularly engage with legislators and other stakeholders on a wide range of issues, including how policies may affect the people who use our products.

We report our interactions with authorities in a transparent manner and in accordance with local regulations.”

The company’s press office also sent links to articles published by its representatives that reinforce Google’s stance during the discussions on Bill 2630 — such as an op-ed published in Folha de S. Paulo — and stated that Bueno did go to the commission on April 26, and did not omit her destination.

‘Burying’ the Bill in the House

PHOTO 01 e 02

Visit of Supreme Federal Court Minister and President of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), Alexandre de Moraes, to the former President of the Senate, Rodrigo Pacheco, and the former President of the Chamber of Deputies, Arthur Lira, with suggestions regarding PL 2630/2020. [Photos: Marcos Oliveira/Agência Senado]

On May 2, the scheduled date for the vote, there were already indications that more representatives were opposed to the text than in favor. Several representatives carried printed sheets reading “Bill 2630, censorship no” alongside the UJL logo. The evangelical caucus also [staged](#) protests and participated in an opposition statement against the bill.

The other side also organized demonstrations. That morning, student [backpacks](#) were placed by the Avaaz organization on the lawn in front of Congress, next to a banner reading: “Protect our children, regulate social networks!”

Early in the day’s agenda, Orlando Silva requested that the bill be removed from the schedule so that he could “consolidate the incorporation of all the suggestions that were made” and unify the House. Behind the scenes, it was widely understood that this was merely an excuse. **The removal from the agenda was requested by the rapporteur because there were not enough votes to approve the bill,** and postponing it was better than losing the vote outright. Then-House Speaker Arthur Lira, responsible for preparing the agenda, agreed.

“At that moment, when it wasn’t voted on, it was already dead,” said a lobbyist from the media sector.

FOTO

Eduardo Bolsonaro in a presser against Bill 2630. [Photo: Lula Marques/ Agência Brasil]

“Abusive campaign”

Even though the bill was removed from the agenda, the discussion continued for several more weeks. Rapporteur Orlando Silva continued meeting with the caucuses to try to negotiate amendments to the project, such as [removing](#) provisions on remuneration for artists and journalists.

Then, on May 9, another Big Tech struck back: Telegram. The Russian-origin company sent a message to all its users' phones, claiming that Brazil was "about to approve a law that will end freedom of expression" and that the project gave "the government powers of censorship without prior judicial oversight." "If approved, companies like Telegram may have to leave Brazil," the message warned. It included a link to a site detailing the arguments. Asked about its role during the debate on bill, Telegram did not respond to this investigation.

That was the final straw for Arthur Lira, who that same day filed a criminal complaint with the Attorney General's Office (PGR) for the "abusive campaign" by representatives of Telegram and Google against the bill. "The respondents, through disinformation and abuse of dominant position in mass communication, acted to block democratic debate and intimidate the representatives of the House, encouraging all kinds of improper behavior, in order to prevent deliberation on the bill," Lira argued.

He explained the rationale: "It's the same *modus operandi* of disinformation and manipulation, through digital media and social networks, aimed at serving personal, political, and economic interests, to the detriment of truth, morality, legality, transparency, and Democracy itself."

"Representatives texted me reporting physical threats, via social networks, personally, through their aides, and their coordinators. Representatives who were threatened by other representatives inside the House. We are gathering all the information, and have already requested it from the technical staff of the House. Big Tech crossed all limits of prudence," Lira [said](#), promising to "pursue all avenues" to hold the Big Techs accountable "for the near-horror they inflicted on representatives in one week over the voting of this matter."

However, the investigations stalled and by mid-June 2023, Google hired a high-profile operator to help with its lobbying against the bill: former president Michel Temer (2016-2018) handled the debate at the Supreme Court, according to investigations conducted for this project. Hiring Temer was another example of the revolving-door tactic.

Other professionals also gained prominence that year for their roles. In fact, a kind of "rivalry" developed among members of corporate government relations departments over who had truly "killed" Bill 2630. "Each lobbyist from each company will claim they worked on Bill 2630," said one. There's a simple reason for this: blocking legislation is the primary job of policy teams.

"The mindset has always been: yes, we'll try to avoid regulation or, at least, ensure that any regulation is as minimally harmful to the business as possible. That's natural. No private company wants to be regulated. No private company wants the State to impose burdens or costs," explained an operator.

"The work of lobbying is to block a bill. That's what lobbying is for," added another. Blocking a bill can also result in high year-end performance bonuses, sources told the reporters.

At Meta, annual bonuses can exceed approximately \$175,000. In 2023, the efforts of at least one government relations executive were formally recognized. Kaliana Kalache was promoted from head of public policies to Director at the beginning of the following year.

A lobbyist with decades of experience in Congress points out that the coordination around Bill 2630 had another effect: in Brazil, Big Tech ended up with its image tied to the far right.

“In the long run, this will push a backlash,” he says. “Their lobbying is very bad. Lobbying is a long-term race. I can lose today, but I can’t destroy bridges for the future.”

In fact, the platforms would suffer two major defeats just two years later: first, with the Supreme Court’s decision to change its interpretation of Article 19 of Brazil’s Internet Bill of Rights, holding them liable for criminal content and requiring proactive moderation; and when Bill 2628 passed, as it focuses on the protection of children and adolescents in digital environments. In both cases, right-wing lawmakers and influencers labeled the measures as “censorship.”

One of the lobbyists who worked on behalf of the tech companies, however, says there was no other way. “There was already a lot of bad blood after the 2018 election. The first year of Bolsonaro was very difficult, and then the pandemic hit. When Orlando Silva became the rapporteur, it was practically impossible to talk to the left. Dialogue was completely blocked,” he says.

“Jumping into the arms of the right was the way to survive,” he concludes.