

RESEARCH/STUDY

## Facebook tweaked its News Feed algorithm, and right-leaning pages are reaping the benefits

*Facebook's algorithm allows right-leaning pages to outperform other political pages with videos that often push or lead to sensational and divisive content*

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Right-leaning news and politics pages on Facebook continue to outperform nonaligned and left-leaning pages in 2021. These pages have used the company's algorithm, which rewards sensational content, to earn billions of interactions in 2021; those large numbers are due to the performance of posts containing videos, which drew nearly three times as many average interactions as posts with links.

An earlier Media Matters study of engagement during 2020 among news and politics-related Facebook pages found that right-leaning pages consistently earned more interactions on the platform than ideologically nonaligned and left-leaning pages. Even after Facebook slightly tweaked the algorithm last year, our findings suggest that the change has not affected right-leaning pages, which often post sensational content. This study is one of many from Media Matters and others that have demonstrated again and again that there is no bias or censorship against conservatives on Facebook, despite claims to the contrary.

In our latest study, Media Matters used CrowdTangle data to compile and analyze millions of posts from right-leaning, left-leaning, and ideologically nonaligned Facebook pages that were posted between January 1 and September 21, 2021. **We found that right-leaning pages consistently earned more interactions than left-leaning or ideologically nonaligned pages in both 2020 and 2021.** Key findings include:

- Between January 1 and September 21, right-leaning pages earned the most interactions, roughly 4.7 billion, even though they posted less than other political and news-related pages. In fact, right-leaning pages accounted for roughly **47% of interactions and only 26% of posts** from all political and news-related pages and consistently earned the most daily engagement throughout our study period, with the exception of only four days.
- During the same time frame, ideologically nonaligned pages earned far fewer (3.1 billion, 31%) interactions than right-leaning pages, even though they posted the most, accounting for over 60% of posts. Left-leaning pages posted the least (under 14%) and earned the smallest share of interactions (22%).
- **Seven of the top 10** political and news-related pages with the most interactions so far this year were right-leaning pages, and five of these were also among the top 10 in 2020.
- Right-leaning pages earned more average interactions per post with video in 2021 than they had the previous year, while ideologically nonaligned and left-leaning pages earned less.
- Of the top 100 posts between January 1 and September 21 from right-leaning Facebook pages, 82 were videos, earning roughly 120 million interactions. Of these videos, **59 were native videos from The Epoch Times's Facebook pages**, which often post seemingly innocuous videos that can act as a bridge for users to reach its more extreme content.

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- On September 15, The Wall Street Journal published the third article in a series of investigative reports about how broadly Facebook's problems are known inside the company. This new report highlighted that in 2018, Facebook implemented a change to its News Feed algorithm that gave more weight to "meaningful social interactions" (MSI), particularly shares and comments. According to Facebook, part of the goal was to reverse a decline in comments and other forms of engagement – a pattern the platform had seen in 2017 – and to encourage more original posting. Later in the year, company researchers discovered that publishers were reorienting their posts toward outrage and sensationalism to produce more comments and reactions. The company concluded that the new algorithm's heavy weighting of reshared material in its News Feed led to "misinformation, toxicity, and violent content" being "inordinately prevalent among reshares."

Even though the algorithm promoted sensational content, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg often resisted – and sometimes outright denied – tweaks to the algorithm that would address the proliferation of false and divisive content, but hurt the company's bottom line. In other words, more engagement and time spent on the platform was better for business – regardless of the consequences. Publicly, Facebook has tried to minimize the importance of engagement, particularly on posts with links, but as the Journal reports, "Engagement is viewed inside the company as an important sign for the health of the business."

The company reportedly did slightly adjust the algorithm in the spring of 2020, reducing an aspect of the algorithm called “downstream MSI” for content with civic and health information, after early tests indicated that such a change would reduce the proliferation of false content. However, based on our findings, this has not affected right-leaning pages, which often post sensational content – including misinformation about U.S. elections and the COVID-19 pandemic – and have continued to earn more engagement than other political and news-related pages, particularly on their video content.

Frances Haugen, a former Facebook data scientist, has confirmed the Wall Street Journal’s reporting and filed eight whistleblower complaints with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, alleging that Facebook is hiding research from investors and the public.

