

Instagram users to see less of what Meta deems ‘political’ content unless they opt in

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Instagram users will see less of what Meta deems to be “political” content in their recommendations and feed suggestions unless they opt into it, in a change the company implemented in the past week. The change requires users to delve into their settings to specifically opt in to political content through their preferences and was first picked up by users on the platform in recent days, implementing a change first announced on 9 February. It is understood the feature was rolled out in the past week. According to Instagram’s version history in the Apple app store, prior to an update on Monday, the most recent change was a week ago. The change affects the explore, Reels, and in-feed recommendations and suggested users that Instagram shows to users. The company has stressed users will continue to see political content from the accounts users already follow. Meta has described what it deems to be political content as “laws, elections or social topics” but not provided more specific information as to what is political. Sign up for Guardian Australia’s free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup It applies to Instagram and Threads, and accounts flagged by Meta to be posting political content can appeal against the decision preventing them being recommended into feeds of users who have not opted in if they believe it has been wrongly applied. In explaining the decision in February, Meta said it was focused on making “Instagram and Threads to be a great experience for everyone”. “If you decide to follow accounts that post political content, we don’t want to get between you and their posts, but we also don’t want to proactively recommend political content from accounts you don’t follow.” A spokesperson for Meta on Tuesday directed Guardian Australia to the February blog post. The company said it would roll out the change to Facebook at a later date. Instagram has faced criticism recently for allegedly censoring content related to the Israel-Gaza war, while also grappling with the perception the algorithm for feeds on Facebook has fuelled political polarisation across the globe. However, a study during the 2020 US election found that changes to the algorithm did not change people’s political perceptions, including a change that reduced the amount of political news people saw on the platform. The Instagram change is the latest in a shift from Meta to disconnect its services from political and news content. The company is also preparing to retire the news tab from Facebook as the company prepares for a fight against news publishers and the Australian government over the payment for news content. The news tab will be retired in early April in Australia and the US, with Meta announcing earlier this month it would not enter new deals with Australian news publishers for payment for news content on Facebook. The Albanese government is now in the process of determining whether to designate Meta under the 2021 News Media Bargaining Code, which would force Meta to enter negotiations with publishers or face fines of up to 10% of Australian revenue. Meta argues currently less than 3% of what users engage with on Facebook is news content.