



GÖTEBORGS
UNIVERSITET

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

WHY DO COMPANIES CHANGE THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN THE AGE OF TRUMP?

A comparative case study examining antecedents of corporate political activity of Meta, a 'Big Tech' company.

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Thesis:	15 hp
Program and/or course:	Bachelor's Programme in Political Science/SK1523
Level:	Bachelor
Semester/year:	Spring/2025
Supervisor:	Georgios Xezonakis
Word count:	11 973

Abstract:

Within the field of *corporate political activity* (CPA), there has been a limited examination of why companies engage in politics or adjust their political strategies vis-à-vis main actors or institutions. In this study, I focus on the explanations of CPA from the perspective of one firm (META) as I explore the company's recent changes in their CPA. Since Trump's re-election, Meta, among other 'Big Tech' companies, seemed to have tried to forge a closer relationship with the executive. To find out the reasons behind Meta's turnabout, I conducted a case study, comparing the company during two periods: 2016-2020 and 2021-2025. By testing three hypotheses, I analyzed different *antecedents of CPA* on three different levels: the individual, the firm, and the societal. At the individual level, the CEO of Meta, Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook posts were studied to investigate whether there was a change in the CEO's political ideology. Regarding the firm, an examination of the company's news announcements was conducted for Meta's views on regulatory burden. At the societal level, the analysis focused on reports from Pew Research to find potential public opinion trends that could drive changes in CPA. The results suggest that Meta's CPA is driven mainly by increasing negative perception of regulations. However, I identify indications of change in Meta's CEO's political ideology, and public opinion trends that could also have justified changes in CPA. For the reasons I explain in the discussion, these latter findings should be interpreted with caution.

Key words:

corporate political activity, antecedents of CPA, political ideology, regulatory burden, political environment

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Introduction:

Ever since Donald Trump was again sworn in as the President of the USA, there have been incidents that, to say the least, have caused some raised eyebrows. Previously stable international relations are questioned, trade tariffs are applied to former allies, and Elon Musk has been mandated to cut government expenditures (Yourish et al., 2025). However, the mentioned tech titan does not seem to be the only tech billionaire sharing a stronger bond with the new leader of the free world. On the contrary, every company of the so-called 'Big Tech' respectively donated 1 million dollars to the inauguration of Trump. During the event, the CEOs also had exclusive seats right behind the President, usually reserved for family members or other honorable attendants (Metzger et al., 2025). This paints a symbolic picture, where some of the earth's wealthiest men stand behind the American President. It could mark the beginning of a new era, with blurred lines of economic power and political influence, or it could even be seen as, to paraphrase Brooke Harrington (The Daily Show, 2025), a brologarchy.

The tech industry's power is inevitable, as most of the worldwide communication, shopping, and sources of information come from Big Tech's platforms (Lindman et al., 2023). They possess a substantial amount of data and benefit from mono or oligopolistic structures in their respective markets, while also being challenging for governments to regulate (Wörsdörfer, 2022). Therefore, some scholars argue that we're heading towards a technopolar world order (Bremmer, 2021) or pose them as a threat to democracy (Fukuyama et al., 2021). One of the companies included in this category is Meta, the multinational corporation that owns Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Threads (Wörsdörfer, 2022). While Meta and Big Tech in general have grown a worldwide influence, they have not typically been warmly embraced by American governments during the last decade. Instead, in Trump's first term of office, their relationship was filled with conflict, including several lawsuits, antitrust investigations, and accusations of bias and suppression of conservative opinions (Pecequilo & Marzinotto, 2022). Thus, Meta's donation to Trump's inauguration while having exclusive seats could potentially point to a shift from an adversarial to a more cooperative relationship with the President. This phenomenon is above the ordinary and remains unsolved in previous literature.

Multinational corporations do continually engage in politics. Within the field of corporate political activity (CPA), scholars explain how companies use various strategies to influence policymakers according to their interests (Hillman et al., 2004). This is done to secure or strengthen their power within a competitive environment. Still, the methods and the outcomes of their political engagement are often the main aspects of CPA (Lux et al., 2011). Research tends to focus less on the motivations behind companies' entry to the political arena or their decision on a political strategy (Katic & Hillman, 2023). The reason why the political activity of one company has changed has not been a focus yet, other than the description of a firm's available choices when engaging with policymakers (Hillman & Hitt, 1999) and the factors predicting a transformation of CPA (Lawton et al., 2013).

My addition to research is to focus on the explanations, or *antecedents*, not the methods or consequences of CPA. By doing this, I hope to broaden the cumulative understanding of multinational corporations' political engagement. Meta is one of the Big Tech companies that recently seemed to have created a closer relationship with President Trump. While these companies are portrayed with political influence and as potential threats to liberal democracy, it is critical to describe what has driven at least a part of this change. Previous literature regarding Big Tech is generally focused on all the companies as a whole (see, for example, Fukuyama et al., 2021; Bremmer, 2021; Lindman et al., 2023). I instead aim to provide a deeper perspective of one company and explain its political activity.

Therefore, in this study, I have tried to answer the question: *Why has Meta's political activity in the last decade changed?* This was done by doing a comparative case study of the multinational tech company Meta. I compared the company during two periods: Donald Trump's first term of office (2016-2020) and the period since (2021-2025). The study was guided by previous literature, a short clarification of how Meta's political activity has transformed, and hypotheses regarding what has driven the change. The material used was Facebook Posts from the corporation's CEO, news announcements from Meta's website, and public opinion reports from Pew Research Center. I approached analysis based on an analysis scheme that structures the causes of political activity into three categories: individual, firm, or social factors.

Literature review:

Multinational Corporations

A multinational corporation (MNC), like Meta, is defined by the occurrence of a subsidiary branch in at least one other country outside its headquarters (Irogbe, 2013). The goal of these companies is to maximize profits and continue their expansion worldwide by evolving through research, marketing, and cost reduction (Gilpin, 1976). When World War II ended, a rise in multinational corporations (Keohane & Ooms, 1972) was registered, driven by expanded foreign investments (Bartley, 2018) and the removal of barriers to investments and trade (Guillen & Garcia-Cana, 2009). This led to academic debates about their sovereignty over nation-states (Evans, 1981). With scholars like Hymer (1970) on one side, arguing for corporations being capitalist entities willing to remove any obstacles facing them, including the nation-state (Gilpin, 1976). While others such as Vernon (1971) claimed that nation-states are capable of handling the challenge of the decreasing authority to MNCs. The position in between was portrayed by Kindleberger (1969) and Dunning and Lundan (2008) as they regarded the state as a regulator of MNCs but highlighted the economic benefits these companies bring through investments and trade.

Another point of view on MNCs' power is how their economic capital could transform into political influence (Salamon & Siegfried, 1977). From Nye's (1974) perspective, these companies are significant political actors rather than threats to the nation-state's sovereignty. His argumentation was based on their effect on foreign policies, their relationship with other states, and their impact on decision-making for national policies. This discussion was taken a bit further by Strange (1991), who broadened the view of power in the international political economy, arguing that corporations diffuse state authority through wealth creation. While international politics focuses mainly on state relationships (Babic et al., 2017), some scholars analyze the power of MNCs within the context of *global governance* (Bartley, 2018). From this outlook, entities such as corporations could shape the international order through norms and rules and by providing public goods. However, whether seeing MNCs as a threat or as a complementary actor alongside the national government, it is clear that these companies exercise power, affecting both our daily lives and the global economy.

Big Tech

A subcategory within the MNCs is tech companies, where the most significant are referred to as the 'Big Tech', primarily including Alphabet/Google, Apple, Amazon, Meta/Facebook, and Microsoft (Birch & Bronson, 2022). Since the 1990s and forward, Big Tech has emerged as a key player in the international economy and is often studied as a political actor. Mainly because of their hold on the market (Wörsdörfer, 2022), the struggle for both national and supranational entities to control their power (Bradford, 2023), and their potential threat to democracy (Fukuyama et al., 2021). For instance, Gorwa (2019) portrayed the danger of their media ownership, Fukuyama et al. (2021) describe Big Tech's informational advantage compared to governments, while Lindman et al. (2023) note the companies' power in restricting fundamental individual rights. Furthermore, their possible influence on political elections and policies is illustrated by Kreiss and McGregor (2018), the challenge to hold these companies accountable is explained by Taylor (2021), and Thorson et al. (2021) mention how these platforms function as a newsfeed with algorithmic interferences, that based on previous political behavior, shape what content one is exposed to.

To understand the phenomenon of Big Tech's control over cyberspace, Zuboff (2019) introduced the term *surveillance capitalism*. He discusses their power as a form of tyranny because of Big Tech's ways of estimating our behaviors on the platforms, examining large quantities of data, and their capability to surveil the vast population of the Earth. According to Lanier (2013) and later Saura Garcia (2024), there have even been scholarly debates about whether these companies are exploiting their possession of data and information as a sort of *data feudalism*. The term means the mutual dependence between companies' algorithms and data, and the reliance society, markets, and governments have on them to achieve political or economic goals. Thus, Big Tech could be seen as feudal lords, controlling the digital space for their benefit (Saura Garcia, 2024). Big Tech is accordingly not only portrayed as a significant political actor but illustrated as a real threat to states, democracy, and the individual rights of citizens by its different means of power. Therefore, these companies are crucial to study and scrutinize; otherwise, "[d]igital platforms' concentrated economic and political power is like a loaded weapon sitting on a table" (Fukuyama et al., 2021, p.103).

Corporate Political Activity

Corporations have various ways to influence political decisions. Within the term *corporate political activity*, or CPA, which is defined as “corporate attempts to shape government policy in ways favorable to the firm” (Hillman et al., 2004, p. 837), their engagement in politics is often studied. CPA is a firm non-market strategy (Lux et al., 2011), and depending on the desired outcome, a company could target different political actors, mainly within the government or the parliament, but also non-governmental organizations or the media (Katic & Hillman, 2023). However, Hillman and Hitt (1999) emphasize that corporations’ ties to the government are crucial, since they decide upon resource distribution, the amount of antitrust legislation, or how subsidized, taxed, or regulated an industry should be. Thus, as Baysinger (1984) first coined it, it is a method for the business to benefit from the government, to secure their spot when the government may hinder their business, and to maintain the strategies that the corporation uses.

