# Internet Neutrality at Stake

## What is the issue?

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- Federal Communications Commission (FCC) of the US announced the ‘Restoring Internet Freedom Order’.
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- This could potentially end the content neutral era of the internet.
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## What is Net neutrality?

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- It is the concept in which all online content providers (all websites or apps) are treated equally by telecom operators.
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- Notably, consumers get access to all websites equally and speed of access is not differentiated for any content.
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- ISPs are mandated to not interfere with or block the content that a consumer accesses, views or posts online.
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- This also specifically outlaws content specific offers/charges on consumers in order to ensure equality.
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## What is the current announcement?

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- FCC rules issued in 2015 aimed at upholding neutrality neutrality.
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- The current ruling undoes this and favours giving sweeping powers to ISPs over the content consumers can access.

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- This ruling is almost certain be cleared in FCCs next open meeting.
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- **Reasons -** FCC claims that the ruling is to remove what it calls “heavy-handed Internet regulations”.
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- These regulations, it believes is holding back investment, innovation, and job creation in the sector.
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- FCC also noted that it didn’t want to micromanage the Internet.
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- **Criticism –** This allows ISPs could give preferential treatment to particular sites and apps, and to their own digital content.
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- ISPs could also block access to sites or cap network speeds by segregating the Internet into fast and slow lanes.
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- Charging consumers extra for better access to some sites and distorting fair trade is also a possibility.
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- This would also lead to blocking of or slowing down of competitor’s content and unfavourable political opinions.
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## How can these distortions be addressed?

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- FCC might no longer regulate content that ISPs provide.
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- Hence, the job of protecting consumers from detrimental business practices will go to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).
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- Notably, FTC neither has any telecommunications expertise nor rule-making authority in this area.
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## Who benefits from the order?

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- Big ISPs such as AT&T Inc, Comcast Corp and Verizon Communications Inc,

stand to benefit due to these changes.
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- They can now design schemes to charge consumers as well as content providers.
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- Notably, in recent years, ISPs have tried offers such as discounts on their service in exchange for browsing history of users.
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- Some ISPs are reported to have tried to drive users to their own apps by excluding them from mobile data usage limits.
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- On the contrast, Alphabet Inc, Facebook Inc, Amazon and Netflix Inc were among the big firms that are currently opposed to the ruling.
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**Source: Indian Express**

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