

Israel-Hamas war

Turkey blocks Instagram over 'censorship' of Hamas leader's death

Erdoğan adviser and communications chief accuses US platform of not allowing 'messages of condolence' for Ismail Haniyeh



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Istanbul during a rally to protest at the death of Ismail Haniyeh © Kemel Aslan/AFP/Getty Images

Adam Samson in Ankara AN HOUR AGO

Turkey has blocked access to Instagram after accusing the US-based social media platform of censoring posts on the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh.

The country's Information and Communication Technologies Authority began restricting access to Instagram on Friday, but other services by parent company Meta, including Facebook and WhatsApp, are still accessible.

Fahrettin Altun, Turkey's communications chief and a top adviser to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on Wednesday condemned Instagram for allegedly "preventing people from posting messages of condolences for the passing of Hamas leader Haniyeh". "This is censorship, pure and simple," he added.

Meta did not respond to a request for comment. The company's US regulatory filing this week, which accompanied its quarterly earnings report, noted that if the group was found in breach of local rules "the Turkish government could take action to reduce or eliminate our Turkey-based advertising revenue".

Ankara's decision to block Instagram, a platform widely used in Turkey, comes as the country has stepped up its criticism of Israel and its backers over the [war in Gaza](#), which Israeli leaders say is aimed at eliminating militant group Hamas after its

October 7 attack. Turkey has embargoed trade with the Jewish state and has repeatedly accused it of carrying out genocide in Gaza.

Turkey has also become much more vocal in its support for Hamas, which runs Gaza. Erdoğan called the [killing of Haniyeh in Tehran](#) on Wednesday, which Iran has blamed on Israel, “a despicable act aimed at disrupting the Palestinian cause, the glorious resistance of Gaza and the just struggle of our Palestinian brothers”.

The Turkish leader in a call with US President Joe Biden on Thursday evening expressed “deep disappointment” with the US for hosting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Congress last month. Ankara has in response invited Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to address the Turkish parliament in mid-August.

[Turkey's](#) decision to restrict Instagram is also the latest sign of Erdoğan's government using internet censors as a political tool at a time when observers are worried the country is sliding towards autocracy.

The number of foreign and domestic websites censored or shut by Turkish authorities in recent years has risen sharply, with about 1mn domain names completely blocked as of early 2024, up from about 350,000 at the end of 2018, according to the Turkish Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD).

Turkey's censors block a broad range of content including entire websites of some news providers such as German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, as well as social media posts and YouTube videos. Censored topics vary widely but include articles critical of Erdoğan and his family, pro-Kurdish and opposition websites and material viewed as obscene or criminal, according to İFÖD.

In January the government sought to [restrict virtual private network services](#), which are widely used to bypass censors, in the lead up to the March local elections. Turkey also threatened to ban X in early 2024 after the platform declined to take down several contentious posts, with Elon Musk's social media site eventually relenting.