Often, the practices used by corporations to influence political change are through political donations and lobbying (Brown et al., 2022). Bernhagen et al. (2022) suggest that firms can also try to enhance their reputation through corporate social responsibility strategies (CSR) and building sociopolitical legitimacy (Mellahi et al., 2016). In other words, companies could pursue voluntary policies that align with social and political goals, such as being environmentally friendly or focusing on human resource management (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Additional CPA tactics are relational strategies, such as appointing top positions to former politicians (Brown et al., 2022) or being involved in corrupt relationships (Lawton et al., 2013). The political strategies can therefore vary based on desired outcomes (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). They might use lobbying or financial contributions to influence decision-makers, whereas addressing voters and employees through advertisement, press conferences, or education programs to influence public policies.

However, the field of CPA goes beyond methods for influencing political decisions; it also examines the consequences of their political activity (Hillman et al., 2004), including effects on firm performance (Lux et al., 2011) and the policy process (Khanal et al., 2024). While the research on CPA has grown in recent years, the focus remains on corporate tactics, like campaign contributions and lobbying (Katic & Hillman, 2023). Katic and Hillman (ibid), even encourage studies to develop the understanding of the antecedents of CPA.

Antecedents of CPA

The reasons for companies' political engagement are often referred to as *antecedents of corporate political activity*. According to Katic and Hillman (2023), all explanations could be summarized within three different structural levels: individual, firm, and societal. At the individual level, the CEO's traits and values are at the center. Based on the *agency theory*, the company's manager is authorized by the stakeholders to act on their behalf (Mellahi et al., 2016). However, the agent's interests often diverge from their principals, resulting in the CEO engaging politically according to their own objectives. Therefore, the main driver of CPA becomes fulfilling the manager's personal goals. Chin et al. (2013) find, in line with this theory, that the political ideology of managers could affect the firms' priorities and actions. This is because the CEO has a degree of discretion over company decisions and may act based on their own opinions. Other antecedents are the social networks of CEOs, as Barron (2011) studied, or the manager's demographic traits, such as education, age, and tenure, which Rudy and Johnson (2019) found to affect the corporation's political activity.

When investigating firm characteristics, the perspective broadens, and a significant theory is the *resource dependency theory* (Katic & Hillman, 2023). It explains how corporations depend on resources from external sources, like the government, as it handles issues like exports, sales, and taxes that affect businesses. Depending on a company's reliance on governmental support, the political activity could vary (Hillman et al., 2004), and the key driver of CPA could become securing the external resources (Mellahi et al., 2016). According to Lux et al. (2011), regulatory burdens can motivate political engagement, as increased regulation could incentivize pursuing political change and reducing the imposed costs for the company. Another mechanism is the firm's size, which Hillman et al. (2004) highlight as important since it illustrates the company's economic capital that enables greater lobbying or donations. Additionally, Vogel (1996) points out the importance of specific issues, as certain policies could be salient for the company if they target or affect its business, and since a corporation is concerned with its performance and profits.

Society could explain a company's interference with politics at the third level, which includes both the firm and its managers. Here, the *institutional theory* is valuable as it entangles the impacts of economic, social, and political arrangements (Lawton et al, 2013). From this point of view, the central driver of CPA is to gain legitimacy from institutional actors (Mellahi et al., 2016), such as stakeholders, the executive, civil society, or employees. These actors are

important since they interact with the firm, affect their decisions, and establish its institutional context (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2012). Another perspective is brought by Bonardi et al. (2006), who examine how companies can adapt their political engagement by comparing others' relationships with the executive or from previous experiences with politicians. According to Barron (2010), cultural aspects are influential for a company's interactions in the political arena, since different societal values and norms shape the company's actions. Furthermore, the political environment, as explained by Brown et al. (2022), could affect the company's willingness to act within the political sphere, especially as corporations continually estimate the current political risks and opportunities.

There are two types of firm-government relationships according to Hillman and Hitt (1999): transactional, focused on short-term exchanges for specific policy outcomes, and relational, which emphasizes long-term trust and reciprocity. The choice between these approaches is conditioned partly on a firm's reliance on government policies. Lawton et al. (2013) and Katic and Hillman (2023) demonstrate that businesses could adapt, and a shift in the firm-state relationship could happen that eventually affects the company's CPA. This is mainly mentioned concerning a changing institutional or political environment. However, Lux et al. (2011) do conclude that increased regulation is one of the central drivers of CPA, and Lawton et al. (2013) portray it as a motivation for changed corporate political activity. On the individual level, Hillman et al. (2004) argue for the importance of the manager's political ideology and their influence on the company, while Lawton et al. (2013) mention that CEOs respond to political changes, leading to transformed CPA tactics. Still, the research that investigates how firms change, how they react to different CPA strategies, and what has caused the adjustment is thin and in need of further studies.

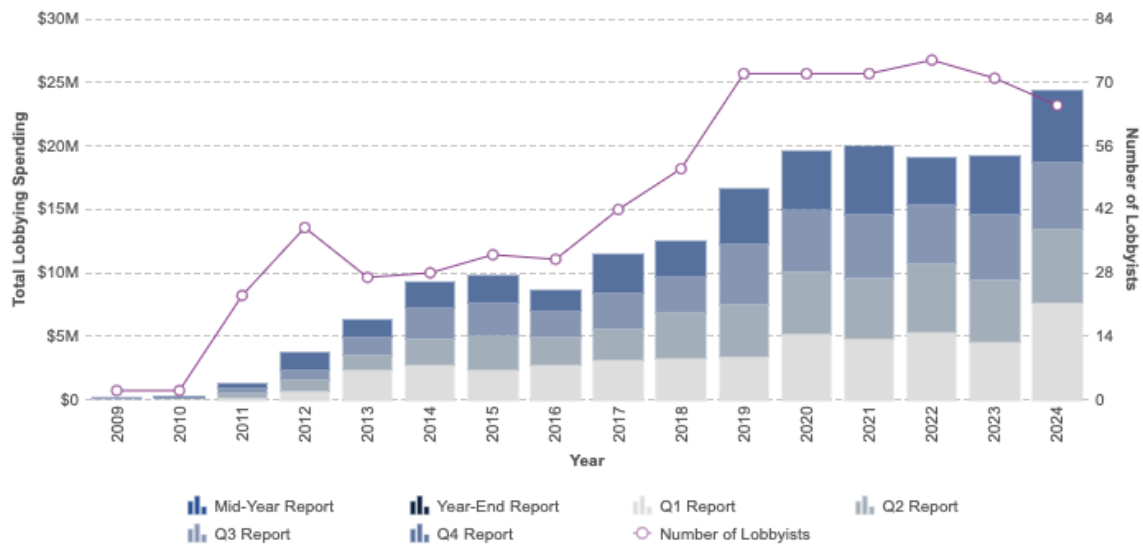
Meta's Corporate Political Activity

Today, Meta's platforms serve about 3 billion daily users and continue aiming to connect the world (Meta, 2025b). While Meta's purpose is not politically charged, its actions could have political implications due to its global influence and the integral role of social media in our lives. This can occur by direct political interference, often lobbying, and through more indirect or even unintentional measures, like how the company operates or interacts with other actors, which could have consequences, even in the political arena (Nye, 1974). How Meta interacts with the government is consequently crucial. However, has Meta's corporate political activity changed between Trump's terms of office?

To answer this question, I operationalized the company's CPA into four variables, each a method of bringing about political change: lobbying, political donations, CSR, and relational strategies. Corruptive behaviors were excluded because of the difficulty of finding sources to confirm such delicate matters. The potential change of CPA was estimated by the perceived proximity to the executive, as in shared values or support for the Republican Party and/or the President. Lobbying and political donations were measured by data from OpenSecrets, an organization that tracks political funding. To study donations to inauguration funds, I used information from the Federal Election Commission, a US agency that oversees campaign finances. Regarding CSR and personal strategies, I examined Meta's news announcements, and when not available, I utilized news articles. The comparison was between the start of Trump's first term (2016-2017) and the beginning of his second presidency (2024-2025), as they are most comparable since Trump's second tenure just started. However, because of its significance, I included Meta's ban of Trump from their platforms in 2021.

By looking at data from OpenSecrets (n.d., b), the lobbying measures in 2024 compared to 2016 have increased, both in terms of the number of lobbyists (from 31 to 65) and the total spending on lobbying (from \$8,692,000 to \$24,430,000) (see Figure 1). The bills lobbied in 2016 were fewer (39) and focused on data security and patents, while in 2024 the number of bills increased (43) and mainly targeted AI, platform governance, and child protection.

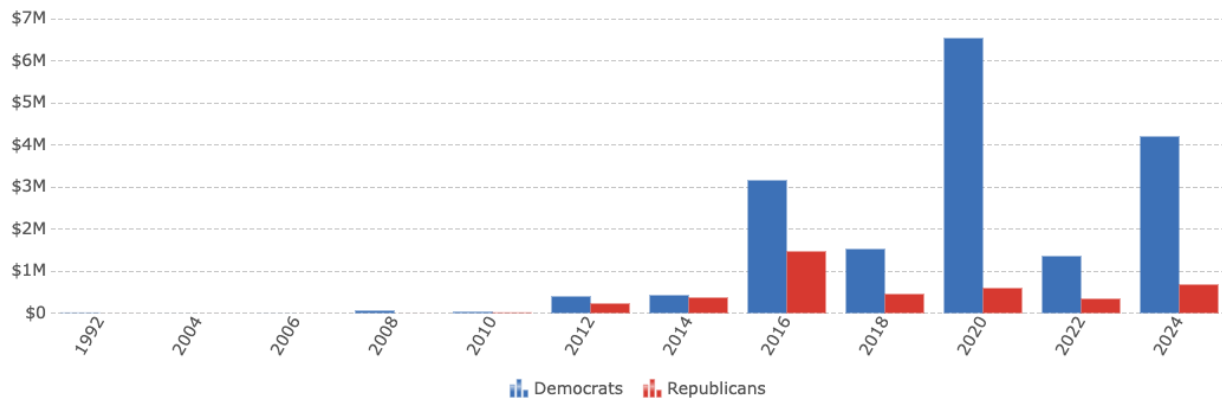
Figure 1: Graph of “Annual Lobbying by Facebook Inc.”



