



Ecosystèmes
Observatoire

MEDIA ECOSYSTEM OBSERVATORY BRIEF

Like it or Not: The Changing Canadian Information Ecosystem

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in English and French
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Information
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Like it or Not: The Changing Canadian Information Ecosystem

Pour le meilleur et pour le pire: l'évolution de l'écosystème canadien de l'information

Executive Summary

The past 3 years have seen major disruption to the ways Canadians consume and engage with political information online. Three major shifts have occurred: (1) Meta blocked Canadian news on their flagship social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. This had an instant and dramatic impact on how many Canadians received their news through social media, with the greatest impact on small and local outlets (2) Elon Musk purchased and repurposed X (formerly Twitter) by removing trust and safety content moderation teams, reinstating accounts that have promoted violence, deprioritizing links in the algorithm, and introducing a paid verification system that has led to the amplification of misinformation — changes that have contributed to a decline in trust, the spread of hate speech and conspiracy theories, and the departure of many journalists and experts from the platform; and (3) TikTok, once a marginal platform in Canada, has become an important venue for Canadians to share information and discuss politics.

This ecosystem brief highlights how these three major shifts have changed the way politicians, news outlets, and Canadians are engaging with politics online.

Sommaire exécutif

Au cours des trois dernières années, la manière dont les Canadiens consomment et interagissent avec l'information politique en ligne a radicalement changé. Trois changements majeurs ont marqué cette évolution : (1) Meta a bloqué l'accès au contenu d'actualité canadien sur ses principales plateformes, Facebook et Instagram. Cette décision a eu un impact immédiat et significatif sur la manière dont les Canadiens accèdent à l'information via les réseaux sociaux, avec des conséquences particulièrement lourdes pour les petits médias et les médias locaux. (2) Elon Musk a racheté X (anciennement Twitter) et l'a profondément transformé. Il a dissout le conseil de confiance et de sécurité responsable de la modération des contenus, rétabli des comptes ayant promu la violence, réduit la visibilité des liens dans les algorithmes et introduit un système de vérification payant qui a favorisé l'amplification de la désinformation. Ces changements ont entraîné une baisse de confiance envers la plateforme, une augmentation des discours haineux et des théories du complot, et ont poussé de nombreux journalistes et experts à quitter la plateforme. (3) TikTok, autrefois une plateforme marginale au Canada, est devenu un espace clé où les Canadiens partagent de l'information et discutent de politique.

We find:

- ◆ A stronger engagement with right-leaning content across the Canadian information ecosystem, with federal Conservative Members of Parliament having much higher engagement across social media platforms over the past 3 years. **Posts from federal Conservative politicians received 61% more engagement than those of Liberal and NDP politicians combined in 2024.**
- ◆ **Engagement with federal Conservative politicians on X has increased by 52% since Musk's takeover.** This substantial increase is inconsistent with explanations based only on the relative popularity of the Conservative Party or the usage trends on X by Conservative partisans. However, a Liberal decline in engagement is consistent with a decline in usage of X among Liberal politicians and supporters. **Conservative voices are being amplified on X.**
- ◆ Social engagement with Canadian news media has dramatically changed over the past 3 years, with the **once-dominant Meta platforms almost completely replaced by TikTok for major and better resourced Canadian outlets.** Smaller local outlets have not successfully pivoted and receive less than half their online engagement. Canadian right-wing outlets receive the majority of their engagement on X.

Ce rapport sur l'écosystème de l'information met en lumière l'impact de ces trois transformations sur les interactions entre les politiciens, les médias et les citoyens canadiens dans l'espace numérique.

Nous avons constaté:

- ◆ Un engagement accru avec les contenus de droite dans l'écosystème canadien de l'information. Au cours des trois dernières années, les députés fédéraux conservateurs ont bénéficié de niveaux d'engagement nettement plus élevés sur les plateformes. **En 2024, leurs publications ont généré 61 % d'engagement de plus que celles des politiciens libéraux et néo-démocrates combinés.**
- ◆ Une amplification des voix conservatrices sur X. **Depuis le rachat de la plateforme par Musk, l'engagement envers les politiciens conservateurs fédéraux a augmenté de 52 %.** Cette hausse ne peut pas être expliquée uniquement par la popularité relative du Parti conservateur ou par l'évolution de l'utilisation de X par ses partisans. En revanche, la baisse de l'engagement envers les politiciens libéraux est cohérente avec une diminution de l'utilisation de X par les politiciens et les sympathisants libéraux.
- ◆ Un changement drastique de l'engagement avec les médias canadiens sur les réseaux sociaux depuis trois ans. Les plateformes de Meta, autrefois dominantes, ont été presque entièrement remplacées par TikTok pour les grands médias canadiens disposant de plus de ressources. Les petits médias locaux, en revanche, n'ont pas réussi à s'adapter et reçoivent désormais moins de la moitié de leur engagement en ligne. Par ailleurs, les médias de droite canadiens reçoivent aujourd'hui la majorité de leur engagement sur X.



