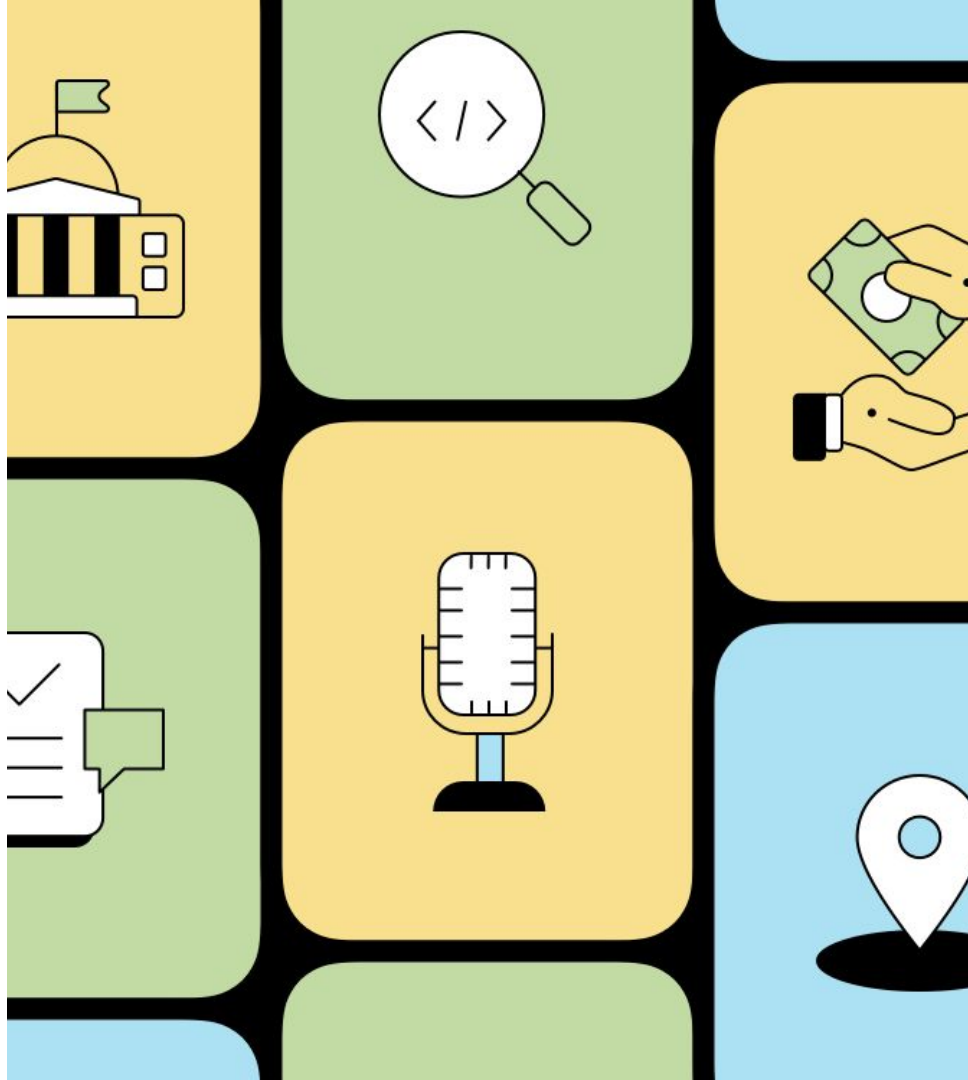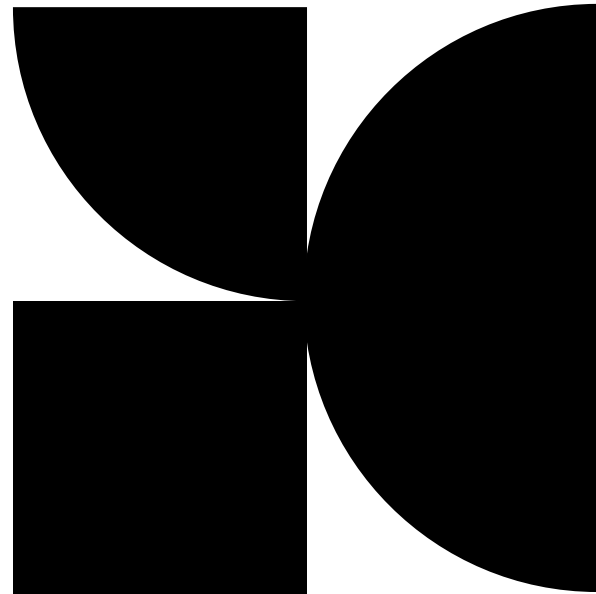# Better Access:
Data for the Common Good

January 28, 2026

The Problem

Online platforms have become a core infrastructure for civic life and public discourse – shaping what we know, how we connect, and who gets heard. Yet the tools that once allowed researchers, journalists, and civil society to study these platforms are disappearing, undermining transparency and accountability.

