

# Reddit's American Political Left-Wing Bias: A Study of the Top 100 Posts from September 12-21, 2024

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective** – Reddit is an online forum where users vote for posts and comments and the most supported content rises to the top. The objective is to investigate the American political leanings of the top 100 posts over 10 days.

**Methods** – The state of Reddit is in constant flux. Rather than a precise snapshot in time, one individual, reading each post and the first 3 pages of comments, subjectively determined if the post was supportive or against a political party, a political figure, or the party's supporters. For comparison, LGBT and animal/insect posts were also recorded. The top 25 posts and top 100 posts were calculated separately. The study was carried out 8am to 10am (UTC/GMT +7 hours) September 12-21, 2024.

**Results** – Based on the top 100 posts over the 10 days (1000 posts total), 224 posts were Pro-Left/Anti-Right and 2 posts were Pro-Right/Anti-Left (99.1% left leaning). Most political posts were negative (85.4%). The density of political posts was higher within the top 25 posts ( $p < 0.0001$ ). For comparison, there were 64 posts about animals/insects and 22 posts were Pro-LGBT (9 Pro-Trans/Non-Binary) with no Anti-LGBT posts.

**Conclusion** – There is a strong Pro-Left/Anti-Right bias to the top 100 posts of Reddit with 112x more posts (99.1%) favoring the American Left Wing compared to the Right. The consistent appearance of supportive LGBT posts within top 100 posts suggest the majority of the Reddit community is supportive of the LGBT community. This study may be considered as a preliminary or a pilot study due to the limited timeframe (10 days) and the high risk of bias (one post reviewer).

**Keywords:** Reddit, LGBT, Trump, Kamala, Democrat, Republican

## INTRODUCTION

Reddit is a forum website. Members can post and comment on posts in various community forums. Members can vote up or vote down posts and comments. The top comments and posts rise to the top of each forum. The algorithm also takes into account the time elapsed for posts and that negatively factors into a posts position keeping the top posts more recent. As of June 2024, it has 91M+ daily active unique users, 342M+ weekly active unique users, 100k+ active communities (called subreddits), and 16B+ posts and comments (Reddit, Inc., 2024).

Reddit has mechanisms to enforce its content policies, “Everyone has a right to use Reddit free of harassment, bullying, and threats of violence. Communities and users that incite violence or that promote hate based on identity or vulnerability will be banned.” Over 2000 communities have been banned including the prominent Pro-Trump subreddit, r/The\_Donald (Lima, 2020). Subreddits have also been quarantined (reduced visibility) and/or banned for anti-trans or general anti-LGBT posts and comments. Despite banning subreddits and user accounts, an article as recent as 2021 reports direct trans user harassment was still occurring and Reddit produced the following statement, “we quickly banned the accounts in violation and are installing mechanisms to prevent this from happening in the future” (Alford, 2021). Users can move to, or create, other subreddits and other researchers have written about predicting the banning of subreddits (Habib, Srinivasan, & and Nithyanand, 2022) and the migration of users from banned subreddits to other subreddits (Hickey, Fessler, & Lerma, 2024).

There has been a rise in Right-wing and “free-speech” online social websites to compete with Reddit, Facebook, and Twitter such as Gab, Parler, and Truth Social who promise little to no censorship; Truth Social is partially owned by Donald Trump himself (Goldstein & Mac, 2022). With Right-wing and “free-speech” focused alternatives and the banning of relevant subreddits and users is it possible that the top posts of Reddit are free of Right-wing and anti-LGBT content? Have those users left in sufficient quantities such that the top posts of Reddit have become a Left-wing echo chamber? This research aims to investigate the political leaning of the top posts. In addition, it investigates LGBT posts and animal/insect posts. The LGBT posts were included due to Reddit’s history of anti-LGBT content and efforts to eliminate it. LGBT posts could also be considered a Left versus Right issue as the Republicans are commonly seen as anti-LGBT (Beran, 2024). Animal and insect posts appear consistently on reddit so the inclusion gives context as to whether these political posts are more or less common than posts about cats, dogs, and other animals/insects.