From OpenSecrets. (n.d., a). *Client Profile: Meta*. [Graph]. <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/clients/summary?cycle=2024&id=D000033563> [Retrieved 2025-04-08]

When studying Meta’s political donations, which mainly portray contributions by individual employees, the data from OpenSecrets (n.d., b) show that the major recipients are Democrats (see Figure 2). The difference between the donations to Democrats (\$4.2M) and Republicans (\$693k) is more profound in 2024 than in 2016, where the donations were \$3.2M to Democrats and \$1.5M to Republicans. Regarding political donations, the reports from the Federal Election Commission (n.d.) do not demonstrate that Meta (as Facebook) donated any money to the 58th inaugural fund in 2017 (Trump’s first presidency) while other Big Tech firms like Microsoft and Amazon did. However, the records regarding the Trump Vance Inaugural Committee in 2025 show that Meta donated \$1M to the fund (Federal Election Commission, 2025). This is thus a changed corporate political activity.

Figure 2: Graph of Meta's "Total Contributions by Party of Recipient"



From OpenSecrets. (n.d., c). *Meta, Contributions*. [Graph].

<https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/meta/totals?id=D000033563> [Retrieved 2025-04-08]

Meta's strategies to increase their corporate social responsibility were apparent when President Trump was first elected. In December 2016, the company launched an approach to tackle fake news, and both simplified the reporting of hoaxes and developed third-party fact-checking procedures (Mosseri, 2016). Just days after Trump's election, Meta further improved their policies about discrimination in advertising (Meta, 2017). However, in 2025, Meta announced their removal of third-party fact-checking in favor of a user-driven approach called Community Notes, inspired by Elon Musk's X, to decrease bias and strengthen free speech (Meta, 2025d). The company also declared through an internal memo its abolition of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs in hiring. Previously, the inclusion of different nationalities in the workforce had been one of the company's goals, at least since 2019 (Bhuiyan & Kerr, 2025).

Regarding personal strategies, such as recruitments within the company, Meta appointed new members to their Board of Directors in January and April 2025, including Dana White and Dina Powell McCormick (Meta, 2025a; Meta, 2025c). The former is a Trump supporter, and the latter is a Republican who has worked in both George W. Bush and Donald Trump's administrations. In the chief role of Global Affairs, Nick Clegg, a former UK Liberal Democrat politician, was recently replaced by the Republican Joel Kaplan (da Silva, 2025). However, I could not find any specific recruitments to top positions within the company in late 2016 or 2017.

Another part of Meta's personal strategy regarding Trump could be both their private and legal relationship. After Trump supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6th of 2021, which was allegedly encouraged by him on Meta's platforms, the company banned Trump from their platforms, at least for two years (Clegg, 2021). However, his accounts were reinstated in 2023, and the ban was completely lifted in 2024. The personal relationship between the CEO and the President is hard to study, but Zuckerberg visited Trump's house in Mar-a-Lago after the 2024 election, and this form of personal meeting has supposedly not occurred before (Gerken, 2024). Regarding legal procedures, in 2021, Trump sued Meta over their ban and censorship of him on social media. Still, once Trump was again in the White House, Meta settled the lawsuit by paying him 25 million dollars (Kerr, 2025).

To summarize, the differences in Meta's CPA, measured by the four variables, show an increased proximity to the executive during Trump's second presidency. This is illustrated by the hired Republican supporters within the company, the abolishment of fact-checking procedures and DEI programs, the \$1M inauguration donation, the \$25M settlement, the lifted ban on Trump on social media, and a personal meeting between Zuckerberg and Trump (see Table 1). However, I did not study the political activity from 2017 to 2024, and one could argue that the lobbying and overall political contributions do not indicate a change, other than the increase in donations to Democrats. To further investigate, it would be worthwhile to look into all the years and assess the bills that received lobbying efforts, which might reveal stronger connections to a particular party, but this is beyond the scope of this study. Still, as shown in the majority of the different (3 out of 4) variables, there has been a shift in the CPA that could signify that Meta's values are currently more aligned with Trump. What has driven the change? Could any of the antecedents of CPA explain the transformation?

Table 1: Summary of Meta's CPA

Corporate Political Activity	Period 1 (2016-2017)	Period 2 (2024-2025)
Lobbying	Less lobbying and a focus on the protection of the company	More lobbying and focus on developments and content regulation
Political donations	More donations to Republicans, but mainly to Democrats. No donation to the inauguration	More donations to Democrats and a larger difference between the two parties. \$1M donation to inauguration
Corporate Social Responsibility strategies	Launch of fact-checking procedures and improved policies about diversity in advertising	Abolishment of fact-checking and DEI programs
Relational strategies	*Ban on Trump on the platforms (2021)	Appointed Republicans to top positions Lifted the ban on Trump on the platforms Personal meetings between Zuckerberg and Trump \$25M settlement of lawsuit

Political ideology, Regulatory Burden, and Political Environment

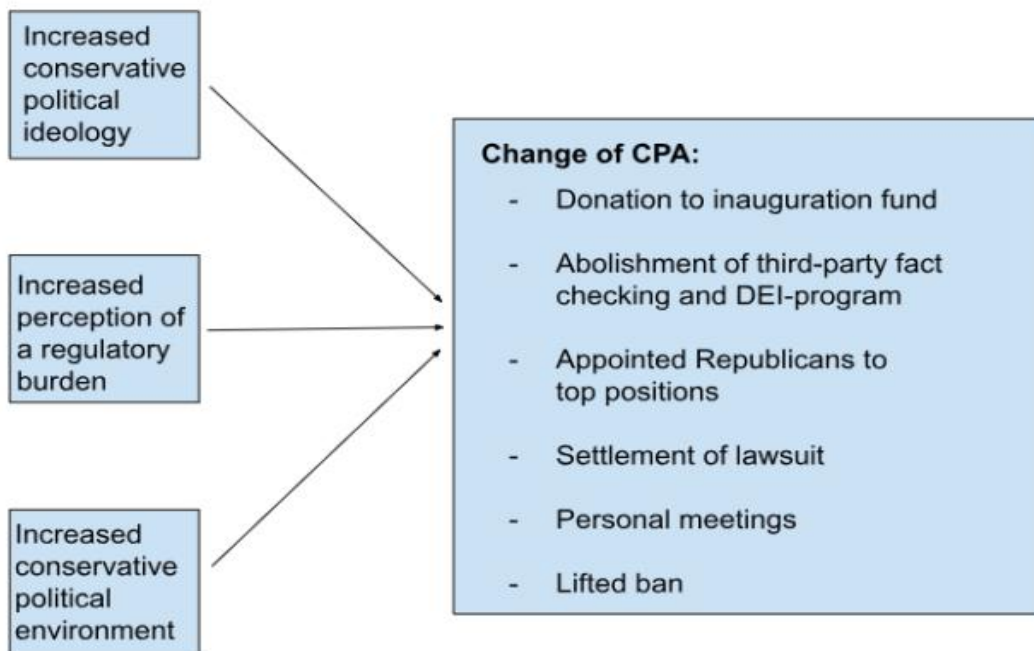
The literature identifies multiple mechanisms influencing a company's political engagement. However, I will, because of time limitations, only focus on one antecedent from each structural level to explain Meta's changed CPA. At the individual level, the political ideology of Meta's CEO, the regulatory burden at the firm level, and the political environment at the societal level. This is not because the other mechanisms are unimportant, but these three are often seen as the most central within their structural level (Katic & Hillman, 2023; Brown et al., 2022; Lux et al., 2011).

Meta's potential relational approach, in contrast to a short-term, policy-focused relationship (Hillman & Hitt, 1999), may indicate that one or a couple of the antecedents of CPA have changed since Trump's last tenure, leading to the shift in the company's political activity. It's possible that all antecedents contributed to the shifts in CPA, or that each has contributed to one aspect of the change. Another perspective is that the evolving political environment may, either directly or indirectly, have affected Zuckerberg's political ideology, suggesting an

interconnectedness between these mechanisms. Yet, to simplify, I will keep them separated for now and discuss the potential overlap when analyzing the results.

Previous literature provides expectations for the effect of political ideology, regulatory burden, and political environment. Political ideology, because a CEO's discretion allows them to act according to their political objectives, regulatory burden, since it incentivizes reducing costs and minimizing disadvantages for the company, and the political environment, due to companies evaluating their political opportunities and changes in cultural values affecting the corporation. Thus, I expect that Zuckerberg's political ideology has become more conservative over the last decade, resulting in Meta's changed CPA. My expectation regarding regulations is that Meta's concern over a regulatory burden has grown, leading to a shift in CPA. Lastly, I expect the political environment to be increasingly aligned with conservative values over the last decade, resulting in the transformed CPA of Meta.

To illustrate:



My hypotheses are thus:

H1: A change of CPA is attributed to a transformation towards more conservative values in Mark Zuckerberg’s political ideology.

H2: A change of CPA is attributed to a change indicating a growing negative perception regarding the regulatory burden for Meta.

H3: A change of CPA is attributed to a shift in the political environment that increasingly aligns with conservative values.

Method:

Method and Design

As mentioned, I aim to understand the transformed CPA of the multinational corporation Meta. Therefore, my research question is: *Why has Meta’s political activity in the last decade changed?* To find an answer to this question, I did empirical research using a comparative case study of two periods: Donald Trump’s first term of office (2016-2020) and the period since (2021-2025). This paper is a theory-testing study that tests three hypotheses and analyzes the material based on theories of antecedents of corporate political activity. Due to its “why” framing, this thesis can be viewed as a theory-developing study. This is because my analysis relies on established theories while empirically testing previously unexplored structural explanations. The analysis scheme was predetermined before the empirical analysis was started, and the study’s aim was not to develop an analytical tool capturing every possible explanation for CPA. Thus, this form of research follows a deductive approach (Esaiasson et al., 2024).

One of my main reasons for choosing a comparative case study is the method’s advantage of diving deep into the possible explanations of a company’s political activity. While respondent interviews or qualitative text analysis could be feasible alternatives, accessing key individuals within my timeframe would probably be challenging, and potential interviewees may be unwilling to discuss the company’s motives. I instead prefer focusing on the cases, taking a comparative viewpoint when analyzing the changes between the two, and discussing what factors might have caused the results.

Yet, a possible downside to the usage of only one company in two time-periods is potentially the reduced generalizability of the study (Esaiasson et al., 2024). The recent alignment of Big Tech with Trump (Howley, 2025) highlights the relevance of understanding the whole phenomenon. Further limitations are that not all explanations are tested, and that the focus is

only on how various mechanisms impacted the company, rather than examining how, for instance, EU regulations have influenced the President, which could have led to him warming up to Big Tech. However, since the explanations for a corporation's political activity may be complex, this method could be a good starting point for future studies to build upon.

