

# US lawmakers urge Meta to delay shutting down transparency tool

July 25 2024, by Anuj CHOPRA

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Meta is killing off CrowdTangle in a crucial election year.

US lawmakers voiced "concern" Wednesday over Meta's decision to shut down CrowdTangle—a digital tool considered vital in monitoring falsehoods -- in a major election year, urging the tech giant to delay the

move by six months.

The Palo Alto company has said CrowdTangle will be unavailable after August 14—less than three months before the US election.

Meta plans to replace it with a new [tool](#) that researchers say lacks the same functionality, and which many [news organizations](#) will not have access to.

"We write with concern about Meta's announced plan to end access" to the "powerful transparency tool," a group of bipartisan lawmakers wrote in a letter to Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg.

"We urge Meta to, at a minimum, postpone this plan for six months and provide further information about its plans and commitment to ensure sufficient transparency for independent research going forward."

The letter seen by AFP was signed by 17 lawmakers -- on both sides of the political aisle -- including senators Chris Coons (Democrat) and Bill Cassidy (Republican) as well as representatives Lori Trahan (Democrat) and Neal Dunn (Republican).

CrowdTangle has been a game-changer for years, offering researchers and journalists crucial real-time transparency into the spread of conspiracy theories and hate speech on influential Meta-owned platforms, including Facebook and Instagram.

Meta is set to replace CrowdTangle with a new Content Library, a technology still under development.

It's a tool that some in the [tech industry](#), including former CrowdTangle chief executive Brandon Silverman, say is currently not an effective replacement, especially in elections likely to see a proliferation of

falsehoods enabled by artificial intelligence.

"We are deeply concerned that Meta Content Library has significant limitations that make it an inadequate replacement for CrowdTangle at the current time," the lawmakers wrote.

"There are also questions of how many organizations will have access to and the practical ability to use Meta Content Library if CrowdTangle access is ended."

There was no immediate comment from Meta.

Organizations that debunk misinformation as part of Meta's third-party fact-checking program, including AFP, will have access to the Content Library.

But the tech giant, which has been moving away from news across its platforms, will not make the new tool accessible to for-profit media.

Journalists have used CrowdTangle in the past to investigate public health crises as well as human rights abuses and natural disasters.

Killing off the tool is seen as a major blow in a year when dozens of countries are holding elections—a period when bad actors typically spread false narratives more than ever.

Earlier this year, global nonprofit Mozilla Foundation voiced alarm in an [open letter](#) to Meta that was signed by dozens of tech watchdogs and researchers.

Decommissioning CrowdTangle would be a "direct threat" to the integrity of elections, the letter warned, calling on Meta to retain CrowdTangle at least until January 2025.

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Citation: US lawmakers urge Meta to delay shutting down transparency tool (2024, July 25)  
retrieved 26 July 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-07-lawmakers-urge-meta-delay-transparency.html>

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