The Canadian Information Ecosystem in 2025

Canadians have a strong social media presence with the nearly 32 million active social media users accounting for 80% of the population.¹ Political parties are increasingly investing in social media for political messaging and news outlets now have a social media presence to provide real-time news coverage. While social media platforms allow direct interactions between Canadian politicians, media, and the public, their motive on increasing time spent on the platform and maximizing engagement has major consequences for the proverbial public square.

The major social media platforms used by Canadians are subject to enormous political influence from the US presidency and administration. With major shifts in public stances towards responsible governance and oversight by X's Elon Musk and Facebook/Instagram's Mark Zuckerberg, Canadians are concerned about the influence these platforms play in our public discourse. Social media users in Canada are inevitably subject to the decisions of these platforms as well as their American userbases.

We investigated the Canadian information ecosystem and its evolution over the past 3 years. Here, we provide a comprehensive summary of how the social media landscape has shifted for Canadian political and media entities and the public. We identify changes in the social media ecosystem that have shifted the way Canadians are receiving their political information. Specifically, we evaluate Musk's acquisition and repurposing of X, the decision of Meta to block Canadian news in August 2023, and the rise of TikTok and their implications for Canadian democracy.

Questions

The combined impact of tweets, posts, videos, reels, and shorts makes social media the key political battleground for attention, shaping public opinion and setting the agenda. By understanding how entities in the political sphere receive engagement across social media platforms, we can better understand the shift in influence in Canadian politics. We ask four questions:

1. How has social media engagement with politician content changed in recent years?
2. There is international evidence that social media platforms, and X—specifically have a right-wing bias.² Are these same dynamics occurring in Canada?
3. Has the Canadian public recently shifted platform preferences?
4. How has social media engagement with news content changed in recent years?

We used two longitudinal approaches to answer these questions. First, we collected the Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, and TikTok posts of all elected federal politicians and news outlets between January 2022 and November 2024.³ Second, we surveyed Canadians on a monthly basis over the course of 2024 to better understand their usage of and attitudes towards social media. Using these two complementary approaches, we assess trends in the Canadian social media ecosystem.

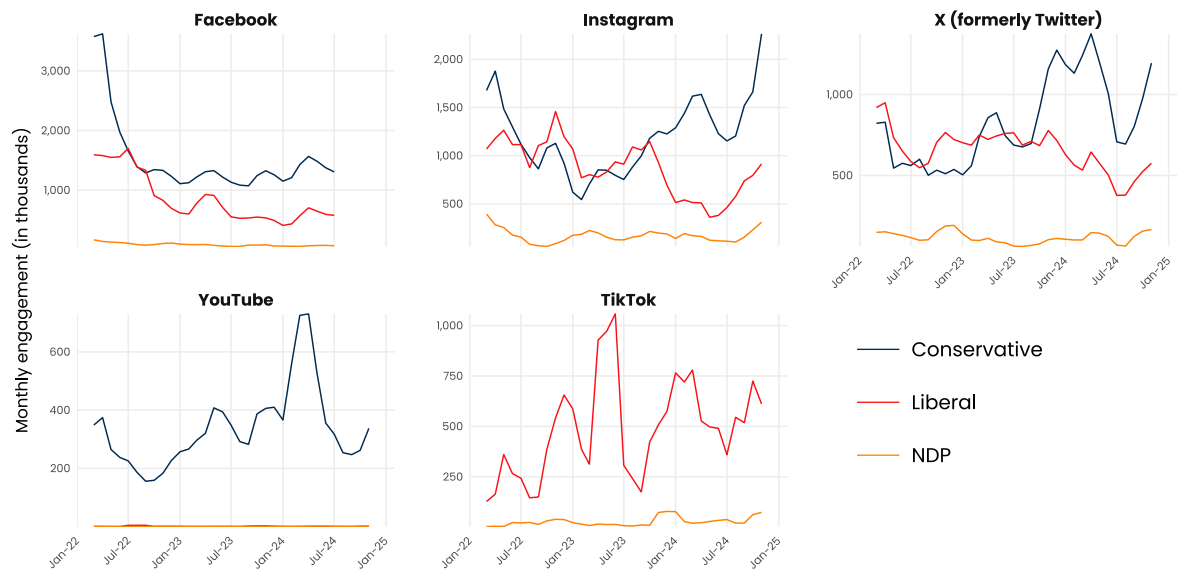


Fig. 1
Party-wise social media engagement trends across social media platforms for federal politicians

Analysis

Question 1

How has social media engagement with politician content changed in recent years?