### **Right-leaning pages consistently earned more engagement on their posts this year compared with left-leaning and ideologically nonaligned pages – a similar pattern as in 2020**

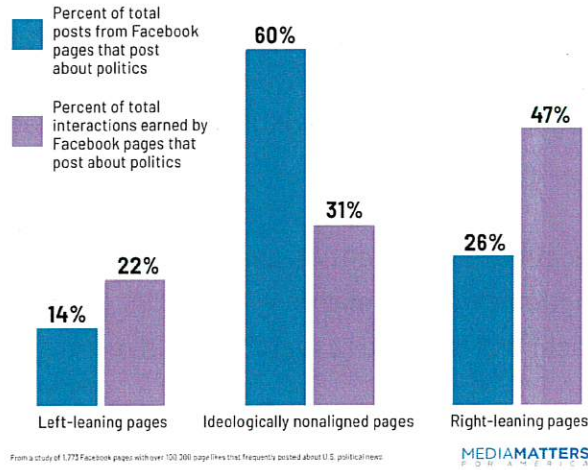
- In a previous study of engagement for political and news-related Facebook pages, Media Matters found that right-leaning pages earned the most interactions in 2020, with nearly 9 billion interactions on roughly 2.3 million posts. The right-leaning pages accounted for 45% of total interactions – and less than 30% of total posts – from right-leaning, left-leaning, and ideologically nonaligned pages overall. Ideologically nonaligned pages accounted for less than 30% of total interactions even though they accounted for over 55% of total posts. Left-leaning pages had the fewest posts and the least engagement, with only 25% of total interactions and 16% of total posts.

So far, these pages have followed a similar pattern in 2021, with right-leaning pages earning the most engagement, ideologically nonaligned pages posting the most, and left-leaning pages posting the least and earning the least engagement.

Between January 1 and September 21, right-leaning pages earned roughly 4.7 billion interactions on over 1.3 million posts, accounting for roughly 47% of interactions and only 26% of posts. Nonaligned pages earned 3.1 billion interactions on over 3.2 millions posts, accounting for only 31% of the interactions and over 60% of the posts. Left-leaning pages earned nearly 2.2 billion interactions on less than 720,000 posts, accounting for 22% of the interactions and 14% of the posts.

### Engagement data on content from Facebook pages that post about U.S. political news

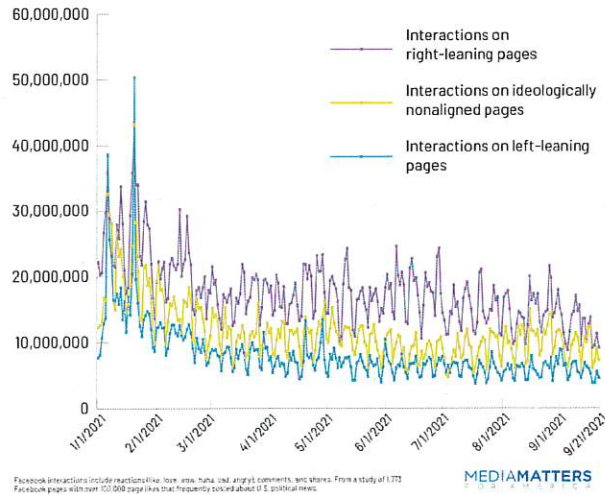
January 1 through September 21, 2021



Right-leaning pages have consistently earned the most engagement so far in 2021, with the exception of just four days: January 6 and 7, when pro-Trump rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol; January 20, the day of President Joe Biden’s inauguration; and February 1, when ideologically nonaligned pages earned slightly more engagement than right-leaning ones.

### Total daily interactions on content from Facebook pages that post about U.S. political news

January 1 through September 21, 2021



## Half of the top 10 political and news-related pages in 2021 are right-leaning pages that were also among the top 10 in 2020

• Even though Facebook reportedly tweaked its algorithm in the spring of last year, the same high-performing right-leaning pages from 2020 were still among the top pages in 2021.

So far this year, seven of the top 10 political and news-related pages with the most interactions were right-leaning pages. Five of these seven right-leaning pages were also among the top 10 in 2020, including the pages for The Daily Wire's Ben Shapiro, Fox News, Fox host Dan Bongino, Daily Mail, and Breitbart.

The top 10 pages that earned the most interactions between January 1 and September 21 were:

- 1.** Ben Shapiro, a right-leaning page which earned nearly 392 million interactions on nearly 25,000 posts.
- 2.** Occupy Democrats, a left-leaning page which earned over 280 million interactions on over 10,000 posts.
- 3.** Fox News, a right-leaning page which earned nearly 275 million interactions on over 12,000 posts.
- 4.** Dan Bongino, a right-leaning page which earned nearly 208 million interactions on over 6,000 posts.
- 5.** Daily Mail, a right-leaning page which earned over 166 million interactions on nearly 35,000 posts.
- 6.** UNICEF, an ideologically nonaligned page which earned over 156 million interactions on over 1,000 posts. (UNICEF has partnered with Facebook for public health education, and Facebook's info panel has been boosting the page's posts.)
- 7.** Breitbart, a right-leaning page with over 150 million interactions on over 13,000 posts.
- 8.** Newsmax, a right-leaning page with over 130 million interactions on over 15,000 posts.
- 9.** CNN, an ideologically nonaligned page with nearly 130 million interactions on over 14,000 posts.
- 10.** Trending World by The Epoch Times, a right-leaning page with more than 117 million interactions on nearly 9,000 posts.