Reddit poses particular challenges in research. While, by accessing the Application Programming Interface (API), a huge amount of instantaneous information can be accessed – Every post, every post’s ranking, every comment, and every comment by a particular user (Baumgartner, Zannettou, Keegan, Squire, & Blackburn, 2020). It is in constant flux. One person’s experience may be different than another’s just by scrolling the website hours apart. How to analyze posts and comments objectively? Do you train an AI model (Hickey, Fessler, & Lerma, 2024)? Often models limit themselves to the text, but that removes context: posts are often images and videos. Does their model understand sarcasm or jokes? Are poorly performing posts or comments relevant to research if the posts or comments can only be found after scrolling through literally thousands of others? And even for research that attempts to be objective through the use of algorithms and AI, there is often a human element. In (Hickey, Fessler, & Lerma, 2024), they had one author read ten random posts and comments from each subreddit to determine whether to categorize it as hateful or not. This research into political leanings of Reddit is not unique. (Valentin Hofmann, 2022) created the “Reddit Politosphere”, a dataset covering 12 years of over 600 political subreddit data for researchers to use. But that dataset excludes the fact that posts with political leanings may be posted in any subreddit and it again relies on text analysis.

## METHODS

A decision was made to mimic the Reddit experience rather than rely on analysing a dataset. Posts were evaluated by one individual over the same time frame each day, including reading approximately the first 3 screen lengths of comments. The top 100 Posts over 10 days were included for a total of 1000 posts. The subreddits that are included on the front page of Reddit can be customized. The user was not logged in (no customization) and viewed posts under the “all” option so that all subreddit content was included. Posts were sorted into the following categories: Anti-Trump/Vance, Other Anti-Right Wing, Pro Kamala/Waltz, Other Pro-Left Wing, Pro-LGBT, Exclusively Pro-Trans/Non-Binary, Cats, Dogs, Other animals/insects, Pro Trump/Vance, Other Pro-Right Wing, Anti-Kamala/Waltz, Other Anti-Left Wing, Anti-LGBT, Exclusively Pro-Trans/Non-Binary.

If a post is about both the presidential candidate/running-mate and their followers, they were to place that post in the Trump or Harris categories. If the impression of a post title, image, or subreddit name disagrees with the majority of the discussion of the comments, then they were to side with the comments. For example, if a post from the r/tiktokcringe (a subreddit devoted to mocking individuals in the posted videos for being “cringe”) were to feature Kamala that may be interpreted as Anti-Kamala, but then the majority of top comments were encouraging people to vote for Kamala then it would be categorized as Pro-Kamala. If the reviewer could not decide (equal posts supporting both sides), then they were to not categorize the post at all. What constitutes criticizing? What constitutes a funny picture meant to support a candidate from one designed to mock them? What constitutes a majority of the comments? Ultimately, these are subjective decisions made by the post reviewer. Also note that the LGBT contains the Trans posts as well, with intent to capture the % of LGBT posts that were trans/non-binary focused. Posts normalizing LGBT lifestyles (featuring LGBT individuals but not necessarily focusing on any LGBT issue) were also included in the Pro category. The top 25 posts and top 100 posts were recorded separately. The study was carried out 8am to 10am (UTC/GMT +7 hours) September 12-21, 2024.

The Reviewer is Canadian and has never voted. He has lived in the United States 2016 until 2020 as a student. He is currently a 39-year-old health professional living in Indonesia. He does not regularly consume American mainstream media and reports getting the majority of his American news through the Youtube channels, “America Uncovered” and “Some More News.” His score on the political compass was 0 on the economic left/right axis and -2.36 on the libertarian/authoritarian axis (Pace News Ltd., 2024). He self-identified his political leanings as: “fiscally conservative and a little libertarian.”

## RESULTS

Table 1 and 2 contain the data for the top 25 and top 100 posts per day, respectively. They also contain the total posts and the average % of posts per day with the corresponding standard deviation. This average percentage will allow for comparison of the posting rate between the top 25 versus the top 100 posts. Looking at the LGBT posts over the 10 days: 9 out of 22 were specifically pro-trans/non-binary with no anti-LGBT posts.