In this report, we evaluate online engagement with politicians associated with three major federal parties: the Conservative Party (Conservative), the Liberal Party (Liberal), and the National Democratic Party (NDP). Our findings show a stronger engagement with Conservative content across all major social media platforms, in particular, bolstered on X under Elon Musk's ownership.

To understand which party has more influence on social media and whether it is shifting over time, we first measured party-wise engagement by summing the number of likes, shares, and comments received on each post by a sitting Member of Parliament.

Figure 1 shows the social media trends across different platforms for federal parties over the past 3 years. Federal politicians are primarily active on Facebook, Instagram, and X, with minimal activity on YouTube and TikTok. Despite there being more elected Liberal Members of Parliament, we found that Conservative politicians have significantly higher engagement on Facebook, Instagram, and X compared to Liberal and NDP politicians. In 2024, Conservatives garnered 61% more engagement compared to Liberal and NDP politicians combined. Liberals, on the other hand, experienced a steady decline in engagement on Facebook, Instagram, and X over the past year.

While federal Conservative politicians have minimal presence on TikTok, they dominate YouTube with a 95% share of engagement. Conversely, federal Liberal politicians receive the highest share of TikTok engagement among all parties; however, they have no substantial presence and engagement on YouTube. Federal NDP politicians are active on all platforms but have lower engagement than the other two parties assessed here.

For Conservative and Liberal politicians, we observe major fluctuations in engagement on Facebook, Instagram, and X in response to political events. For example, Conservatives gained massive engagement on Facebook and Instagram in early 2022 through a series of posts related to the Conservative party leadership race and the Freedom Convoy. While Facebook engagement remained consistent after early 2022 for Conservatives, their Instagram engagement declined throughout 2022 before slowly building back to early 2022 levels in 2024. A sharp increase in engagement seen in November 2024 is due to increased activity on the platform by Pierre Poilievre, who alone makes up around 80% of Conservative engagement on Instagram.

On X, Conservatives saw a marginal change in engagement corresponding to the leadership race and Freedom Convoy and their monthly engagement remained low compared to Liberals throughout 2022. However, since then, the Conservatives have steadily increased their engagement, surpassing the Liberals and doubling their monthly engagement beginning mid-2023.

(Fig. 1). Importantly, the period when Conservatives began to grow coincides with platform ownership change. Unlike Instagram, where recent growth is concentrated in one account, the growth in X reflects a broader increase in engagement with Conservative politicians.

Question 2

Did Conservatives benefit after Elon Musk took over X?

One major platform change in the last 3 years occurred on X. On October 27, 2022, Elon Musk completed his Twitter buyout followed by a series of policy changes.⁴ With Conservatives raking higher engagement on social media platforms, it stands to reason that either their politicians are gaining popularity in recent years or that changing platform policies have contributed to increased engagement. We find that Conservative politicians have likely benefited from X in the post-Musk era.

