

Despite Meta Ending Its Third-Party Fact-Checking Program, Most People Still Want Fact-Checkers on Social Media

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In early January 2025, Meta announced that it would be ending their third-party fact-checking program across all its platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Threads).¹ According to Mark Zuckerberg, the third-party fact-checking service was “too politically biased” and “became a tool to censor.”¹ He also noted that the recent U.S. elections felt like “a cultural tipping point towards once again prioritizing speech.”¹ With this change, Meta also lifted restrictions on speech within “topics like immigration, gender identity, and gender” and is starting a new program to pay bonuses to creators based on views and engagement with their content.^{1, 2} These changes have been met with both criticism and praise—criticism from experts who worry these changes will increase the amount of false information online and praise from right-wing political elites who see fact-checking in opposition to free speech.

This report examines recent public opinion data about social media companies employing third-party fact-checkers. While there are indeed differing perceptions of fact-checking across political leaning, we find that most people in the U.S. agree that social media companies should employ third-party fact-checkers. Further, we find that the subset of people who frequently use Meta's platforms to get news also agree that social media companies should employ third-party fact-checkers—with only 9.9% of frequent Facebook news consumers and 10.6% of frequent Instagram news consumers *not* wanting third-party fact-checking.

Right-wing politicians and tech companies in the United States

This shift away from third-party fact-checking reflects the broader historical relationship between right-wing politicians and tech companies in the United States. Starting in 2016, right-wing elites have consistently pushed the narrative that tech companies are biased against conservative voices.³ For example, Donald Trump and other GOP leaders made numerous claims of online censorship in 2018.⁴ Around the same time, fact-checkers were accused of anti-conservative bias by conservative media outlets,⁵ and two US House Committees held hearings on content moderation to look at the “potential bias in the filtering practices of social media companies.”⁶ In 2019, Republican



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Senator Ted Cruz threatened to charge social media companies with antitrust violations, claiming that “Facebook, Google, and Twitter target the political speech of right-leaning users to limit their online reach.”⁷ In 2020, Donald Trump again accused social media platforms of anti-conservative bias after his tweets about mail-in ballots were flagged as misleading.⁸ Claims like these were often paired with anecdotal examples of what appeared to be anti-conservative bias,⁹—which were then amplified in the media. For instance, op-eds by GOP leaders claimed that Facebook and others were biased against conservatives, using hand-picked examples to support their claims,¹⁰ and prominent conservative news outlets continued to support these claims with data generated through questionable methodologies.¹¹

This belief was not only held by political elites but also by Americans more widely. According to a 2020 survey by Pew Research Center,¹² 93% of Republicans said, “it’s likely that social media sites intentionally censor political viewpoints that they find objectionable.” Even Democrats largely held this view, with 74% saying social media sites intentionally censor information. Republicans widely believed that major tech companies had a pro-liberal bias, with 71% of Republicans saying, “major technology companies support the views of liberals over conservatives.” On the other hand, Democrats commonly believed that tech companies supported the views of liberals and conservatives equally.

Despite this widely held view and consistent claims made by politicians, there has been little systematic evidence of anti-conservative bias by tech companies. Content from right-wing influencers has regularly been ranked highly on social media platforms such as Facebook¹³—regardless of claims of suppression. There has been no evidence of ideological bias in website ranking by Google’s search engine.¹⁴ No evidence was found to support claims of political bias in content moderation on YouTube.¹⁵ It is true that there has been a political imbalance in some content moderation outcomes, —such as flagging information as false on Twitter—however, this imbalance reflects the imbalance of false information itself, with politically right users more frequently sharing and engaging with misinformation than politically left users.^{16–19} This is not to say that fact-checking systems are error-free, —both false positive and false negative errors have occurred¹⁹—yet there is no evidence that these errors and inconsistencies have been systematic.

The rocky relationship between tech companies and U.S. GOP leaders has smoothed significantly since late 2022. The first major shift in this relationship came with Elon Musk’s purchase and rebranding of Twitter. Since then, Musk has dismantled most of the content moderation tools and teams at Twitter, allowed once-banned content producers back onto the platform, and has remade other credibility cues—like the blue check mark for verified accounts—as paid-for features. Now, we see the second major shift in this relationship with Zuckerberg’s recent agreement with Republican views that fact-checking has been “too politically biased” and a “tool to censor.” Perhaps the best example of this new relationship was the number of tech CEOs—including Musk and Zuckerberg—with exclusive seats at U.S. President Donald Trump’s inauguration in January 2025. As characterized by Ali Swenson at AP News, *“That’s a shift from tradition ... Seats so close to the president are usually reserved for the president’s family, past presidents, and other honored guests.”*²⁰

There is ample evidence that fact-checking is effective

No matter one’s political leaning or views on content moderation, research has shown that fact-checking is widely effective. Many studies have shown that content warning labels—like fact checks—effectively reduce the accuracy perceptions of false information, trust in false information, and the sharing of false information.^{22–23} These results have held across various label designs, political leanings, and other individual differences.²⁴ It has even been shown that fact-checking labels are effective for those who do not trust fact-checkers.²⁵ Hence, even as major social media platforms are removing fact-checking, it is a powerful tool in mitigating the harmful effects of false and misleading information.

