

THE PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY ACT

The Platform Accountability and Transparency Act (PATA) is a bipartisan proposal that would require social media companies to share more data with the public and researchers. The bill is designed to foster a better understanding of the impact these platforms have on children, families, national security, and society more broadly by producing reliable information about large social media companies and their design choices.

BILL SUMMARY

PATA would create three new mechanisms to increase transparency around social media companies:

- 1) Researcher-specific data access. Under PATA, independent researchers would be able to submit proposals to study social media companies to the National Science Foundation, which is an independent agency that promotes scientific inquiry by approving research and development proposals. If a researcher's request is approved, platforms would be required to provide the necessary data for the study, subject to privacy and cybersecurity protections.
- 2) Limited legal safe harbor for automated data collection. The safe harbor would prevent social media companies from suing or criminally accusing public interest researchers who use automated means to collect public-facing platform information, so long as the researcher uses appropriate privacy safeguards for the data they collect. Companies would not be prevented from taking any technical measures to secure their platforms or stop this kind of data collection, but they would not be able to hold researchers liable for contract violations or threaten potential criminal liability if the research meets the prescribed conditions. Researchers report that the possibility of such liability is a significant obstacle to their ability to analyze platform behavior.
- 3) Enhanced transparency through disclosures. PATA would require covered platforms to disclose certain information that would provide a much stronger understanding of what is happening on platforms that is currently shrouded from view. Specifically, platforms would be required to report information about:
 - a. Viral content. Metrics about content that has gone viral or has been distributed from major public accounts, *e.g.*, data about the extent of dissemination, engagement, audience, and whether the content was recommended, amplified, or restricted.
 - b. Ad library. Information about advertisers and ads they have run, and metrics about dissemination, reach, engagement, and targeting criteria.
 - c. Algorithmic design. A semiannual description of the data used as inputs in ranking or recommendation algorithms and how that data affects the algorithm's output; information about each algorithm's optimization objective; information about how content is scored or ranked; and information about how companies assess new products.
 - d. Content moderation. Statistics about content that a platform took action against, broken down by the categories like the policy that was violated; geographic and demographic factors; data about the number of times violating content was viewed; information about how violating content was identified; the extent to which violating content was recommended, amplified, or restricted; and estimates about the prevalence of violating content.