This case study's design employed John Stuart Mill's Indirect Method of Difference. In this approach, two cases have been strategically chosen because they differ regarding whether the outcome being studied took place. This is beneficial since it allows for clearer links between observed differences and the studied variables, as maintaining constant conditions minimizes the influence of external factors (Berg-Schlosser, 2001). Due to the same company being compared during both periods, there are more similarities between the two cases than comparing two different corporations. For instance, a comparison between Meta and Amazon must consider their diverse services, distinct goals and principles, and different CEOs. This would have made it more difficult to distinguish a cause for the change in CPA. However, a problem with this design is the complexity of excluding other alternative causes, or that too much emphasis could be given to one factor. Still, I argue that the cases chosen, using the same company during both periods, create beneficial conditions to rule out alternative factors. This enhances the study's internal validity and ensures that it accurately investigates its intended focus (Esaïsson et al., 2024).

Case Selection

The selection of Meta, as the company whose CPA was analyzed, was because of the significant change in behavior between the two periods (Nix & Bwoskin, 2025). Hence, the cases were strategically selected for maximal variation while still being two comparable objects of study. In principle, all the other Big Tech companies have undergone a similar transformation of political activity in Trump's current term of office and therefore could be interesting cases to study (Howley, 2025). Still, it is often either Meta, Amazon, or X that are referred to as having significantly changed their relationship with Trump (Samuel, 2025). While Amazon's CEO, Jeff Bezos, also owns The Washington Post (Howley, 2025), I believe both companies might be relevant to analyze in that instance. Elon Musk and X could have been intriguing cases, but X is not a part of Big Tech according to the usual definition (Lindman et al., 2023), and the case of X/Musk may not be as generalizable to other tech companies, especially with Musk's influence within 'Doge' (Yourish et al., 2025). Therefore, I chose the easier choice, Meta.

Material:

To conduct this study, I utilized various materials. When investigating the political ideology of Zuckerberg, I examined his Facebook Posts, using only text from January 2nd, 2016, to April 30th, 2025. To assess Meta's perception of regulation, I reviewed news announcements on their website from the 7th of January 2016 to the 29th of April 2025. I only examined articles that included words such as regulation, law, legal, or act, to filter out most of the material that was irrelevant and not concerning their view on regulation. Additionally, I used reports and short reads from Pew Research Center to understand the development of the political environment and cultural values. To find relevant data, I searched for publications on US public opinion of gender equality, DEI policies, the LGBTQ community, environmentalism and climate change concerns, and immigration. I focused on finding material between 2020-2025, because it could show the development of opinions, either a stability or a change of values between 2016-2020 and 2021-2025.

The diversity in material allowed me to explore different types of explanations and capture the distinct structural levels of the antecedents of CPA. Yet, there are obstacles with the material. Zuckerberg's Facebook posts can only partially illustrate his political ideology, as the material is limited to what he has chosen to upload to the platform. Ideally, interviews in which he shared his political opinions would have been preferable, but it was difficult to find comparable material for both periods. Regarding the possible regulatory burden, the news announcements from Meta's website provide a continual overview of their perception of regulation compared to their 'Regulatory and Other Transparency Reports', which focus only on the last five years. Still, Meta's company news is sometimes written by Zuckerberg himself, complicating the differentiation between the position of the CEO and that of the corporation. The public opinion reports from Pew Research are useful due to their reliability as a US think tank. I believe that using their datasets, focusing on specific questions for this thesis, and comparing the evolution between the two periods would have enhanced the study's validity, though time constraints prevent this.

Coding:

To measure Zuckerberg's political ideology, I coded his statements in his Facebook posts using the GAL-TAN scale, which locates political positions from Green/Alternative/Libertarian attitudes to Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist values (Hooghe et al., 2002). This scale has become a useful continuum within political science to grade parties and actors. I chose the GAL-TAN scale because TAN values, which include nationalism and traditional social norms, align with Trump's rhetoric. The material also made it more challenging to identify clear sentences according to the left-right scale, and the GAL-TAN scale allows me to compare a change in Zuckerberg's values with potential societal shifts. When coding the material, I have used content analysis as a technique, which involves categorizing and coding the text quantitatively, both in tone and in amount, to draw reliable and valid conclusions (Krippendorff, 2019).

Therefore, in my coding, a GAL statement could reflect a positive tone towards environmentalism, such as support for renewable energy, taking action against climate change, or preserving nature. Another indicator of a GAL sentence is a positive tone regarding alternative social values, such as support for the LGBTQ community, gender equality, diversity and inclusion, or pro-immigration. Lastly, a positive tone of liberal values, such as personal freedom or freedom of speech, has been coded as GAL. However, I have also coded negative tones of TAN-values as GAL. Conversely, for a statement to qualify as TAN, I coded sentences expressing a positive tone of authoritarianism, such as support for state authority, regulation, or institutions, along with a positive tone of family or tradition as traditional values. Sentences that favor protectionism or nationalism have been coded as nationalist and TAN. I have not found instances of negative tones against GAL-values. Moreover, I counted complete sentences and not just phrases. Given the ambiguity about whether the statements reflected Zuckerberg's or Meta's values, I included sentences that mention 'I,' 'We,' or lack a pronoun.

When coding the regulatory burden, I classified news announcements based on whether the complete sentences implied a positive, negative, or neutral tone regarding regulation or indicated a measure that the company needed to take to comply with the regulation. A positive tone indicated approval, encouragement of more or updated regulation, demonstrating a commitment to the legislation, reaching an agreement, or portraying the regulation positively. To be coded as having a negative tone, the company depicted the

regulation as disappointing, showing disapproval, representing it as a burden or obstacle, or suggesting that it is unfair. However, it could also be that they appealed a decision, received a fine, or faced a lawsuit. If a sentence contained positive and negative tones or neither, it was coded as neutral. A sentence mentioning a strategy, procedure, or new policy used to comply with the regulation was coded as a measure of the regulation. Still, the main focus of the coding was to find either a positive or negative tone regarding regulation. Since Meta is a global company, I included sentences referring to regulations, lawsuits, and legal decisions not only from the US but from every country they mentioned, or the EU.

Regarding the political environment, I examined public opinion reports and short reads from Pew Research and looked for stability or change in GAL values. The reason I chose to focus on GAL values is because of the simplicity, and since GAL and TAN values are considered opposites of each other, a change in GAL values affects how TAN values are represented in society. When collecting the material, I searched for publications on immigration, gender equality, environmentalism, and climate concern, and regarding the LGBTQ community. To see the development over time, I studied the texts and graphs from their publications, examining whether there has been an increase, decrease, or stability of support for GAL values.

In summary, my analytical framework (see Table 2) for handling the material was based on prior research, especially the article by Katic and Hillman (2023), and their categorization of antecedents of CPA on three structural levels: individual, firm, and societal explanations. The three chosen mechanisms of change, on each level, could, according to my hypotheses, be attributed to the change of CPA. To investigate this, I studied the political ideology of Zuckerberg, operationalized by GAL-TAN values, examined Meta's perception of a regulatory burden by looking at their tone of regulations, and analyzed the political environment using public opinion reports, looking for a change or stability in GAL values.

Table 2: Analysis scheme

Structural level of antecedents of CPA	Mechanism of change	Operationalization
Individual	Political ideology	GAL-TAN values
Firm	Regulatory burden	Positive/negative tone of regulation
Society	Political environment	Stability/change of GAL values

Ethical Considerations

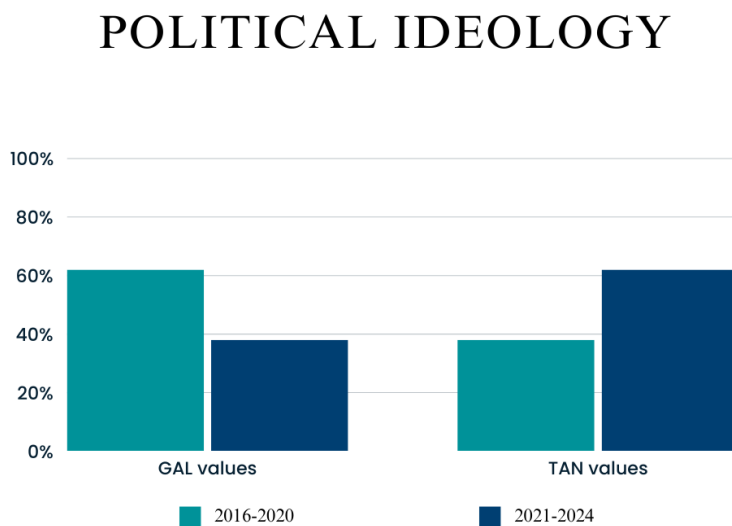
This study has exclusively used public information when collecting the material. Regarding Zuckerberg's Facebook posts, Meta's news announcements, and the public opinion reports from Pew Research are all data that are publicly accessible and not sensitive or private. Still, to see all of Zuckerberg's posts, one has to be logged into their Facebook account.

Result:

Political Ideology

The political ideology of Meta's CEO, measured by GAL-TAN values, appears to have changed between 2016-2020 and 2021-2024. The exclusion of 2025 is because the year is not finished. As shown in Figure 3, there has been an increase in TAN (62% compared to the previous 38%) values and a decrease in GAL values after 2020 (now 38% but before 62%).

