

# Meta's Political Content Limit Causes Steep Drop in Reach for Accounts

A Survey of Prominent Accounts Finds Reach of Political Content on Instagram is Down by 65%

# Toplines

Meta's decision to limit the reach of "political" content on Instagram has yielded an **average 65% drop in the reach of several prominent accounts** that regularly posted credible political content over a three month period from March 8 to May 24, 2024.

With little to no transparency and accountability in changing algorithms and settings, Meta is deprioritizing credible political content for Instagram users, creators, and organizations with profound implications for the reach of content focused on political education, activism, and mobilization in a U.S. election year.

## Background

On February 9th, Meta — the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and Threads — announced a policy change they argued would help make Instagram "a great experience for everyone." In a [blog post](#), the company stated that they would "no longer recommend content about politics" on Instagram's Explore page, Reels, In-Feed Recommendations, or Suggested Users. Since that announcement, Meta has yet to provide clarity about how they define and filter "political" content. A screenshot in the blog post suggests that they could include content that is "likely to mention governments, elections, or social topics that affect a group of people and/or society at large."

The vague language of "social topics" immediately sparked concern from creators and organizations, who raised alarms about the policy's potential to undermine credible content and advocacy, including topics like climate change, gun violence prevention, LGBTQ+ rights, election information, and more. In light of those concerns, in April 2024 more than 200 creators signed on to an [open letter](#) from Accountable Tech, calling on Meta to give users the autonomy to adjust their algorithm by making the setting to limit "political" content an opt-in user choice rather than on-by-default.

In addition to Meta's lack of transparency and failure to notify users and creators of this policy update, Meta — also without notice — [override past user settings](#), switching all Instagram accounts to limit "political" content on June 26, 2024, a day before the first U.S. presidential debate. The change was not missed by creators, who noted that their settings were reset to limit "political" content by default. Even when users re-selected the option to not limit "political" content, the setting reset to limit "political" content each time they re-opened Instagram. Meta Communications Director Andy Stone [posted](#) on Threads that this was an "error." Yet again, with the flip of a switch, Meta further demonstrated in a single day the profound power the company has to alter algorithms and settings with little to no transparency or accountability.

Over the past months, Meta has moved quickly to systematically remove trustworthy "political" content from their recommendation surfaces on Instagram while ignoring calls from Accountable Tech and others for transparency. As this report demonstrates, that decision has dramatically reduced the reach of credible, informative posts, effectively hiding that content from millions of users. At a time when online disinformation and propaganda are [spreading like wildfire](#), Meta is deprioritizing credible content and further threatening the vulnerable information ecosystem.

To provide a statistical foundation to many of the anecdotal accounts from creators on the impact of Meta's decision to limit "political" content on Instagram, Accountable Tech worked with five large Instagram accounts that regularly post "political" content to delve into the data and determine trend lines for their reach over time before, during, and after Meta [reportedly](#) began implementation of this new policy the week of March 18, 2024.

# Methodology & Findings

Accountable Tech asked five Instagram accounts with more than 10,000 followers each to share their Instagram account insights analytics data with us to measure the change in average reach per piece of content posted over a three month period. Since individual account insights data is the only way to assess the reach of an account's posts on Instagram, participating accounts in this study had to spend significant time carefully pulling this data from their own Instagram account insights.

The accounts in the study include Secretary Hillary Clinton (@hillaryclinton), Feminist (@feminist), Human Rights Campaign (@humanrightscampaign), GLAAD (@glaad), and Field Team 6 (@fieldteam6). Each of these accounts regularly posts "political" content, providing an opportunity to assess how their average reach per piece of content changed in the approximately three month period from March 8 to May 24, 2024. These accounts post a wide range of "political" content including topics like climate change, reproductive freedom, LGBTQ+ rights, voting information, and racial justice. Collectively, these five accounts have almost 13.5 million followers on Instagram, and their content surpassed a collective reach of over 106 million during the 11-week window of this study.