In comparison to 2020, there are two new right-leaning pages in this year's top 10 list: Newsmax and Trending World by The Epoch Times. Newsmax's newfound popularity on Facebook seems to follow a similar trend as its viewership, which increased as former President Donald Trump simultaneously promoted the right-wing outlet and criticized Fox News during his final months in office, while Trending World by The Epoch Times appears to have found success by promoting video-based content in accordance with Facebook's tweaked algorithm.

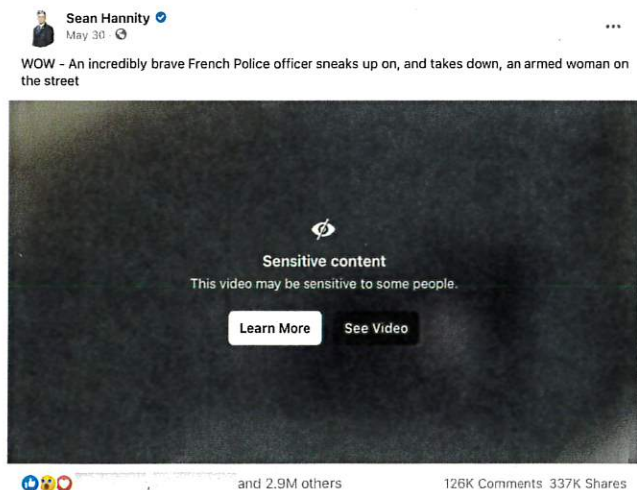
**Right-leaning pages earned nearly three times more average interactions for video content than posts containing links – and far more than other political and news-related pages**

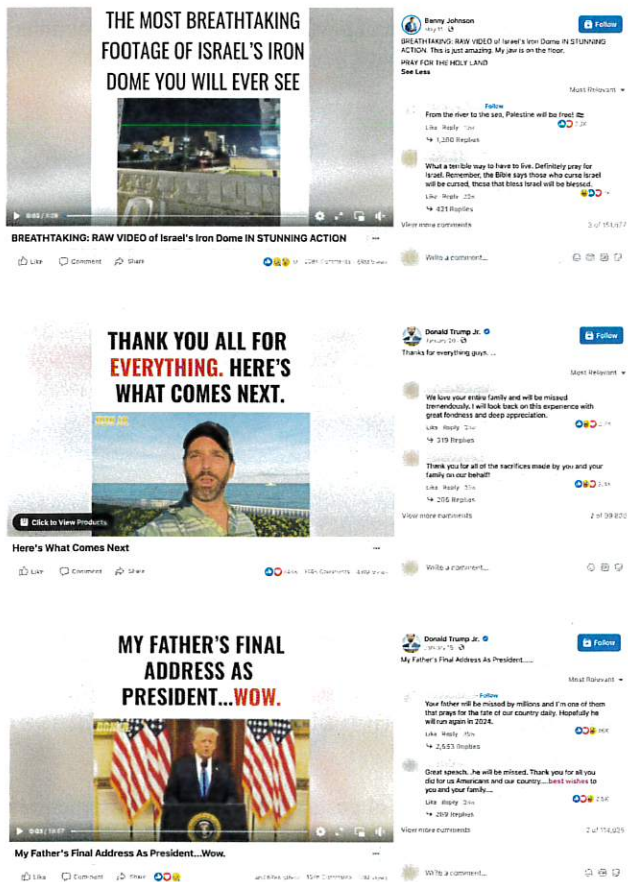
Facebook often focuses on how posts with links are used to spread misinformation, but photos and videos posted by right-leaning pages also spread sensational, false, and divisive content.

Between January 1 and September 21, right-leaning pages earned nearly 2.3 billion interactions on roughly 1 million posts with links – or roughly 2,300 average interactions per post.

During the same time frame, right-leaning pages earned nearly three times more average interactions per post with video than per post with links. Roughly 188,000 posts with videos from right-leaning pages – including native videos, live videos, and YouTube videos – earned over 1.2 billion interactions, or nearly 6,500 average interactions per post.