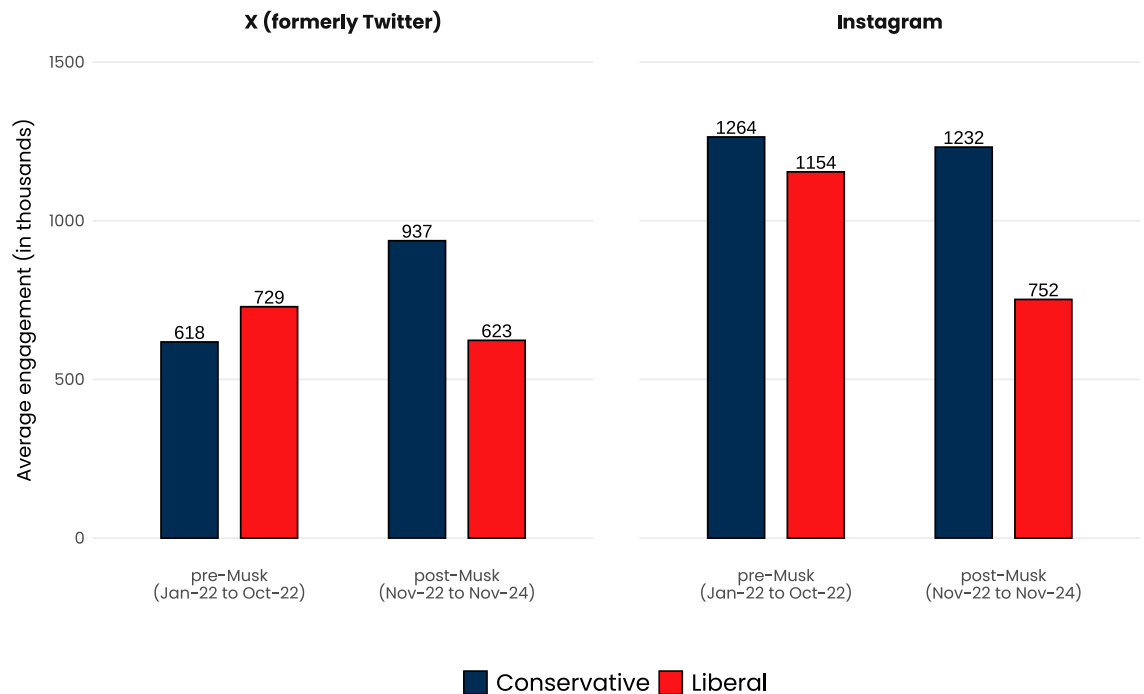
Figure 2 shows whether the new ownership had any effect on party-wise engagement on X. When we compared collective engagement on X before and after Elon Musk became the owner, we found that Conservatives benefited from the ownership change with an average 52% increase in monthly engagement.

During that same period, the average monthly engagement declined by 15% for Liberal politicians on X.

One alternative explanation for this rapid growth in Conservative engagement on X is that the party saw markedly increased popularity in national public opinion polls and that this popularity coincided with Musk's ownership of X. To evaluate this, we compare the growth in X with the Conservative growth on Instagram over the same period. If the cause of the growth was popular support then we would expect a similar increase. Figure 2 shows that we observe no similar increase in average monthly engagement on Instagram. Although Conservatives saw an increase in Instagram at the end of 2024, this increase is recent and does not coincide with Musk's ownership of X. We cannot attribute the rise in X engagement for Conservative politicians after Musk's ownership as primarily from their increase in popular support.

Overall, these trends show Conservative politicians dominate all major social platforms except TikTok. Conservative politicians are continuing to increase their engagement, largely driven by X under Elon Musk's ownership. Our results corroborate with global trends that show how politicians and users who identify with the political right are thriving on the platform.

