

# [***Instagram and Threads will no longer promote 'political' content. No one knows what they define as 'political'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BBF-7SV1-JBSS-S00H-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Analysis by Oliver Darcy, CNN

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New York (CNN) &#8212; Editor's Note: A version of this article first appeared in the "Reliable Sources" newsletter. [*Sign up for the daily digest chronicling the evolving media landscape here.*](https://www.cnn.com/newsletters/reliable-sources?source=nl-acq_article)

What constitutes "political" content?

It's an important question that Meta has conspicuously left unanswered, despite the Mark Zuckerberg-led social giant vowing last week to clamp down on the topic across both Instagram and Threads - an extraordinary move that will have far-reaching and significant consequences for the public discourse.

In a [*series of posts*](https://www.threads.net/@mosseri/post/C3IjTzGvk6_) announcing the policy, Adam Mosseri, the Meta executive who oversees both Instagram and Threads, said the company does not want to "proactively amplify political content from accounts you don't follow." Mosseri said that the platforms will still show users content from the accounts they have chosen to follow but added that the company will "avoid recommending political content" to the broader masses.

"Our goal is to preserve the ability for people to choose to interact with political content, while respecting each person's appetite for it," Mosseri explained.

The sweeping and opaque decision to reduce certain content it deems undesirable further extends Meta's announcement in the fall that Threads is "not going go to amplify news on the platform," sending chills through the community, much of which had just fled Elon Musk's X for a stable platform to share information.

And while some initially viewed the decision to reduce political content as positive, potentially reducing the platform's ability to algorithmically recommend bogus or inflammatory content and sending users down dark rabbit holes, it quickly raised alarm among many who questioned the scope and rationale in the run-up to a high-stakes election.

"The fact that there is no definition is concerning," Judd Legum, who writes the independent Popular Information newsletter and frequently posts his reporting on the platform, told me Wednesday.

It is perhaps, a lofty goal, to operate a social media safe space not penetrated by the daily monsoon of distressing news radiating out of Washington, D.C., (though the replies to Mosseri's posts might indicate otherwise). But it's easier said than done. After all, a lot of potential content can easily be categorized as "political."

"The challenge is identifying what is or isn't political content," billionaire Mark Cuban [*replied*](https://www.threads.net/@mcuban/post/C3Jep7nMPxS) to Mosseri's post on Threads, echoing the sentiment of a deluge of others. "How will you determine what is or isn't?"

Mosseri didn't reply to Cuban and Meta has dodged questions on the matter.

"Meta seems unable to define 'political' content," Charlie Warzel, a staff writer at The Atlantic who covers the intersection of technology, ***politics***, and culture, told me. "To be fair, it's a tough ask, especially in an election year because ***politics*** is not some neatly confineable element of life - it is intertwined with culture, pop culture and news about everything from tech to business to health and science."

While the company has grown allergic to political conversations flowing through its platforms, it still has no problem boosting paid political posts. According to Meta's Ad Library, the company [*has raked in*](https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=onboarding) more than $4 billion in political and social issues ad spending since 2018.

A Meta spokesperson told me that Mosseri was traveling Wednesday and could not be made available for an interview to get clarification on the new policy. When I asked whether Mosseri, might have time later in the week, I didn't hear back. It seems that Mosseri, who rarely grants interviews to the press, seems to prefer sporadically replying to posts of his own choosing on Threads when he wants to address a matter. (Remind you of another social media boss?)

The Meta spokesperson, instead, offered this vague statement: "Informed by research, our definition of political content is content likely to be about topics related to government or elections; for example, posts about laws, elections, or social topics. These global issues are complex and dynamic, which means this definition will evolve as we continue to engage with the people and communities who use our platforms and external experts to refine our approach."

The statement only raised more questions than answers. A lot can be categorized under the banner of "social topics."

For example, does climate change fall under this umbrella? Women's rights issues? LGBTQ issues? Meta simply won't say.

"My concern, both as an independent publisher and an LGBTQ person who occasionally writes about her own life, is that my writing and links will get swept up into the 'political' category, whether or not it actually is about ***politics***," Parker Malloy, who authors the The Present Age newsletter, commented to me.

It's not just limited to social issues. Will posts about how tech platforms are battling misinformation be considered "political"? What about posts debunking falsehoods about vaccines? Or sharing information rebutting the absurd [*Taylor Swift Super Bowl conspiracy theories*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/14/media/taylor-swift-election-conspiracy-theory-poll/index.html)? How about posting video of Jimmy Kimmel at the Oscars joking about the country's state of affairs?

And will news organizations no longer be recommended to users because they post updates on the White House or 2024 election? Has Meta considered that this could prompt publishers to dramatically change how they use its platforms and cease posting important information on its platforms? If a celebrity, such as Swift, posts a political endorsement, will their account be restricted too?

I presented these questions to the Meta spokesperson and noted that it is simply unclear where the company is drawing the line. The spokesperson had no response.

Warzel argued that a problem for companies like Meta is that audiences don't seem to know what they want social networks to do about moderation, though most would likely prefer to not have polarizing content boosted into their feeds.

"It's this terrible no-win situation," Warzel added, "where Meta is making a sweeping editorial decision in order to make fewer editorial decisions, and audiences who want platforms out of their ***politics***, but don't want them to let hyper-partisan garbage run wild and unchecked."

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