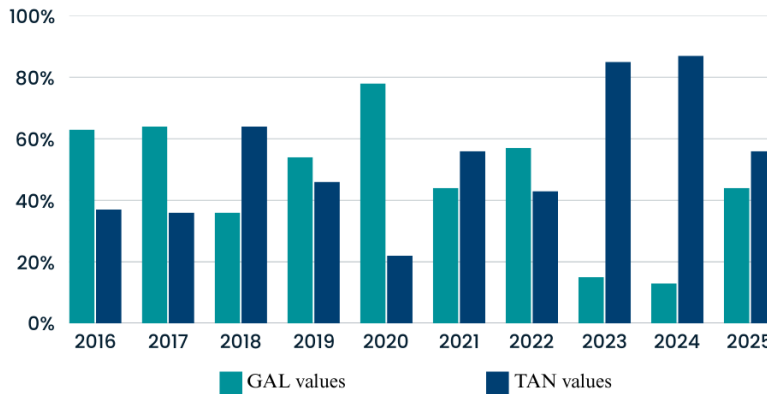
Figure 3: Diagram of Zuckerberg's percentages of GAL-TAN values pre- and post-2020



There was a spike in TAN-values in 2023-2024 and an overall majority of TAN sentences in 2021-2024, compared to the period of 2016-2020, which were more represented by GAL values (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Diagram of Zuckerberg’s percentages of GAL-TAN values every year between 2016-2025

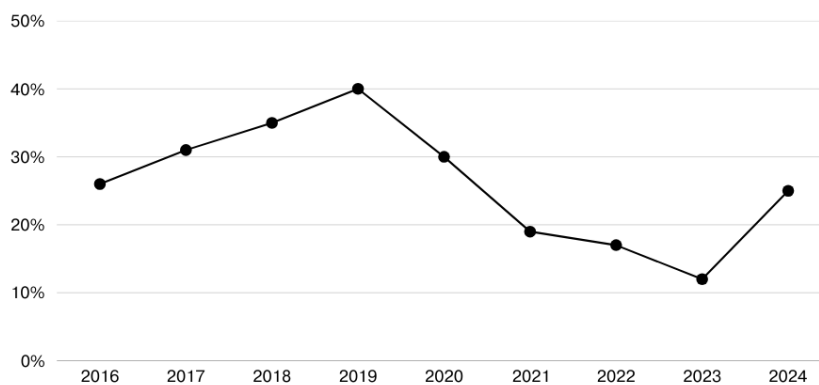
POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OVER THE YEARS



However, the total number of posts that indicated either a sentence of a GAL or TAN value has decreased over the years since 2019 (see Figure 5). In particular, the data from 2022-2024 consisted of about 20 sentences, which is considerably fewer than the data from 2016-2020, where the counts were around or exceeded 100 sentences, except for 2018. The lack of data for the period 2021-2024 questions the credibility and internal validity of the result because there is a risk that the result is a matter of chance. Still, a theme regarding the decreased amount of data is that there is an increase in TAN values, both seen in 2018 and 2021-2024.

Figure 5: Graph of the percentage of Zuckerberg’s Facebook that included GAL-TAN values from 2016 to 2024

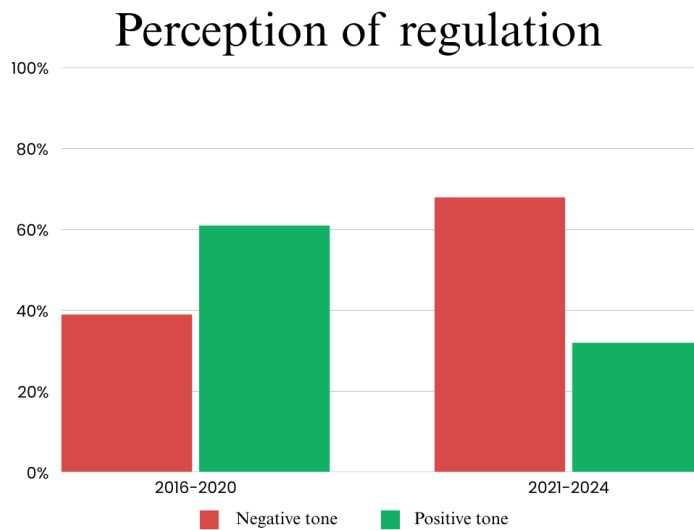
Amount of posts with GAL or TAN values.



Regulatory Burden

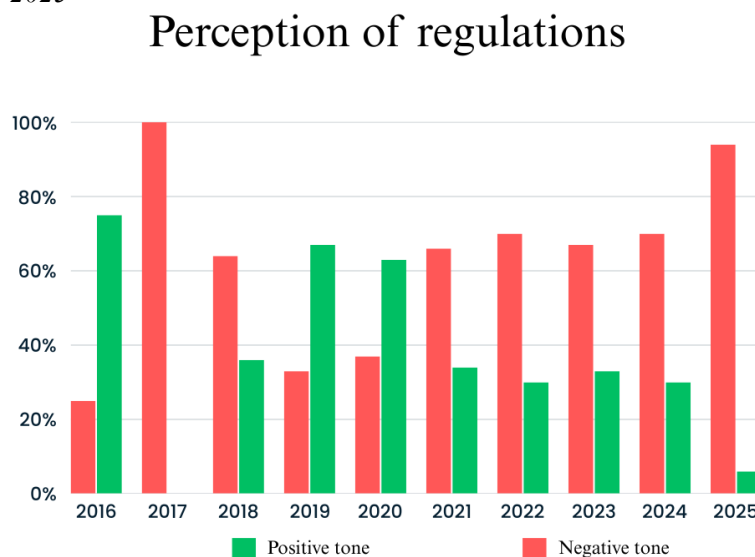
Regarding Meta's perception of regulations, there has been an increase in negative tone since 2021 compared to 2016-2020 (see Figure 6). The positive tone has decreased (from 61% to 32%), and the negative tone of regulations has increased (from 39% to 68%) in the period 2021-2024 compared with 2016-2020.

Figure 6: Diagram of the percentage of negative or positive perception of regulation pre- and post-2020



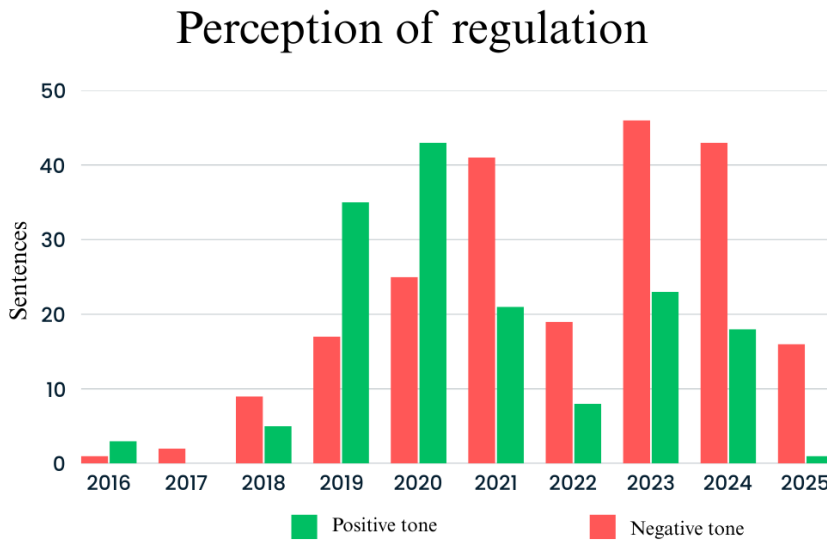
As shown in Figure 7, there has been a clear majority of negative tone regarding regulations since 2021. The result of the period 2016-2020 is more inconsistent, showing years with an overrepresentation of both negative and positive tone. However, the years of 2019 and 2020 show a clear majority of a positive tone.

Figure 7: Diagram of the percentage of positive or negative perception of regulation each year, 2016-2025



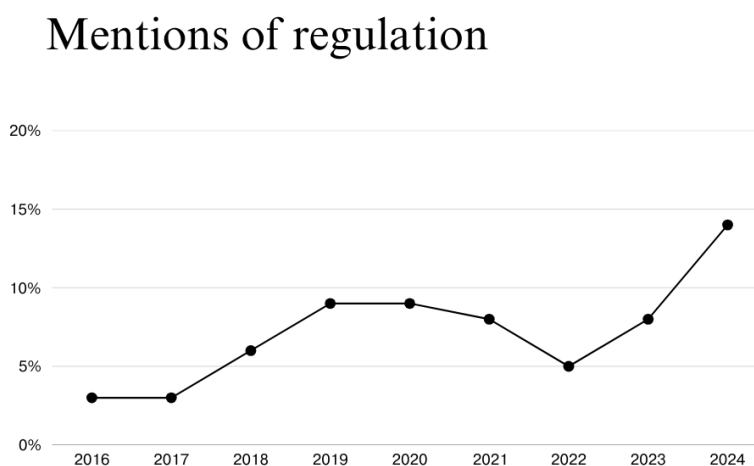
The data for 2016-2018 is very scarce (see Figure 8), which makes the result harder to evaluate for those years. Still, the diagram shows that a shift happened between 2020 and 2021, where after 2021, the majority of sentences became more negative in general regarding regulation.

Figure 8: Diagram of the number of sentences indicating positive or negative perception of regulation of each year (2016-2025)



When studying the overall mentions of either a positive or negative tone in Meta's news announcements, the data demonstrates that there has been an increase in the total number of mentions of regulations over the years 2016-2024 (see Figure 9). For instance, in 2024, there were 17 news announcements mentioning regulations out of a total of 119 articles, whereas in 2016, there were only 2 mentions of regulations in a total of 80 news announcements. The increase is not linear, as there is a drop in 2022, but overall, Meta has enhanced their mentioning of regulations over the years.

Figure 9: Graph of the percentage of total amount of mentions of regulation in news announcements during the years 2016-2024



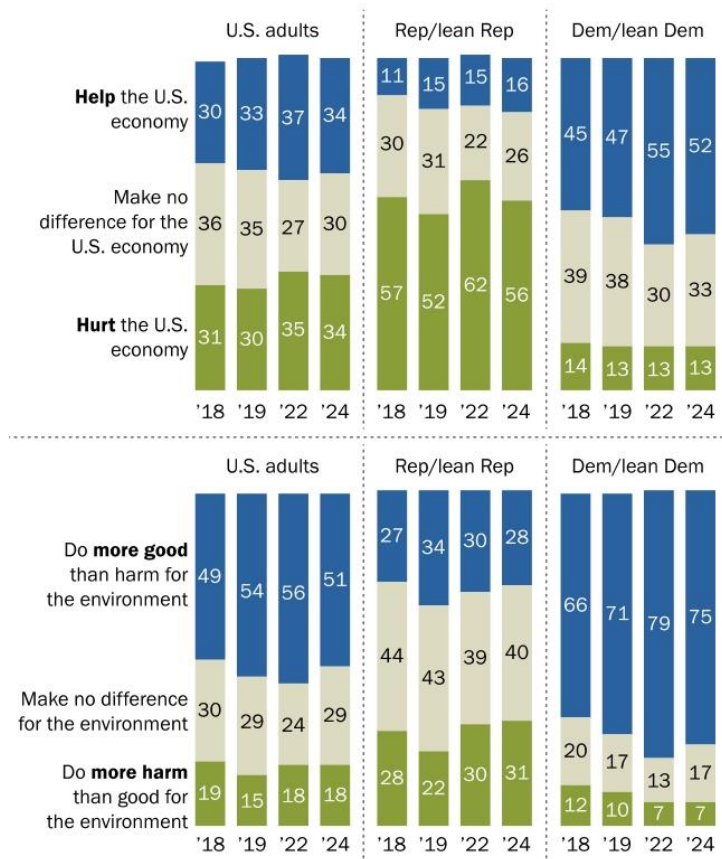
Political Environment:

When studying climate concern and support for environmentalism, there is some variation among the US public over the years 2018-2024 (see Figure 10). The data shows a clear differentiation between Democratic and Republican voters on the view of both the benefits and harm of climate policies for the US economy, and whether the policies are considered to do good or harm the environment. Even though there has been an increase in Republicans' perception of negative effects and Democrats' general positive view on climate policies, I consider the public opinion on this matter stable.