In fact, of the top 100 posts from right-leaning Facebook pages in 2021, 82 were posts with native video, earning roughly 120 million interactions, including posts from Donald Trump Jr., Fox News host Sean Hannity, and other conservative voices that featured sensational content:



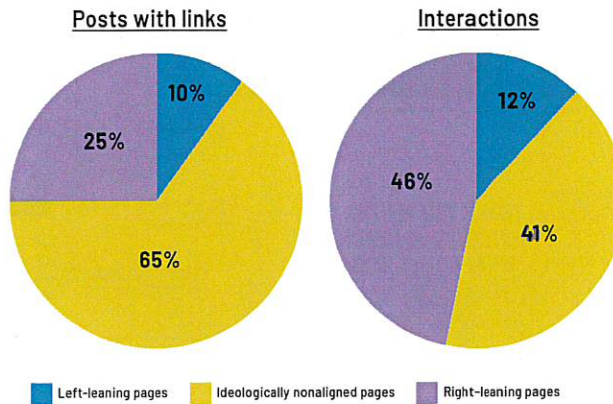


While ideologically nonaligned pages posted the most links and videos during the studied time period, it was right-leaning pages that earned the most interactions for each of these post types. Most notably, right-leaning pages accounted for roughly 30% of all posts with videos from political and news-related pages, but they earned nearly 60% of the interactions.

Proportion of posts with links and proportion of interactions for these posts:

### Ideological breakdown of posts with links (and interactions earned) on Facebook pages posting about politics

January 1 through September 21, 2021



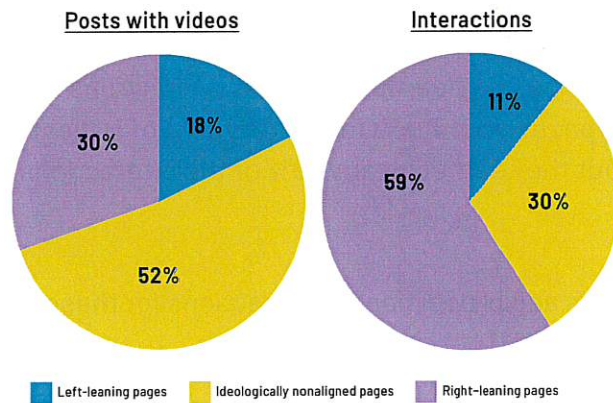
From a study of 1,773 Facebook pages with over 100,000 page likes that frequently posted about U.S. political news. Facebook interactions include reactions (like, love, wow, haha, sad, angry), comments and shares. All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



Proportion of posts with videos and proportion of interactions for these posts:

### Ideological breakdown of posts with videos (and interactions earned) on Facebook pages posting about politics

January 1 through September 21, 2021



From a study of 1,773 Facebook pages with over 100,000 page likes that frequently posted about U.S. political news. One-third of video posts are all posts with native video. One video complete, video, and photo are video categories. Facebook interactions include reactions (like, love, wow, haha, sad, angry), comments, and shares.



**Average interactions earned per video post by right-leaning pages increased from 2020 to 2021. The same for ideologically nonaligned and left-leaning pages decreased.**

Right-leaning pages earned more average interactions per post with video than other political and news-related pages in both 2020 and 2021. In fact, right-leaning pages earned nearly 6,500



interactions per post with video in 2021, which is more than the average 5,600 interactions per post with video in 2020.

Comparatively, nonaligned pages and left-leaning pages both earned less average interactions per post with video in 2021 than the previous year. Left-leaning pages earned roughly 2,000 interactions per post with video, less than half of the 4,200 interactions per post with video earned in 2020. Ideologically nonaligned pages earned roughly 1,800 interactions per post with video in 2021, slightly less than the 2,000 interactions per post with video in 2020.

### **Right-wing media outlet The Epoch Times earned significant engagement on seemingly innocuous videos, which can be a bridge to more extreme content**

- Of the top 100 posts from right-leaning Facebook pages this year, 53 were native videos from two Facebook pages affiliated with right-wing media outlet The Epoch Times, which has often spread pro-Trump conspiracy theories alongside its affiliate New Tang Dynasty (NTD). Its Facebook pages The Epoch Times and Trending World by The Epoch Times have roughly 15 million combined followers, and these 53 videos earned over 82 million interactions.

Between January 1 and September 21, the two pages posted nearly 20,000 times, and 62% of those posts featured links. Links to articles from the right-wing media outlet included pro-Trump talking points, misleading and false COVID-19 and vaccine information, election misinformation, misleading information about the January 6 insurrection, and anti-Biden talking points.