Fig. 2
Party-wise differences
in engagement after
Elon Musk's X takeover



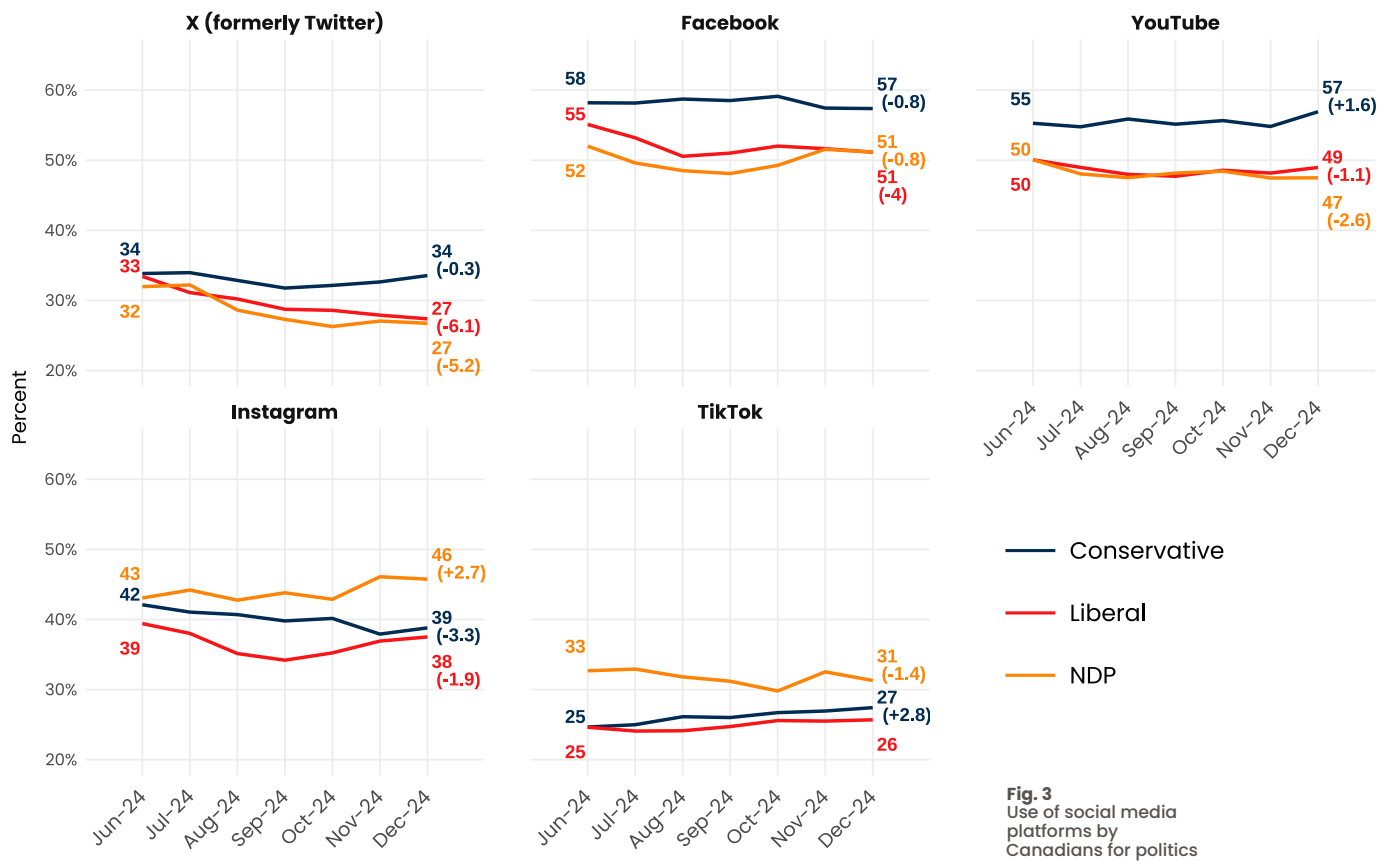


Fig. 3
Use of social media
platforms by
Canadians for politics

Question 3

Has social media preference for politics shifted for the general public?

A second explanation for the shifting engagement patterns across social media and particularly X is that Canadian partisans have changed their social media platform preferences. We investigated this and found that, over the past year, self-reported usage of social media platforms have remained largely steady, with the notable exception of X, where approximately a sixth of Liberal and NDP users report no longer using the platform for politics.

Using survey data collected monthly from April 2024, until the end of December 2024, we measured self-reported social media behavior of the Canadian general public. In our monthly tracking survey, we first asked how frequently the respondents use social media platforms. If the respondents said that they use a platform (for any usage purpose and frequency) in the given month, we asked them a follow-up question whether they use the same platform for 'politics and current affairs' specifically.

Figure 3 shows the percent of respondents who reported platform usage for politics, separated by partisan self-identification. We used a three-month rolling average to better represent platform-use trends. In our results, X shows the largest time trend in our survey data. Over the course of 2024, approximately a sixth of Liberal and NDP X users report no longer using the platform for politics, whereas Conservative partisan usage remained unchanged.

Partisan differences across platforms are also striking. Conservative partisans use Facebook and YouTube the most, and TikTok the least for politics. NDP partisans are the most likely to use Instagram and TikTok for political purposes. Liberal partisans do not have a consistent pattern, sometimes closer to Conservative partisan trends (on TikTok and Instagram), and sometimes closer to NDP partisan trends (Facebook, X, and YouTube).

However, the differences across platforms are larger than partisan differences within platforms. Facebook and YouTube are the most commonly used platforms for political purposes, in

part due to the platforms' widespread use for all purposes by the general population. TikTok and X are the least used platforms by the general population, but their users report the highest share of political use.

How Canadians report their online social media behaviour depends on the platform and their partisanship. The most striking shift is a decline in X usage for politics among NDP and Liberal partisans, hinting at broader discontent with the platform.

Question 4

How has social media engagement with news content changed in recent years?

We next assess whether these partisan shifts are similarly reflected in engagement with Canadian news media across social media platforms. During the last 3 years, we find that Meta's ban on news in Canada may have induced major news outlets to shift their social media efforts to non-Meta platforms such as TikTok to maintain their engagement volume, while smaller news outlets suffered substantial loss of engagement due to the ban.