**Table 1: The Number of Posts Per Day in Each Category Within the Top 25 Posts**

	2024-09-12	2024-09-13	2024-09-14	2024-09-15	2024-09-16	2024-09-17	2024-09-18	2024-09-19	2024-09-20	2024-09-21	Total	Average % of Posts	Standard Deviation
<b>Anti-Trump/Vance</b>	2	8	2	1	11	2	2	2	2	0	32	12.8	38.8
<b>Other Anti-Right Wing</b>	3	0	5	4	1	3	3	3	5	2	29	11.6	6.4
<b>Pro Kamala/Waltz</b>	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	0	2	16	6.4	3.4
<b>Other Pro-Left Wing</b>	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.8	2.5
<b>Exclusively Pro-Trans/Non-Binary</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0.8	2.5
<b>Pro-LGBT</b>	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	0	0	8	3.2	4.9
<b>Cats</b>	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	1.2	1.9
<b>Dogs</b>	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1.2	2.7
<b>Other animals/insects</b>	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	1.6	2.8
<b>Pro Trump/Vance</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Other Pro-</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>Right Wing</b>													
<b>Anti-Kamala/Waltz</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Other Anti-Left Wing</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Anti-LGBT</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 2: The Number of Posts Per Day in Each Category Within the Top 100 Posts**

	2024-09-12	2024-09-13	2024-09-14	2024-09-15	2024-09-16	2024-09-17	2024-09-18	2024-09-19	2024-09-20	2024-09-21	Total	Average % of Posts	Standard Deviation
<b>Anti-Trump/Vance</b>	13	16	10	11	19	12	8	10	6	6	111	11.1	4.1
<b>Other Anti-Right Wing</b>	6	6	12	5	3	12	8	6	13	9	80	8	3.4
<b>Pro Kamala/Waltz</b>	5	4	4	2	1	2	6	2	0	3	29	2.9	1.9
<b>Other Pro-Left Wing</b>	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0.4	1.3
<b>Exclusively Pro-Trans/Non-Binary</b>	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0.9	1.0
<b>Pro-LGBT</b>	3	1	2	2	3	4	2	4	0	1	22	2.2	1.3
<b>Cats</b>	2	2	2	2	4	0	6	4	5	3	30	3	1.8
<b>Dogs</b>	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	13	1.3	1.1
<b>Other animals/insects</b>	4	1	2	3	2	0	2	3	1	3	21	2.1	1.2
<b>Pro Trump/Vance</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
<b>Other Pro-Right Wing</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

<b>Anti-Kamala/Waltz</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.1	0.3
<b>Other Anti-Left Wing</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.1	0.3
<b>Anti-LGBT</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

Table 3 contains simplified combined categories, combining posts of similar purpose and political leaning such as combining Anti-Right with Anti Trump/Vance. It also separates the posts into whether they were positive (pro) or negative (anti) in nature. All the Right leaning posts were negative in nature: there were no posts that were positive about the Right, only 2 posts were negative about the Left. For the Left leaning posts, 85.3% of posts were negative towards the Right and only 14.7% positive about the Left. In total, negative political posts made up 85.4% of political posts.

**Table 3: Combined Categories with number of Positive or Negative Posts as well as the Total for Each Category Over the 10 Days**

	Positive	Negative	Total
<b>Pro-Right/Anti-Left</b>	0	2	2
<b>Pro-Left/Anti-Right</b>	33	191	224
<b>Animals</b>	64	0	64
<b>Trans</b>	9	0	9
<b>LGBT</b>	22	0	22

Figure 1 compares the average percent of posts for the top 25 posts per day with the top 100 posts per day. There is a larger percentage of Left leaning posts within the first 25 posts per day, but consider the large standard deviations which means there is a large variance between days for the top 25 posts. There were no Right leaning posts in the first 25 posts per day. Overall, the concentration of political posts is higher in the first 25 posts per day (two-tailed comparison of means,  $p < 0.0001$ ).