Notable posts with sensational and false content from The Epoch Times include:

**The Epoch Times** ✓  
September 23 at 7:47 PM

"To me, it's unconscionable that a society uses its children as shields for adults. Children do not have a significant risk from this illness... Are we [as] a society, a civilization...going to inject our children with an experimental drug that they don't have a significant benefit from, to shield ourselves?"

In this episode, we sit down with #PublicHealth policy expert Dr. #ScottAtlas, to discuss #VaccineMandates for children, especially given that data has shown children do not significantly spread the virus compared to adults.

We also discuss the underlying reasons behind the recent COVID surge in Florida as well as the efficacy of #NaturalImmunity.

Dr. Atlas is the author of "A Plague Upon Our House: My Fight at the Trump White House to Stop COVID from Destroying America," which is set to be released on November 23.



THEEPOCHTIMES.COM

**Dr. Scott Atlas on Vaccine Mandates for Children, Natural Immunity, and Florida's COVID-19 Surge**

COVID-19 vaccines go through many tests for safety and effectiveness and are then monitored closely.  
Source: World Health Organization  
[Get Vaccine Info](#)

103

10 Comments 30 Shares

**The Epoch Times** ✓  
January 7

Just in



THEEPOCHTIMES.COM

**Protester killed in Capitol was Air Force veteran from California**

The U.S. Capitol Police said it is investigating the killing of a woman who entered the U.S. Capitol...

1.9K

1.6K Comments 178 Shares

 The Epoch Times   
January 7 

"Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution"



THEEPOCHTIMES.COM

**Pence Chief of Staff Blocked From Entering White House Grounds: Report**

Vice President Mike Pence's chief of staff Marc Short has claimed that he was denied entry back...

   2.4K

1.2K Comments 205 Shares

 The Epoch Times   
September 18 at 5:32 PM 

Four days ago, the director of the National Institute of Health (#NIH) said during an interview that the reason kids are being forced to wear #masks in school isn't necessarily because they are in danger of infection, but rather so that the #school districts don't shut down classrooms.



YOUTUBE.COM

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   93

22 Comments 42 Shares

**The Epoch Times** May 2

What's happening now in Maricopa County, #Arizona, is the first full forensic audit of the 2020 election. #Democrat's have labored fiercely to stop this from the beginning. This could be because if the results show significant interference in the #Election, it could lead to prosecutions at the state and/or federal levels.


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Getting to the Truth of the 2020 Election—Maricopa County Election Audit; 2.1M Votes to be Recounted

1.3K 395 Comments 147 Shares

While the majority of posts from these two Facebook pages included links, nearly all of their interactions – over 195 million, or more than 95% of total engagement – were earned on posts with videos (native videos, live videos, and YouTube videos). In fact, seven of the top 20 posts from all political and news-related pages during the same time frame were seemingly innocuous videos from The Epoch Times’ two pages. These videos earned hundreds of millions of views. However, these videos can easily lead users to more extreme content from The Epoch Times, including misinformation, if they follow links in other posts on the pages.

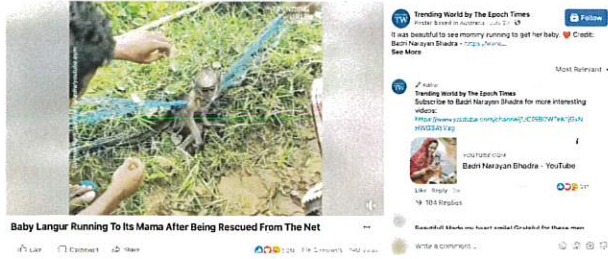


Beautiful Peacocks Opening Their Feathers

Trending World by The Epoch Times  
 Credit: Caerhill Countryside Centre  
 Follow @margaretta on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/margaretta/>

The peacocks are so beautiful when they fan their tails - They would come and see us in Rulien strouping outside their home was in the Rulien Castle but they would fly over and walk in the front garden and sit on the roof of the house

**Over 3.7 million interactions and 39 million views**



**Over 3.5 million interactions and 78 million views**



**Over 3.4 million interactions and 93 million views**

## Methodology

Using CrowdTangle, Media Matters compiled a list of 1,773 Facebook pages that frequently posted about U.S. politics from January 1 to August 25, 2020.

For an explanation of how we compiled pages and identified them as right-leaning, left-leaning, or ideologically nonaligned, see the methodology here.

The resulting list consisted of 771 right-leaning pages, 497 ideologically nonaligned pages, and 505 left-leaning pages.

Using CrowdTangle, Media Matters compiled all posts for the pages on this list between January 1 and September 21, 2021. We reviewed data for these posts, including total interactions (reactions, comments, and shares), post type, and video views.