[In our previous brief](#), we studied the impact of Meta's ban, where we reported a 43% decrease in social media engagement across all Canadian news organizations.⁵ However, that report did not make systematic distinctions between the political leanings of news outlets. Here, we expand on our previous report and bring the role of ideology to the forefront by analyzing whether news outlets' ideology affected their social media engagement after the Meta ban. To do this, we identified the top 10 news outlets in Canada ranked by their total social media engagement and determined their political leanings based on their audience's political self-identification. We categorized six outlets as centre-aligned and four outlets as right-aligned. There were no left-aligned outlets with a large enough social media base to be included in the top 10 outlets. We then compared engagement trends of these 10 major news organizations by political alignment between January 2022 and July 2024, the last complete month where Facebook data was available.

Figure 4 shows an ideology-based breakdown of social media trends for news outlets. Centre-aligned news outlets included CBC, CTV, Global News, Le Journal de Montréal, La Presse, and Toronto Star. Despite a steep decrease in engagement on Meta platforms (Facebook and Instagram) after the implementation of the news ban in August 2023, it is evident that centre-aligned outlets largely maintained their total engagement volume during the last 3 years. However, the composition of the engagement changed drastically during the same period. Engagement with centre-aligned news outlets through TikTok grew dramatically between January 2022 and July 2024. In January



2022, TikTok only accounted for 4.6% of the total engagement, but by July 2024 it accounted for 73.5% of total engagement. Not surprisingly, we find the opposite trend for Facebook and Instagram. Facebook and Instagram made up 83.3% of the total engagement in January 2022 but only 12.9% in July 2024.

The continuous drop in engagement on Facebook and Instagram starting from the announcement of the Meta ban in May 2023 until its implementation in August 2023 was simultaneously replaced by the increase in TikTok engagement. Although TikTok engagement grew steadily throughout 2022, the largest jump in engagement occurred between the announcement and the implementation of Meta's ban. This suggests that the major centre-aligned news organizations had been prepared to strategically shift their social media activity to TikTok by the time Meta fully banned news from its platforms.

With the pivot towards TikTok, engagement with centre-aligned news outlets became extremely consolidated to a small number of posts. In January 2022, 1,541 posts made up 50% of all of their engagement, but in July 2024, only 17 posts received 50% of engagement. Due to the more viral nature of TikTok, centre-aligned news organizations may have traded sustaining their engagement volume with a reduction in the variety and number of posts reaching their audience. Even though centre-aligned news outlets receive a similar volume of total engagement compared to prior to Meta's ban, their social media audiences are now limited to mostly TikTok users who are exposed to a much smaller pool of posts.

Right-aligned news outlets included Rebel News, The Post Millennial, the Toronto Sun, and True North. We see an overall decrease in social media engagement over the last 3 years