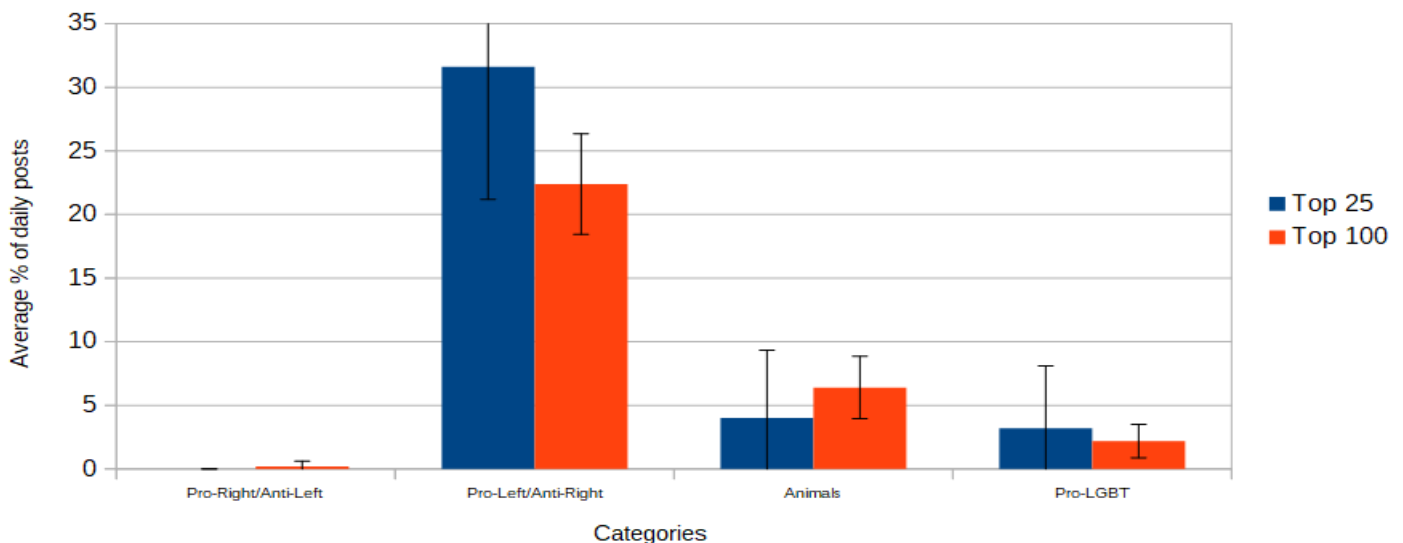


Figure 1: A Bar chart comparing the average percent of posts for various categories between the Top 25 Posts with the Top 100 Posts. The error bars represent the standard deviation.

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## DISCUSSION

The fact only one individual subjectively evaluated each post introduces a large source of bias. As such, this could be viewed as a preliminary or pilot study and future studies could employ a group. But, should the group be evaluating the identical posts? Should they just use Reddit, as was done in this study, at their own pace where posts and comments will move up and down the rankings as time passes. This is an intrinsic difficulty in trying to study Reddit due to its ephemeral, ever changing nature. How do you capture the state of something like Reddit at a point of time other than through a study like this? Some of this bias could be alleviated through a dataset text analysis but that also contains bias as the researchers must subjectively categorize words and subreddits. Since a human is examining each post including the link, video, or image, and not just text, an intent can be inferred, where as a computer program may only interpret text. In terms of political biases, the one reviewer may hold one that influenced the results. Future work could examine how political biases influence the categorization of posts (political compass score, party affiliation, news media consumption, etc.).