People still want third-party fact checking: Evidence from survey data

Across several of our recent survey-based studies, we asked participants to what extent they agreed with the following statement: “Social media platforms should employ third-party fact-checkers.” The first survey was launched and completed on February 16, 2025. There were 1,255 participants from a representative sample of the U.S. across gender, ethnicity, and political affiliation. The second survey took place across multiple rounds and samples. Specifically, the second survey was taken between March 10, 2025, and March 12, 2025. Across all rounds of the survey, there were 1,167 participants from the U.S., where 391 of those participants were from a representative sample across gender, ethnicity, and political affiliation, 384 of those participants were from a gender-balanced sample that was split evenly between conservatives and liberals (no politically moderate participants were included), and 392 of those participants were from a sample of people with prior fringe beliefs—that is, participants did not

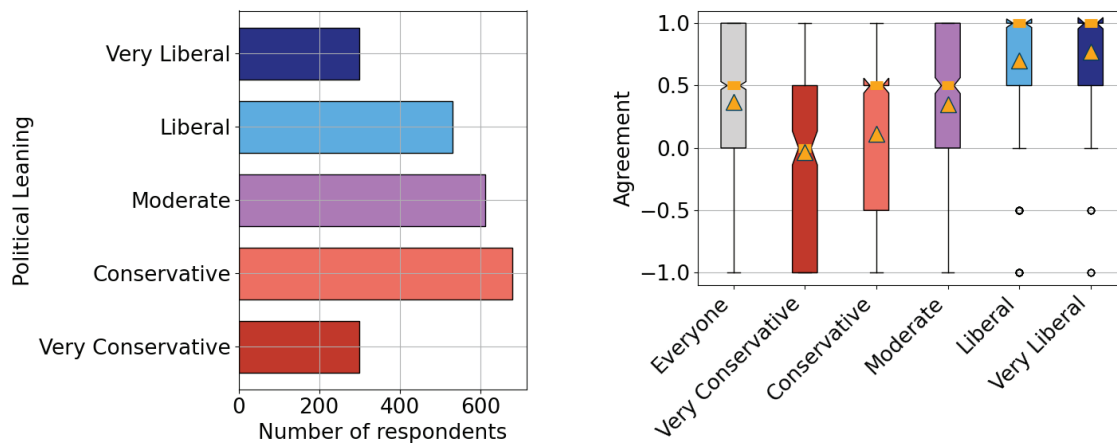


Figure 1: Number of respondents per political leaning (left) and box plots of agreement across political leaning (right). Agreement is mapped directly to the 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is Strongly Agree, 0.5 is Somewhat Agree, 0 is Neither Agree nor Disagree, -0.5 is Somewhat Disagree, and -1 is Strongly Disagree. Everyone shows the distribution when all participants are together.

believe in climate change and felt negatively about vaccinations. The differing sampling strategies across these surveys reflect the goals of the original studies they are tied to. Since all participants answered the same question about third-party fact-checkers, we analyzed the combined data in this report. In total, 2,422 participants were asked about their perceptions of third-party fact-checkers, where 1,646 came from a representative U.S. sample. Across the whole sample, the average age was 44.51, 75.27% were white, and 51.24% were female.

Figure 1 (left) shows the number of respondents per self-reported political leaning. This figure shows that our overall sample skews slightly conservative. There were 299 very liberal participants, 532 liberal participants, 612 moderate participants, 680 conservative participants, and 299 very conservative participants. This reflects the mixture of representative samples and samples meant to capture the extremes of political leaning in our data. In Figure 1 (right), we show the distribution of agreement with the statement “Social media platforms should employ third-party fact-checkers” across political leanings, where 1 is “strongly agree” and -1 is “strongly disagree.”

While perceptions of third-party fact-checking are clearly different across political leanings—with conservatives being more likely not to want fact-checking, most respondents had positive perceptions of third-party fact-checkers. Even with the conservative skew of our data, 1,604 of 2,422 (66.2%) participants said they somewhat agree or strongly agree that fact-checkers should be used on social media. Only 472 participants said they somewhat disagree or strongly disagree, with 335 (71.0%) of those who disagreed being either conservative or very conservative. Even among the very conservative participants, more agreed (129) that social media should have third-party fact-checkers than disagreed (120).