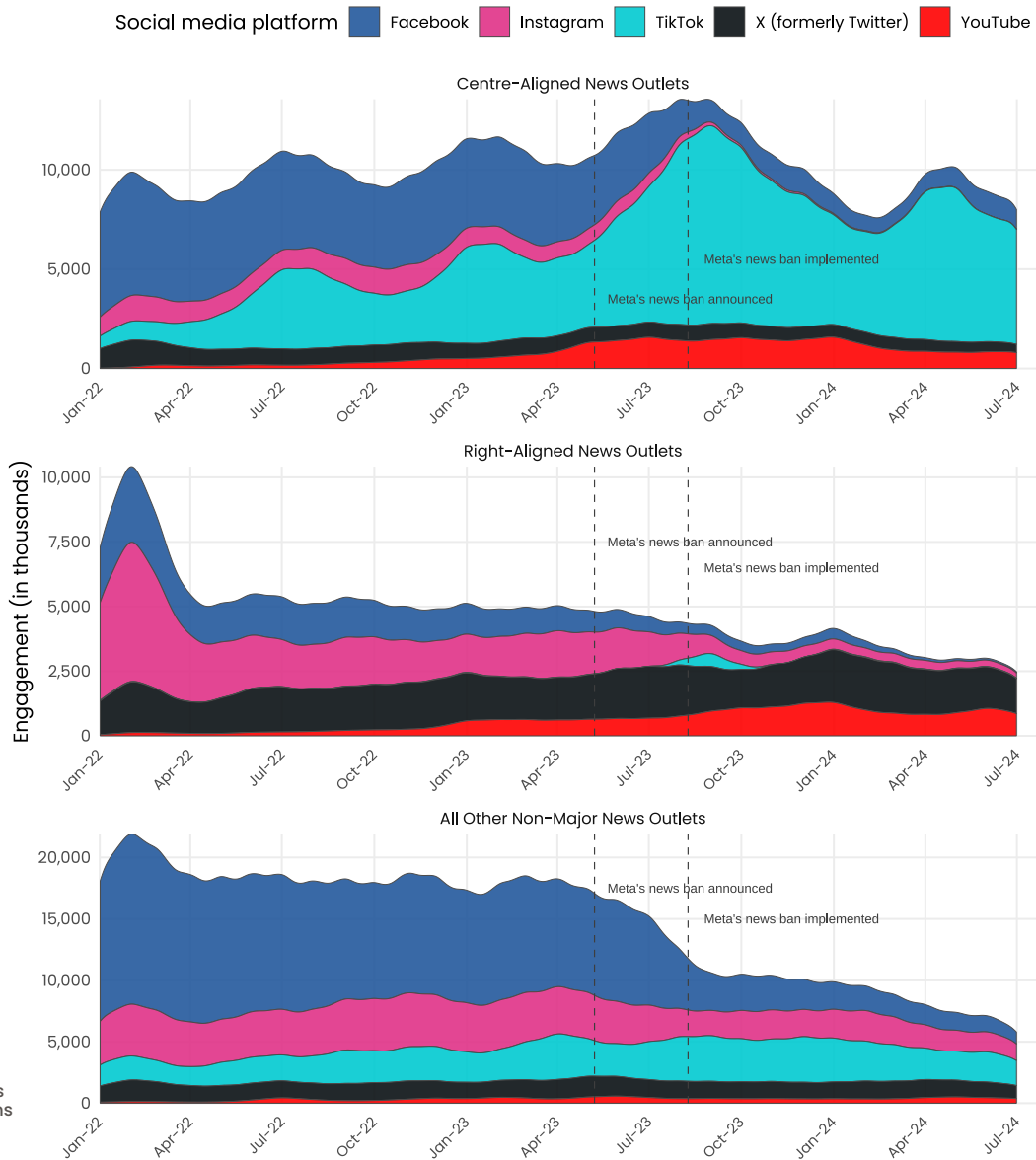


Fig. 4
Social media engagement trends of news outlets across social media platforms grouped by political leanings

(Fig. 4). Matching the Conservative politician's social media trend, right-wing media saw a spike in engagement around January and February of 2022, likely attributable to the Freedom Convoy and the Conservative leadership race. Unlike centre-aligned news, these news outlets found little to no engagement on TikTok. However, their engagement on YouTube increased from less than 0.1% of total engagement in January 2022 to 32.7% by July 2024. Instead of pivoting to TikTok in response to the Meta ban, right-aligned news outlets have employed a different strategy favoring YouTube. The engagement increase on YouTube was not sufficient to cover for the loss in Facebook and Instagram, however. Overall, the right-aligned

news media saw a decrease since the implementation of the ban in 2023.

Compared to centre-aligned news outlets, the only platform where right-aligned news consistently received more engagement was X. Although the X engagement did not have a significant change in volume for right-aligned news, it made up the majority of their total engagement (56%) by July 2024 due to the decrease in Facebook and Instagram. In addition, right-aligned news did not suffer from a consolidation of engagement as the centre-aligned news did.

Finally, we also analyzed the engagement received by all other non-major Canadian news outlets. As we discussed in our previous brief, the rest of Canada's news outlets saw a steep decline in engagement after the Meta's news ban. Figure 4 shows that, unlike the major news outlets, the smaller outlets were not able to make up for the loss in engagement in other platforms. This finding also aligns with our previous analysis that small local news outlets were affected disproportionately by Meta's news ban.

In summary, centre-aligned news outlets maintained their engagement after the Meta ban by pivoting to TikTok, but their engagement became extremely concentrated into a small number of news posts. On the other hand, right-aligned news outlets were unable to fully offset the loss of engagement after the Meta ban. Regardless of political alignment, major news outlets fared better than the rest.

Conclusions

The Canadian information ecosystem has experienced profound disruption over the past three years, reshaping how Canadians consume political information and engage with politics online.

Meta's decision to ban news on Facebook and Instagram impacted Canadians' access to quality journalism, especially harming smaller and local outlets. Elon Musk's takeover of X (formerly Twitter) has amplified conservative voices and facilitated misinformation and hate speech. TikTok emerged prominently, largely replacing Meta's platforms for major news outlets, though smaller outlets have struggled to make this transition.

Canadian politicians and news organizations have adapted to this new digital landscape unevenly. Conservative politicians have benefitted most with high engagement numbers across major platforms and heavy growth on X not primarily driven by their popular support or increased Conservative partisan use of the platform. In contrast, Liberal and NDP representatives have experienced reduced engagement, partly due to their supporters moving away from X. Larger, well-resourced media organizations have effectively pivoted to TikTok, while right-wing outlets maintained strong engagement primarily on X.