Figure 10: Diagrams of the development of perception of climate policies (2018-2024)

How Americans view the economic and environmental impacts of climate policies

% who say policies aimed at reducing the effects of global climate change generally...



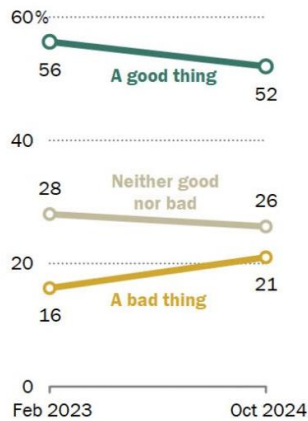
From Pew Research Center. (December 2024). *How Americans View Climate Change and Policies to Address the Issue*. [Diagram] https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/12/PS_2024.12.9_Climate_REPORT.pdf

Regarding the perception of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies in the workforce, there has been a clear shift from 2023 to 2024, where US workers have become more pessimistic. As shown in Figure 11, Republican voters are increasingly opposed to DEI programs, while Democratic supporters are becoming less likely to view them as a good thing. This indicates an overall shift towards decreased support for DEI policies.

Figure 11: Graph and diagram over the development of perception of DEI (2023-2024)

Growing share of U.S. workers say focusing on DEI at work is a bad thing

% of employed adults saying that in general, focusing on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion at work is mainly ...

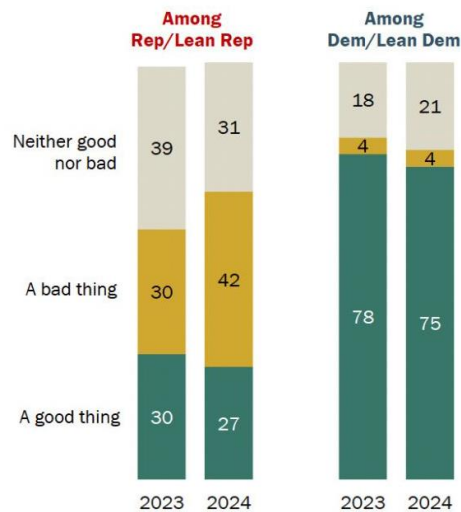


Note: Based on workers who are not self-employed and work at a company or organization with 10 or more people. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. workers conducted Oct. 7-13, 2024.

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Republican workers in the U.S. have become considerably more likely to say focusing on DEI at work is a bad thing

% of employed adults in each party saying that in general, focusing on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion at work is mainly ...



Note: Based on workers who are not self-employed and work at a company or organization with 10 or more people. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. workers conducted Oct. 7-13, 2024.

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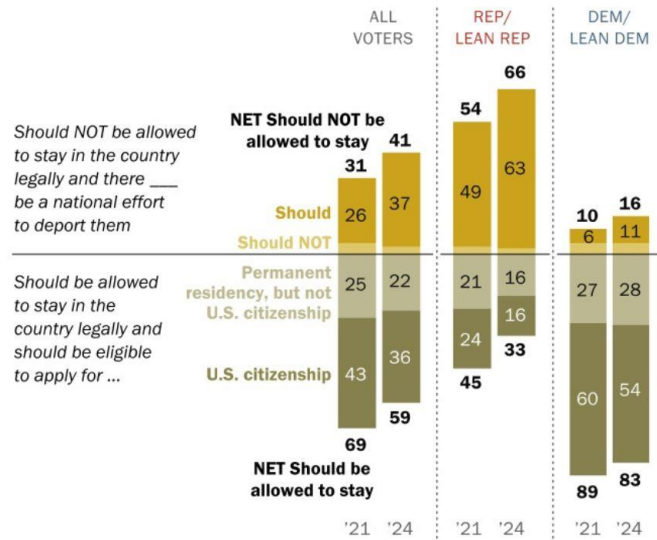
From Minkin, R. (19th of November 2024). *Views of DEI have become slightly more negative among U.S. workers.* Pew Research Center. [Graph and Diagram]. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/19/views-of-dei-have-become-slightly-more-negative-among-us-workers/> [Retrieved 2025-05-08]

Furthermore, the US public opinion on immigration seems to have become more hostile since 2021 (see Figure 12). Both the perception of not granting legal stay for undocumented immigrants in the US and the support for deportation efforts have increased over the years 2021-2024. This is shown both among Democratic and Republican voters. Hence, I recognize this as a change of opinion towards more antagonistic views on immigration.

Figure 12: Graph and diagram of perception of undocumented immigrants (2017-2024) and deportations efforts (2021-2024)

Growing support for national deportation efforts since 2021, particularly among GOP voters

% of registered voters who say undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. ...

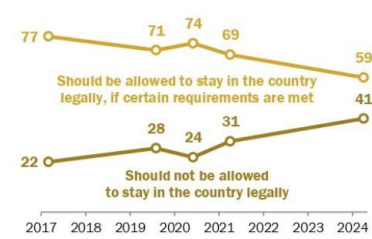


Note: Based on registered voters. No answer responses not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.

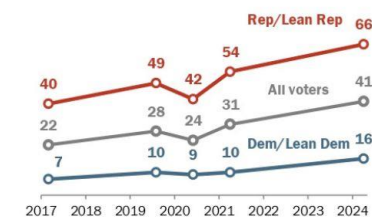
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Growing share of voters say undocumented immigrants should not be allowed to stay in the country legally

% of registered voters who say undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. ...



% of registered voters who say undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. should not be allowed to stay in the country legally



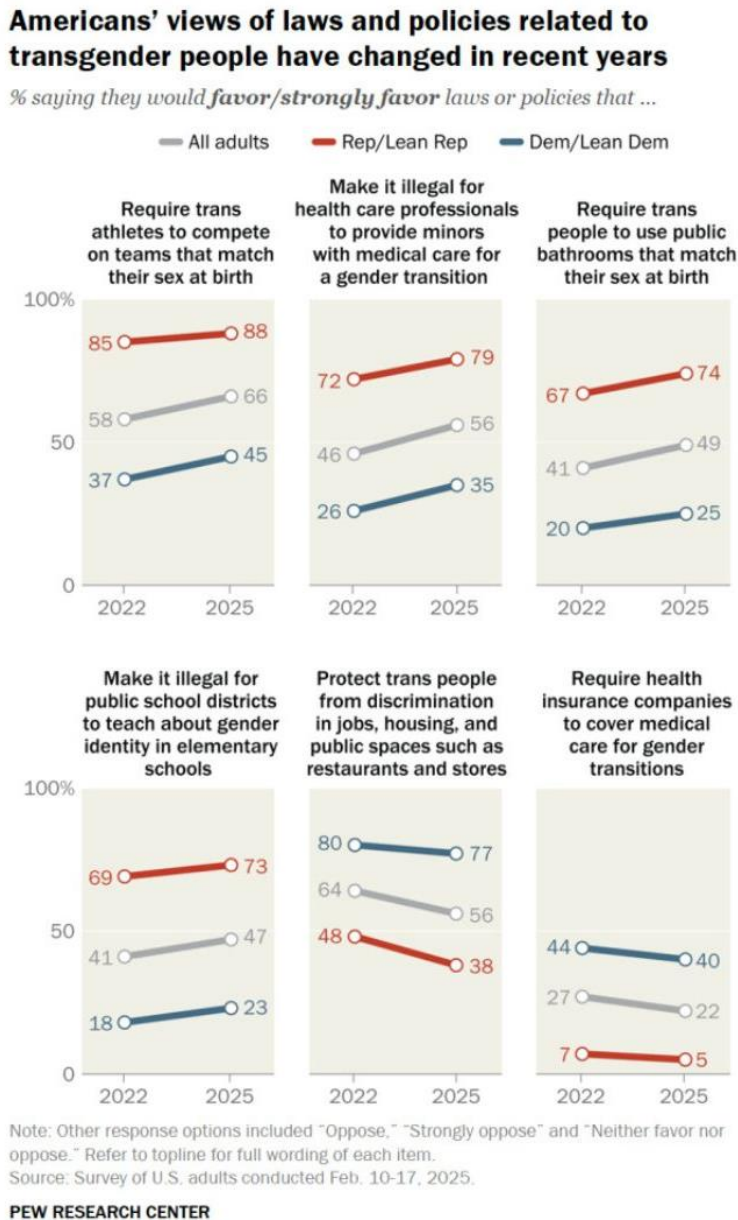
Note: Based on registered voters. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.

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From Pew Research Center. (June 2024). *Cultural Issues and the 2024 Election*. [Graph and Diagram]. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/06/PP_2024.6.5_cultural-values_REPORT.pdf

The data illustrating the public opinion on trans laws and policies shows that there is a growing support for restricting their rights from 2022 to 2025. As displayed by Figure 13, the approval of regulations restraining their right to medical care, insurance, and the teaching of gender identity in public schools has increased. The same pattern could be seen regarding the support for restricting their choices in sports, regarding public bathrooms, and protection against discrimination. This result is consistent among both Republican and Democratic voters. Therefore, I consider this a change in opinion to be less in favor of supporting trans people.