There is a significant imbalance of Left versus Right with 224 Left leaning and just 2 Right leaning: 99.1% favor the Left. It should be noted, “-leaning” includes negative posts/comments towards the other political side. So, despite there being 2 Right leaning posts there were no posts actually supportive of Trump, the Republican party, Trump supporters, or prominent Right-wing political figures. Also, there were 22 pro-LGBT posts and no negative LGBT posts. There might be anti-LGBT posts and posts that support Trump but they aren’t being found within the top 100 posts. If they exist, they aren’t being upvoted and/or are being down voted. This would suggest the majority of Reddit users supports the Left and supports the LGBT community. Without exposure to alternative viewpoints and opinions it could be argued that Reddit has become a Left-Wing echo chamber. This research was only focused on the top 100 posts. People could search out alternative views, if they still exist, within subreddit communities. That is beyond the scope of this report. Work by Cinelli (2021) found that users congregate to like minded content and, at the time, they found that Facebook was more of an echo chamber compared to Reddit. The America Political Left leaning bias may be partially attributable to demographics rather than a platform bias. Only 14% of Reddit users are 50 or older (Sidoti, 2024). American’s younger than 50 tend to lean Democrat and those 50 and older tend to lean Republican (Pew Research Centre, 2024). The largest inequality being in the 18-24 group with 66% leaning Democrat. The imbalance is insufficient to fully explain the 99.1% imbalance found in this study.

Most posts were negative towards the opposite side rather than supportive. There were 193 (85.4%) negative political posts. This is an incidental finding that may be worth investigating further as the negativity could have an effect on the reader’s mental health. Anger seems to strengthen the echo-chamber effect (Wollebæk, 2019). Negative posts also result in fostering negative thoughts in the reader and can result in the dehumanizing of others (Cuncic, 2022). When prompted for comment, the reviewer said, “It was easy at first but when I got to the eighth day, I caught myself jumping to conclusions and I had to put in a lot more brain power to stay objective. I didn’t think it was going to be so bad, but I consider it a deeply unpleasant experience and I don’t want to see Reddit ever again.” In future work, entry and exit surveys could be included to evaluate any effect reading the posts may have.

The results may only reflect the moment in time from September 12-21, 2024. It is an election year in the United States with the election date set for November 5, 2024. There was also a debate between the presidential nominees on September 10, 2024. The prevalence of American political posts may be exaggerated. While the results of this study may not hold true in general, it may be fascinating to compare short- and long-term trends in future work similar to what’s presented here or in text analysis work.

The increase in political posts in the first 25 posts compared with the top 100 suggests these posts are upvoted more often which may be only due to the election season. The posts were examined at the same time of day each day. What about morning versus evening? Should future work allow the post reviewer to evaluate Reddit at their convenience each day? Posts could be evaluated independently, then data analysis could investigate the position of those posts at different times of day, but that might not reflect the state of the comments as encountered at different times of day.

Only the top posts and comments are examined, with the intention that only the posts most likely to be seen by users are included instead of all posts/comments. This may be flawed as the top posts may change drastically, particularly when a post initially has few comments: the #1 comment for one individual when there were only 5 comments could end up as comment #4790 later that day. Also, is reading 3 pages a reasonable number of comments for this study? In reality, people read more comments if they are interested and scroll by a post while reading no comments if they are not? Many Reddit users also customize their experience and may sort comments by best, top, new, old, and q&a. Many may never view the top posts and they may just frequent their favorite subreddits. There is no guarantee that a dataset study that includes all posts and comments will reflect a user experience either, as users are not reading every post and every comment. There may be no way to have a definitive, and useful, objective analysis of the Reddit experience as every user's experience might vary.

## CONCLUSION

There is a strong Pro-Left/Anti-Right bias to the top 100 posts of Reddit with 112x more posts (99.1%) favoring the American Left Wing compared to the Right from September 12-21, 2024. The consistent appearance of supportive LBGT posts within top 100 posts suggest the Reddit community is largely supportive of LBGT users/content. There was more negative political content than positive (85.4%). The political content was more highly concentrated in the top 25 posts compared with the top 100 posts ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The results may not reflect long terms trends due to the limited time frame (10 days) and the study's proximity to a presidential election. This study may be prone to a large amount of bias due to only using one post reviewer. It is recommended to use a larger group and/or increase the duration of the study in future work.

## Conflict of Interests

The author states that no conflict of interest exists in connection with the publishing of this article.

## Data Availability

The article contains all of the relevant raw data. Screenshots demonstrating the top 100 posts each day can be requested from the author by email.

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