## Sample posts from five participating Instagram accounts from March 8 to May 24, 2024:



@FEMINIST | May 6, 2024

Instagram [post](#) by @feminist providing educational information on the Biden administration's announcement that medical records for out-of-state abortions will be protected by the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).



@HillaryClinton | May 7, 2024

Instagram [post](#) by @hillaryclinton showing how one in three women in the U.S. live in a state where abortion is restricted or outright banned.



@HumanRightsCampaign | March 26, 2024

Instagram [post](#) by @humanrightscampaign explaining dangerous anti-LGBTQ+ bills advancing in state legislatures.



@GLAAD | May 22, 2024

Instagram [post](#) by @GLAAD about harmful anti-trans legislation signed into law in South Carolina.

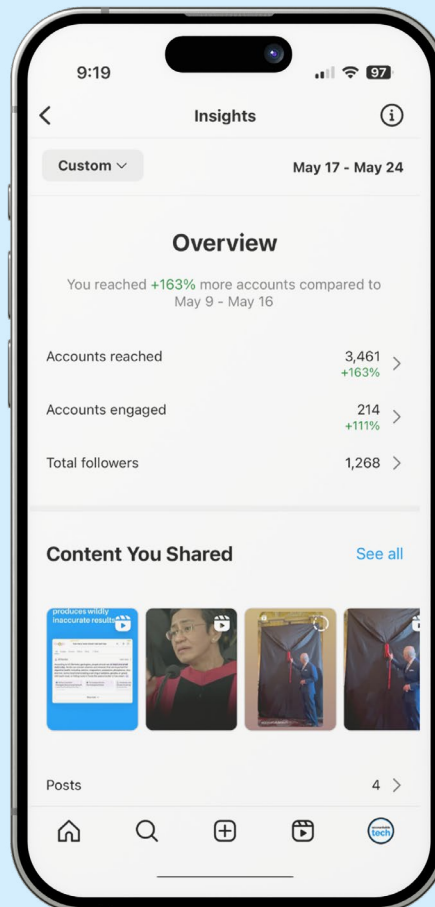


@FieldTeam6 | May 20, 2024

Instagram [post](#) by @fieldteam6 about upcoming in-person voter registration opportunities in California.

Because Meta only allows accounts to view the last three months of their analytics, this study is limited to data collected between March 8 to May 24, 2024. Each of the five participating Instagram accounts provided Accountable Tech with their weekly reach total along with the total number of pieces of content including posts, stories, and reels published each week for this 11-week period.

### Sample screenshot of Instagram Insights Report:

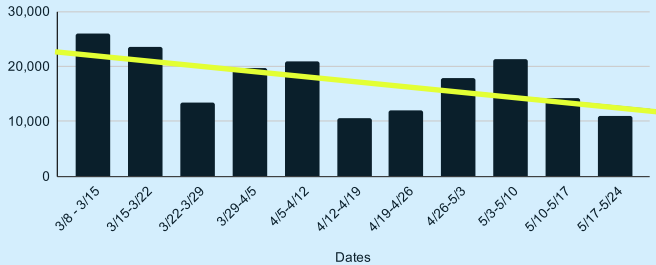


Example screenshot of an Instagram insights report for a weekly time period. Accountable Tech's Instagram account was not included in the study because it has too small a following to produce significant reach over time.