Canadians continue to heavily rely on social media for news and political content, often unaware of the broader implications of platform-driven changes on their information consumption. With reduced presence of reliable news and increased polarization, public discourse risks becoming less informed and more divisive.

A vibrant, diverse, and trustworthy information ecosystem is crucial for Canadian democracy. The current trajectory, heavily

influenced by external platform decisions, highlights critical vulnerabilities. Canada must proactively address these challenges to ensure social media supports a robust democratic dialogue rather than misinformation and polarization, especially as critical federal elections approach.

Contributors

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Methodology

Social media data in this report covers January 1, 2022 to November 30, 2024. All media organizations were identified and reviewed by a team of research assistants and data analysts, while politicians were identified from the official sites of federal legislatures in Canada. Each of their social media handles across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X were collected. All data was collected at least 72 hours after the content was posted to ensure comparable engagement metrics. All data collected from Facebook for this brief was through the CrowdTangle API, whose access was closed on August 14, 2024. Therefore, analysis using Facebook data ends in July 2024 for this report. Monthly engagement was calculated by grouping each social media handle into the respective news outlet or political party and then aggregating share, likes, and comments counts for every post.

We focused our social media data analysis on two groups that heavily influence political messaging in Canada—federal politicians and all news outlets. Our dataset consists of 301 politicians (156 Liberal MPs, 120 Conservative MPs, and 25 NDP MPs), and 845 news entities operating at national and local level.

For the analysis of news outlets, determining political alignment for every news outlet was not feasible as the majority of them are smaller local news outlets that do not align with specific ideologies. We, therefore, pursued only the top 10 news outlets in Canada and their subsidiaries, which made up 51.6% of the total news engagement in the past 3 years. These top news outlets were identified by ranking their total social media engagement. To determine political leanings of these news outlets, we used our monthly tracking survey and assigned political ideology based on the average political leanings of the outlet's audience. This exercise resulted in 6 major news outlets being assigned as "centre-aligned" and 4 major news outlets being assigned as "right-aligned." There are no outlets in the top 10 most popular online outlets in Canada that are "left-aligned" (i.e. had an average viewership ideology score of beneath 4 on a 0-10 ideological scale).

Our tracking survey, aimed at better understanding Canadian online media consumption habits, is fielded at the end of each month and collected high-quality responses from 1400-1500 respondents who report being Canadian residents. Using a commercial survey provider, we provide quotas according to region, age and gender, at rates determined by Statistics Canada. We also filter out survey respondents who fail simple attention checks to ensure answers are of a minimum standard of quality and attention.

Questions used in survey analysis:

How often do you use each of the social media apps and websites listed below?

- ◆ Never (0)
- ◆ Once or twice this month (1)
- ◆ Several times this month (2)
- ◆ Once or twice a week (3)
- ◆ Several times a week (4)
- ◆ Once or twice a day (5)
- ◆ Several times a day (6)

When you use each of these social media apps, how often do you read, watch, listen to, or share politics and current affairs content, specifically?

- ◆ Never (0)
- ◆ Once or twice this month (1)
- ◆ Several times this month (2)
- ◆ Once or twice a week (3)
- ◆ Several times a week (4)
- ◆ Once or twice a day (5)
- ◆ Several times a day (6)

Generally speaking, is there a political party that you feel close to in federal politics? If yes, which party do you feel closest to?

- ◆ Conservative Party
- ◆ Liberal Party
- ◆ New Democratic Party (NDP)
- ◆ Bloc Québécois
- ◆ Green Party
- ◆ People's Party of Canada
- ◆ Other (please specify)
- ◆ I don't feel close to any party
- ◆ Don't know / Prefer not to answer

Notes

- 1 "Number of social media users in Canada from 2020 to 2029." Statista, December 2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/260710/number-of-social-network-users-in-canada/>.
- 2 Natasha Lomas. "Study of TikTok, X 'for You' Feeds in Germany Finds Far-Right Political Bias Ahead of Federal Elections." TechCrunch, February 19, 2025. <https://techcrunch.com/2025/02/19/study-of-tiktok-x-for-you-feeds-in-germany-finds-far-right-political-bias-ahead-of-federal-elections/>.
- 3 We do not have Facebook data after July 2024 in our analysis. Meta discontinued its social media tracking tool, CrowdTangle, affecting our data collection pipeline.
- 4 Kopps, Adrian. "Two Years After the Takeover: Four Key Policy Changes of X Under Musk". Digital Society Blog. Zenodo, October 28, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14040407>.
- 5 Media Ecosystem Observatory. "Old News, New Reality: A Year of Meta's News Ban in Canada." Aug 1, 2024.