Figure 13: Graphs over perception of trans laws and policies (2022-2025)



From Pew Research Center. (26th of February 2025). *Americans have grown more supportive of restrictions for trans people in recent years.* [Graphs]. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/02/26/americans-have-grown-more-supportive-of-restrictions-for-trans-people-in-recent-years/> [Retrieved 2025-05-08]

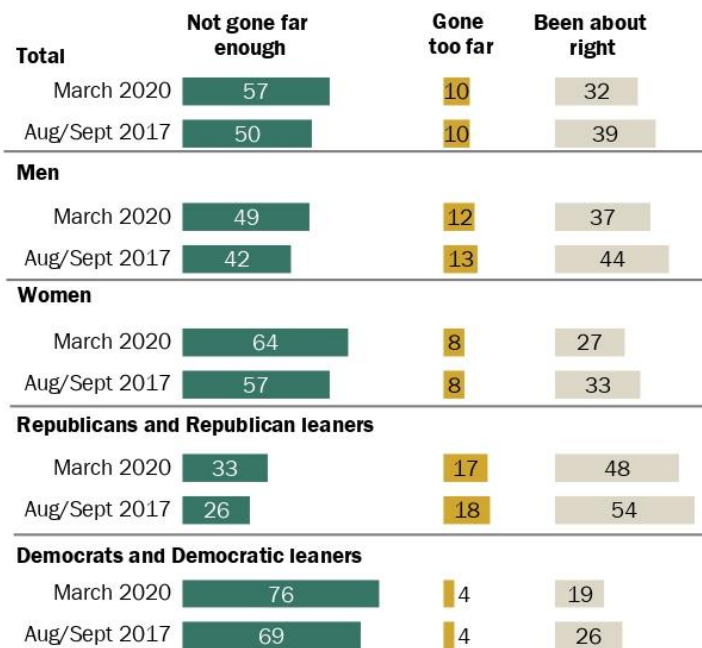
When I searched for opinions on other aspects of LGBTQ rights, such as same sex marriage, I could not find any graphs or diagrams showing the development of those values. However, articles from Pew Research portray that the opinion on same-sex marriage has been stable, at least since 2019 (Borelli, 2022).

Lastly, regarding gender equality, the most recent survey I could find was from 2020. As shown by Figure 14, there has been an increase since 2017 in the view that women’s rights are not going far enough to strengthen gender equality, both among Democrats and Republicans. However, according to an article from 2023, the views on the benefits or disadvantages of being a man or woman have not changed drastically since 2019 and 2020 (Braga, 2023). Because of the lack of recent data, it is difficult to assess if there has been a change or if the values are stable.

Figure 14: Diagrams of US public opinion on women’s rights

Growing share of Americans say the country has not gone far enough in giving women equal rights with men

% saying, when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, they think our country has ...



Note: Share of respondents who didn’t offer an answer not shown. In 2017, the question was asked about “the country.” In 2020, the question wording was changed to “our country.”

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 18-April 1, 2020.

“A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

From Pew Research Center. (July 2020). *A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality*. [Diagrams]. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/06/PDST_07.07.20_19thamendment.FULLREPORT.pdf

In summary, the political environment could have changed over the last few years, since the representation of GAL values has decreased, at least regarding views on trans rights, DEI programs, and immigration. However, this was not significant concerning the perception of climate policies, gender equality, and same-sex marriage.

Discussion:

Political ideology

My analysis of Mark Zuckerberg's political ideology between 2016-2020 and 2021-2024 indicates a transformation in GAL-TAN values. At least, a shift seems to have happened since 2023, where his statements indicated less alignment with GAL attitudes and instead increased support for TAN values. However, the total number of posts containing a GAL or TAN value has decreased since 2019, and most of Zuckerberg's TAN-coded sentences were declarations of his appreciation for his family, which remain a constant element within his Facebook posts. This becomes relevant as the years lacking data, such as 2018 and 2021-2024, show a theme of mostly TAN values. It could mean he continues to express admiration for his family, even if he doesn't produce other significant political posts. Therefore, I do not interpret the result as an increase in alignment regarding TAN-values. Instead, I view the result as a decrease in political statements overall, and that he has become less vocal regarding support for environmentalism, gender equality, LGBTQ rights, pro-immigration, diversity, and personal freedom.

Why Zuckerberg has uploaded fewer Facebook posts indicating different values, according to the GAL-TAN scale, is difficult to assess. It could be out of uncertainty about who would become the next elected president and him trying to stay neutral. Another perspective is that the shift may relate to changes in the political environment, where he either directly or indirectly has followed the general public opinion regarding certain issues. Zuckerberg could have been weighing political risks and opportunities and evaluating his statements to gain political objectives, similar to what Brown et al. (2022) discussed regarding corporations' view of the political environment. Therefore, there could be an overlap between the antecedents of CPA at the individual and the societal level, making individual-level factors act as intermediaries influenced by broader societal factors.

Whether Zuckerberg explicitly expressed his values or the company's stance was unclear in the material. It led me to analyze sentences that included 'I', 'we', or no pronoun at all. The line between Zuckerberg's and Meta's values could be rather blurred, due to his being the head

of the company. This ambiguity may complicate the assessment of his opinions and be a setback to both the material and the result. To better capture his political ideology, interviews could provide additional insights. However, if he is generally reserved in expressing political sympathies, it could be difficult to form a complete picture. His earlier Facebook posts do reveal insights into his perspectives on vaccines, free market structures, charity work, globalization, and potential support for political candidates. Thus, one could further analyze the material with a broader analytical framework than GAL-TAN values to thoroughly understand his political opinions. Nonetheless, due to my time constraints, I decided to focus primarily on GAL-TAN values, as they offered more data for me to analyze.

What does this provide for theoretical and practical implications? According to the agency theory, the CEO of a firm could make important decisions that affect the company, since they have been delegated power from the stakeholders (Mellahi et al., 2016). A manager's personal political views could influence the decisions regarding the company, because they have a degree of discretion and may act according to their interest (Chin et al., 2013). Relating to my hypothesis, where a change in CPA could be attributed to a transformation in Zuckerberg's political ideology, my result does show a shift in political ideology: a decrease in GAL values. This could therefore be attributed to the change in CPA.

Is a decrease in expressed support for GAL values enough of a link for the change in CPA? Would it have been clearer if he had explicitly shown a negative tone regarding GAL values, such as anti-immigration or restriction of LGBTQ rights? Probably, but still, it indicates that it is not as important for him to state his support for GAL values anymore, and this may have, at least partly, affected the company's decisions, for instance, regarding the removal of DEI programs.

Regulatory Burden

Regarding Meta's perception of regulations, the results show that the regulatory burden has changed for the company and that there is a clear difference between 2016-2020 and 2021-2024. The view on regulations has become more negative since 2021, and there is a profound difference compared to 2020. Even though the data was scarce from 2016 to 2018, the lack of data could signify that regulations were either not considered a problem or a benefit during

those years. Adding to this interpretation is that the overall amount of mentions of regulations, both in positive and negative tone, has increased over the years. This could be because Meta progressively needs to address laws and legal procedures, and it has become a more prominent subject for them.

A probable explanation for the change of tone towards regulation could be the increase in EU laws. For instance, one of the most prominent regulations relevant to Big Tech within these years is the General Data Protection Regulation that was signed in 2016, but was applicable first in 2018 (European Commission, n.d.). In addition, other significant laws are the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act, signed in 2022 but entered into force first in 2024 (European Commission, 2025). These regulations have meant that tech companies like Meta have had to modify their policies and measures to ensure compliance. This is frequently referenced in the news announcements from Meta.

In recent years, Meta has further encountered antitrust investigations, laws, and lawsuits from multiple countries other than the EU, such as Canada and the USA. These legal procedures are typically depicted as a burden or framed negatively by Meta. Yet, the company and Mark Zuckerberg continue to encourage more regulation in at least four areas: data portability, harmful content, elections, and privacy. This is probably because, as they have grown as a company, they have had to consider multiple issues, such as elections, where clearer and cohesive regulation would create a framework for them when handling troubling decisions. This is aligned with Hillman et al. (2004), who discuss the importance of a firm's size for the company's CPA.

According to my hypothesis, a change in the perception of regulatory burden could be attributed to the transformed CPA, and the result showed an increased negative perception of regulation. As Hillman et al. (2004) discuss, a corporation could depend on resources from the government. If the company additionally faces regulatory burdens, Lux et al. (2011) mention that it could stimulate political activity, as they may seek to lower the associated costs. This suggests that Meta has changed their CPA and warmed up to Trump because they feel dependent on the US government to help them with their regulatory pressures or, at least, avoid further constraints typically imposed by legislation or other legal procedures. Potentially, this could have led Meta to settle the lawsuit with Trump over their ban of him on social media. However, could Meta's news announcements fully capture their view on

regulations? Would it have been better to examine testimonies in court or other legal documents? It is hard to say; it could have given a broader perspective of their view on regulations, or it would only have portrayed their negative perception, as it would often be their answer to legal procedures targeted against them.

Even though I coded sentences based on their neutral position regarding regulations and mentions of measures taken to comply with the laws, I did not count them or examine if they had increased or decreased in number. Perhaps the number of these sentences could give a fuller picture, but I chose to only focus on the dichotomous coding of positive and negative tone because of simplicity and time constraints.

Political environment

The result concerning the political environment could indicate a shift in public opinion, with less support for GAL values when comparing the 2021-2024 period with 2016-2020. Since the opinions regarding some issues have remained stable, like climate policies and same-sex marriage, or even increased the support for GAL values, such as for gender equality, the result could also be seen as unclear. Still, regarding issues in favor of DEI programs, immigration, and trans rights, the results show a clear decrease in support for these GAL values. Does it count as a changed political environment if only some aspects of GAL values have received less support among Americans?

One could interpret the result that some of the GAL values have increasingly become mainstream values, like gender equality, and therefore remain rather stable within public opinion. Whereas issues regarding trans rights and immigration are polarizing subjects and are seen as controversial in the public debate. This could explain why there is a shift in the political environment regarding only a few of the GAL values. According to Inglehart and Norris (2017), there has been an intergenerational cultural backlash against the development of progressive values. Because of unequal distribution of resources, flows of immigrants, and growing insecurity of employment, people are increasingly aligned with xenophobic, populist, and authoritarian values. This clashes with younger generations who, due to their economic stability, have been able to favor post-material values like climate concern.

Therefore, regarding the more controversial topics, the result could be considered a transformation in public opinion and aligning with my hypothesis that indicates that a shift in the political environment could be attributed to the change in CPA. A changed political

environment could mean that for Meta to gain legitimacy from institutional actors (Mellahi et al., 2016), like the executive or civil society, they might have needed to act according to these actors' interests. This potentially led to their decision to remove DEI programs. However, the decrease in support for GAL values favors attitudes aligned with TAN. Due to the Republican Party, typically aligned with traditional social values and nationalistic sympathies, as shown by my result, now holding a majority in the Congress (Yourish et al., 2025), there is a possibility that Meta has, because of the changed political environment, increased their proximity to the Republican Party. This could potentially explain the appointed Republicans within the company, but maybe other favors to Trump as well, such as the inauguration donation or the removal of the ban.