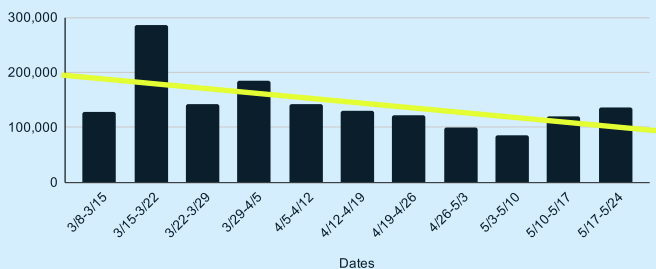
## Data from the five participating Instagram accounts for the time period of March 8 to May 24:

Average weekly reach per piece of content posted

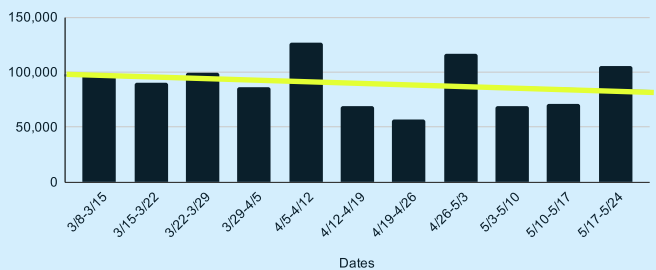
### Account 1:



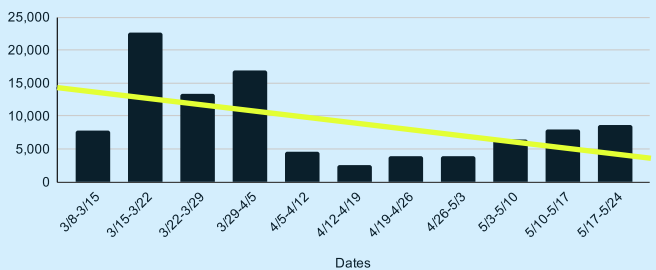
### Account 2:



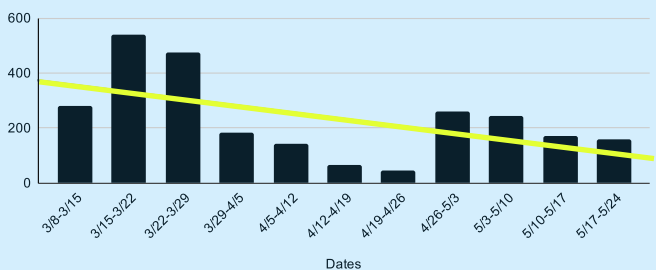
### Account 3:



### Account 4:



### Account 5:



The trend lines for each of accounts show a significant decline in reach over time. Computing the slope of these trend lines with the first week's average weekly reach per piece of content as a baseline allows us to determine the weekly percent decline in average reach per piece of content for each of the accounts. Across the five accounts, we find an average 6.5% decline in the average weekly reach per piece of content. In the ten weeks following the first week of the study period as a baseline, the 6.5% weekly decline in reach translates into a 65% total decline in the average weekly reach per piece of content for the prominent Instagram accounts.

## Average Instagram Reach Data

	Percent Decline in Average Weekly Reach Per Piece of Content	Total Decline in Average Weekly Reach Per Piece of Content Over Study Period
Account 1	-3.52%	-35.20%
Account 2	-6.97%	-69.68%
Account 3	-1.29%	-12.89%
Account 4	-11.91%	-119.06%
Account 5	-8.81%	-88.12%
<b>Average</b>	<b>-6.50%</b>	<b>-64.99%</b>

# Conclusion

When Meta announced this policy change, the company [stated](#) that they would “roll out these changes slowly over time to get this right.” But our research has found the opposite to be true. In fewer than three months since the policy implementation, Meta has quickly and systematically demoted credible, authoritative content from prominent accounts at a time when election-related [disinformation and propaganda](#) are proliferating on social media platforms.

Meta may have billed their decision to categorically hide “political” content from millions of users as a small update, but we are only just beginning to understand the ripple effects this change will have on global elections, social justice, and human rights. The information ecosystem is a vital part of a functioning democracy and as long as large companies like Meta call the shots on what kind of content is too “political” for users, that ecosystem will become more fractured, increasingly polarized, and less reflective of our shared values and truth.

With millions heading to the polls here in the U.S. and around the world, the stakes have never been higher.