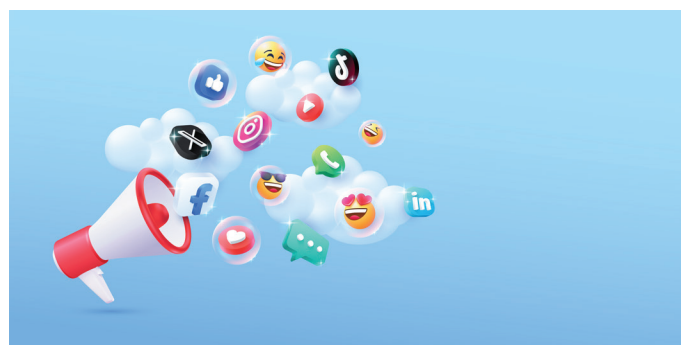


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One potential argument for Meta stopping its third-party fact-checking service could be that those who use Facebook and Instagram for news do not want fact-checking. In other words, Meta is simply catering to its audience by stopping its fact-checking service—perhaps the “cultural tipping point” that Zuckerberg was referring to in the announcement. However, our data also suggests that this is not the case. For a subset of our data, we also asked participants how frequently they get news from various social media platforms. This subset was a representative U.S. sample of 391 participants. In Figure 2 (top), we show the proportion of respondents per frequency of platform use for news consumption. We show this



for the three platforms that have stopped third-party fact-checking: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X. In Figure 2 (bottom), we show the fact-checking perceptions of the participants who frequently use these platforms for news consumption.

Across all three platforms, frequent users consistently agreed that social media platforms should employ third-party fact-checkers. Of those who reported using Facebook for news ‘A few times a week’ or more frequently, only 32 of 232 said they somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with employing fact-checkers. For Instagram, only 23 of 218 said they somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with employing fact-checkers. For Twitter/X—which has removed many content moderation features since Elon Musk acquired it in late 2022—27 of 150 said they somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with employing fact-checkers. Hence, Zuckerberg’s move to stop third-party fact-checking on Meta’s platforms is not in line with the desires of those platform’s users.

Conclusion

This report examined recent data about U.S. residents’ perceptions of third-party fact-checkers on social media. We found that perceptions vary across the political spectrum, with conservatives being much more likely not to want fact-checkers. However, even with these differences, most participants wanted third-party fact-checking.

As others have argued,^{26,27} Meta’s move away from fact-checking seems to be due to pressure from U.S. political elites rather than to fulfill the desires of Facebook and Instagram users. Even after an exodus of users from these platforms due to these decisions,²⁸ our data shows that those who remain want third-party fact-checking.

Our results suggest that the social media ecosystem may continue to fracture due to this mismatch between consumers and platform policies. In the past, we have seen significant movement away from “big tech” social media platforms *because of content moderation*.^{29,30} Now, we may see just the opposite: movement away from major social media platforms because of *a lack of content moderation*.

While the broader implications of removing fact-checking from major social media platforms are uncertain, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for researchers to analyze these platforms, researchers should continue to study these systems as best as we can. Even if some market share is lost by Facebook and Instagram, we know that these platforms do not exist in a vacuum: what is done on one platform can impact the information ecosystem as a whole,³¹ and many people around the world will continue to rely on their services. Hence, research on misinformation and disinformation on social media may be as critical to do now as it ever has been.

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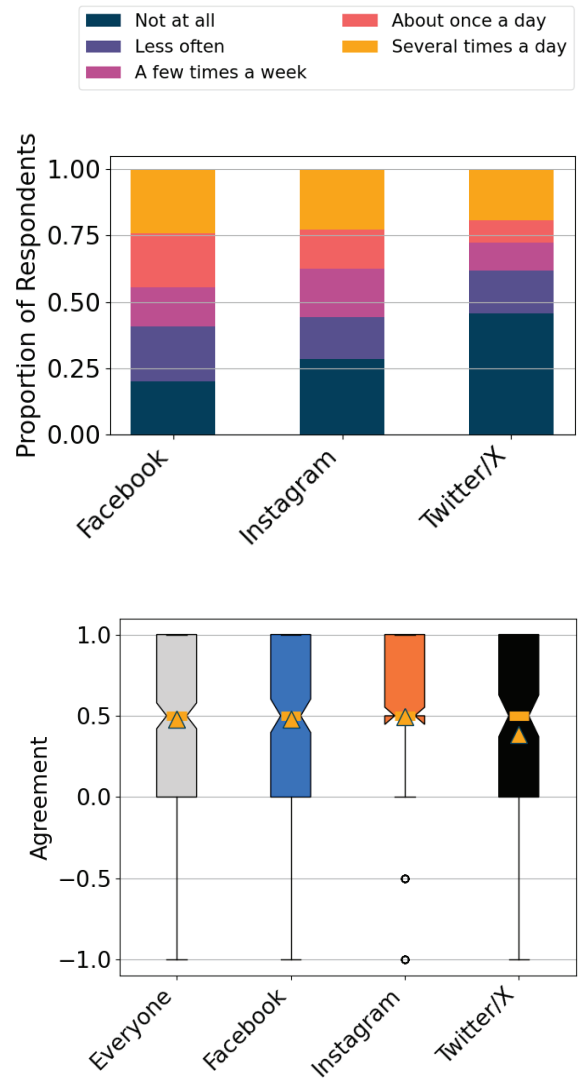


Figure 2: Stacked bar chart showing the proportion of respondents by frequency of consuming news on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter/X (top). Box plots of agreement with employing third-party fact-checkers across frequent platform users (bottom). That is, the distribution of agreement for each platform is from participants who said they consumed news on that platform ‘A few times a week’ or more frequently. Everyone is a participant who frequently consumes news on any or all platforms. Importantly, participants could fall into all three bins (frequently consuming on each platform) or fewer.



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