Still, on every level of antecedents of CPA, I have not been able to test additional explanations for the change of CPA that could be relevant. This is a limitation of my study, since it would be interesting to see the effect of, for instance, other Big Tech companies' influence on Meta's CPA or the personal relationship between Trump and Zuckerberg, which could include corruptive behaviors, threats, or a genuine friendship. There is also a potential overlap between the individual and societal level of antecedents of CPA, which problematizes the independent effect of Zuckerberg's change of political ideology, since it may only be affected by changes in the political environment. In addition, my examination of the political environment is limited since I only analyzed reports from Pew Research and did not use their datasets, investigating the development of certain issues myself. Regarding the content analysis on the individual and firm levels, I did robustness checks by recounting the sentences and tried to be as consistent as possible to make the result more reliable and valid. However, concerning the political environment, I did not compare the result from Pew Research to other sources like the American National Election Studies, which could have affected the result and made the material less thorough, and this is a limitation of my study due to time constraints.

In summary, I consider the result to point most clearly to the effect of an increased negative tone regarding regulations. The result showed a distinct difference between the two periods, where the negative tone regarding a regulatory burden has increased, paired with Meta's rise in mentioning regulations overall in recent years. Their growing negative concern about regulations could therefore be attributed to Meta's changed CPA. However, the result shows

indications for both the effect of the changes in political ideology and the political environment that would justify the change in CPA. Still, the results for these mechanisms are both less clear and robust since they may be interconnected.

Conclusion:

In this study, I have tried to answer the question: *Why has Meta's political activity in the last decade changed?* This was done by doing a comparative case study of Meta's political activity in 2016-2020 compared to 2021-2025, and by testing three hypotheses based on theories about antecedents of CPA. I examined Facebook Posts of Meta's CEO Mark Zuckerberg, news announcements of the company, and public opinion reports from Pew Research. The analysis was based on an analysis scheme that divided the antecedents of CPA into three structural levels: individual, firm, and societal.

The result of my study indicates the clearest change in Meta's perception of a regulatory burden between 2016-2020 and 2021-2024, which has become more negative during recent years. Possibly, this negative perception of regulation could be attributed to the change in Meta's CPA. Still, my result does indicate that the political environment could have shifted, at least regarding controversial GAL values, and it may also have affected their changed political activity. Zuckerberg's decrease in political statements and less expressed support for GAL values could perhaps explain some aspects of the change in CPA. However, the changes in Zuckerberg's political ideology are most likely dependent on the transformations in the political environment, making it difficult to assess the independent impact of the individual-level antecedent. Therefore, I consider the clearest result of my study to be the effect of the increased negative tone on Meta's regulatory burden.

My main limitation of this paper is that I examined one Big Tech company, even though this closer relationship to Trump may be a common theme among other tech corporations. Another possible setback is that I, because of time constraints, only tested three antecedents of CPA, while multiple mechanisms could have affected Meta's change in political activity. Lastly, the focus has consistently been on explanations affecting Meta's behavior and not considering eventual mechanisms that could have affected Trump to change his behavior towards Big Tech.

For future research, I recommend empirical and statistical analysis of other Big Tech companies. The different variables tested could be their lobbying, donations, CSR policies, and personal strategies. By investigating these factors, it could clearly indicate if there is a trend among Big Tech to warm up to Trump and compare their closeness to the executive. Additionally, I think it would be valuable to examine other antecedents within a similar study to this one, testing the three different structural levels of antecedents of CPA.

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Appendix:

Table 3: Summary of the method and coding of Zuckerberg's political ideology

Antecedent of CPA	Source	Operationalization	Measurement GAL values	Measurement TAN values
Political ideology	Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook Posts	GAL-TAN values	<p>G = Environmentalism, support for measures fighting climate change or conserving nature</p> <p>A = Alternative social values, support for diversity and LGBTQ, multiculturalism, pro-immigration, or gender equality</p> <p>L = Support for civil rights or personal freedom</p>	<p>T = Traditional social values, support for family or traditions</p> <p>A = Support for state authority, law and order, state intervention or regulations</p> <p>N = Support for anti-immigration, protectionism or nationalism</p>

Example of a coded Facebook Post:

GAL value

TAN value

(Max is one of Zuckerberg's daughters)

28th of December 2016

A few years ago, Priscilla and I visited Kauai and fell in love with the community and the cloudy green mountains. We kept coming back with family and friends, and eventually decided to plant roots and join the community ourselves. We bought land and we're dedicated to preserving its natural beauty. It's filled with wildlife like pigs, turtles, rare birds and seals, and local farmers use it to grow fruits and spices. I love taking Max to explore and see all the animals.

Table 4: Summary of the method and coding of Meta's perception of regulatory burden

Antecedent of CPA	Source	Operationalization	Measurement	Measurement
			Positive tone	Negative tone
Regulatory burden	Meta's news announcements	Positive/ negative tone of regulations, laws or legal procedures	Positive tone = Promoting more, increased or updated regulation. Support for legislation, showing commitment to regulation, or portrays regulation with advantages. Positive language regarding legal procedures	Negative tone = Expressing disappointment, disapproval or portraying laws regulation as a burden or in need of a lot of work for compliance. Mentioning regulations as unfairness, a hinder, or an obstacle. Appealing a legal decision, receiving a fine or lawsuit. Negative language regarding legal procedures.

Example of a coded news announcement:

Positive tone

Negative tone

August 22, 2023

New Features and Additional Transparency Measures as the Digital Services Act Comes Into Effect

Takeaways

Meta welcomes the principles of transparency, accountability and user empowerment at the heart of the DSA.

We've introduced additional transparency measures and user options as part of our ongoing commitment to meeting our regulatory obligations.

The DSA is in keeping with our long-standing record of openness around our policies, processes and enforcement.

Later this month, the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA), one of the most comprehensive pieces of internet regulation, will begin to fully apply to Facebook, Instagram and a number of other tech platforms and services. It is a big deal not just for European tech companies but for all tech companies that operate in the EU, and it will have a significant impact on the experiences Europeans have when they open their phones or fire up their laptops.

Meta has long advocated for a harmonised regulatory regime that effectively protects people's rights online, while continuing to enable innovation. For this reason, we welcome the ambition for greater transparency, accountability and user empowerment that sits at the heart of regulations like the DSA, GDPR, and the ePrivacy Directive. The DSA in particular provides greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of online platforms and it is right to seek to hold large platforms like ours to account through things like reporting and auditing, rather than attempting to micromanage individual pieces of content.

We've been working hard since the DSA came into force last November to respond to these new rules and adapt the existing safety and integrity systems and processes we have in place in many of the areas regulated by the DSA. We assembled one of the largest cross-functional teams in our history, with over 1,000 people currently working on the DSA, to develop solutions to the DSA's requirements. These include measures to increase transparency about how our systems work, and to give people more options to tailor their experiences on Facebook and Instagram. We have also established a new, independent compliance function to help us meet our regulatory obligations on an ongoing basis.

Building on Our Industry-leading Ads Transparency and Protections

We were the first platform to put in place ads transparency tools and, for many years, we've provided industry-leading transparency for social issue, electoral and political ads. We are now building on that by expanding our Ad Library to display and archive all ads that target people in the EU, along with dates the ad ran, the parameters used for targeting (e.g., age, gender, location), who was served the ad, and more. These ads will be stored in our public Ad Library for a year, so anyone, anywhere, can better understand every ad that's run in the EU.

As part of our continued work to keep our apps age-appropriate for teens, we've also made changes to their ads experience on our platforms. Since February, teens aged 13-17 globally no longer see advertising based on their activity on our apps — like following certain Instagram posts or Facebook pages. Age and location is now the only information about teens that advertisers can use to show them ads.

Giving People More Information About How Our Platforms Work

We're providing an unprecedented level of insight into how our AI systems rank content by releasing 22 system cards for Facebook and Instagram. These cards provide information about how our AI systems rank content for Feed, Reels, Stories, and other surfaces; some of the predictions each system makes to determine what content might be most relevant to people; and the options available to help customise an experience on Facebook and Instagram. These build on our long-standing "Why Am I Seeing This" feature, which allows people to see details directly in our apps about why our systems predicted that specific content would be relevant to them, and the types of activity and inputs that may have led to that prediction.

We're also rolling out two new tools for researchers – the Meta Content Library and API. The library includes publicly available content from Pages, Posts, Groups and Events on Facebook, as well as publicly available content from creator and business accounts on Instagram. Researchers will be able to search, explore, and filter the publicly available content on a graphical User Interface (UI) or through a programmatic API. These tools will provide the most comprehensive access to publicly-available content across Facebook and Instagram of any research tool we have built to date.

Giving People More Control Over Their Experiences on Facebook and Instagram

As well as additional transparency, we're also providing people with more options to help tailor what they see on Facebook and Instagram. I've written previously about our AI ranking and recommendation processes, which help you see content we think you'll find most meaningful and reduce the distribution of problematic content, so you're less likely to come across it. We're now giving our European community the option to view and discover content on Reels, Stories, Search and other parts of Facebook and Instagram that is not ranked by Meta using these systems. For example, on Facebook and Instagram, users will have the option to view Stories and Reels only from people they follow, ranked in

chronological order, newest to oldest. They will also be able to view Search results based only on the words they enter, rather than personalised specifically to them based on their previous activity and personal interests.

For a number of years, in addition to reporting options for content that might violate our Community Standards and Guidelines, we've also had dedicated reporting tools for illegal content. We've now made those tools even easier for people to access. And while we already notify people when we remove a piece of their content, and typically give them the chance to appeal, we'll now provide this information to people in the EU for a broader range of content moderation decisions. This includes when we apply feature limits to people's accounts and when we restrict content for violating local law.

The Future of Harmonised Regulation

From early on, we've been supportive of the objectives of the DSA and the creation of a regulatory regime in Europe that minimises harm effectively, protects and empowers people, and upholds their fundamental rights. The hard work of creating these pioneering new rules has come to an end, and the process of implementing them has begun. In this new regulatory environment, it is critical that the DSA now maintains its primacy over existing and new national laws, to protect the clarity it has created for services, maintain consistency in the way tech companies are held to account, and preserve the harmonious way people experience our platforms across the region. A strong and open digital single market is of vital importance to the competitiveness of Europe as a whole, and we will continue to work closely with European policymakers and regulators in support of this shared vision.