This is why we need a **clear framework for researcher access** to public platform data – the content, data, and information posted to online platforms that are publicly available to anyone.

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. The *Better Access* Framework
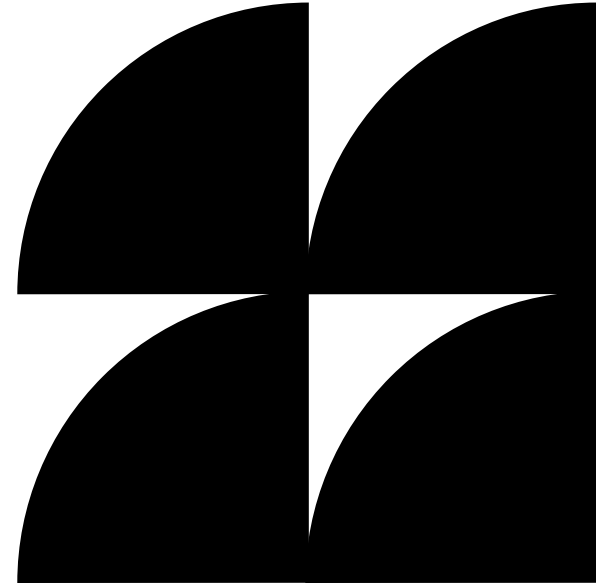4. *Better Access* Thresholds
5. Discussion

Background

Barriers to Data Access

Restrictions on data access are substantial and increasing.

In a recent Coalition for Independent Technology Research survey **60% of independent technology researchers face significant barriers accessing the data essential for studying the societal impacts of technology.**

Narrowing access on key platforms – Meta, X, Reddit – at the same time that public data is monetized for advertisers, data brokers, and training artificial intelligence (AI) systems.

Capacity-building is a major bottleneck. Data protection and security training is needed to upskill data access researchers.

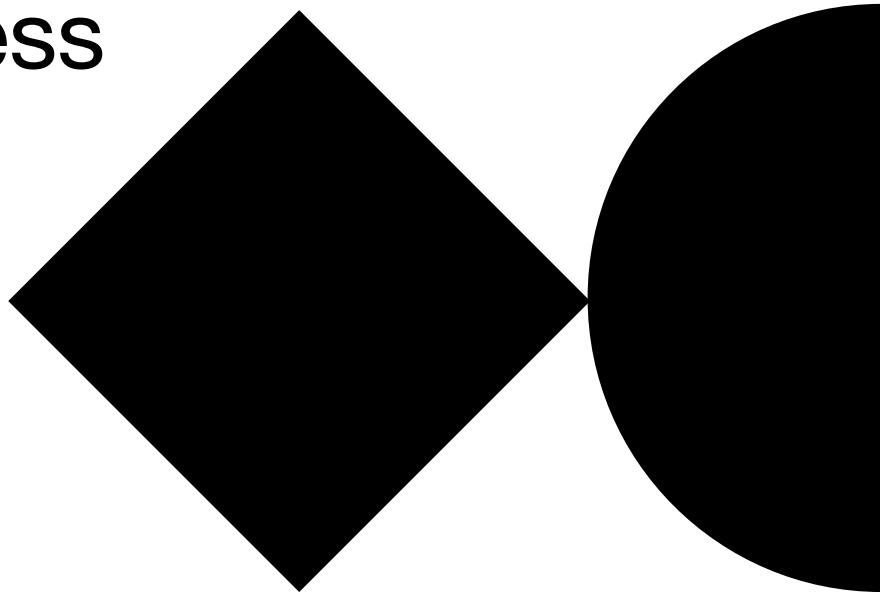Knight ▄▄▄ Georgetown Institute

Regulatory Data Access

New regulations are requiring access to data for researchers – notably Article 40 of the Digital Services Act (DSA); changes to the UK's Online Safety Act; and several proposals in the United States.

Regulations and proposed regulations focus on enabling two types of data access: **privileged access to platform data and access to public platform data.**
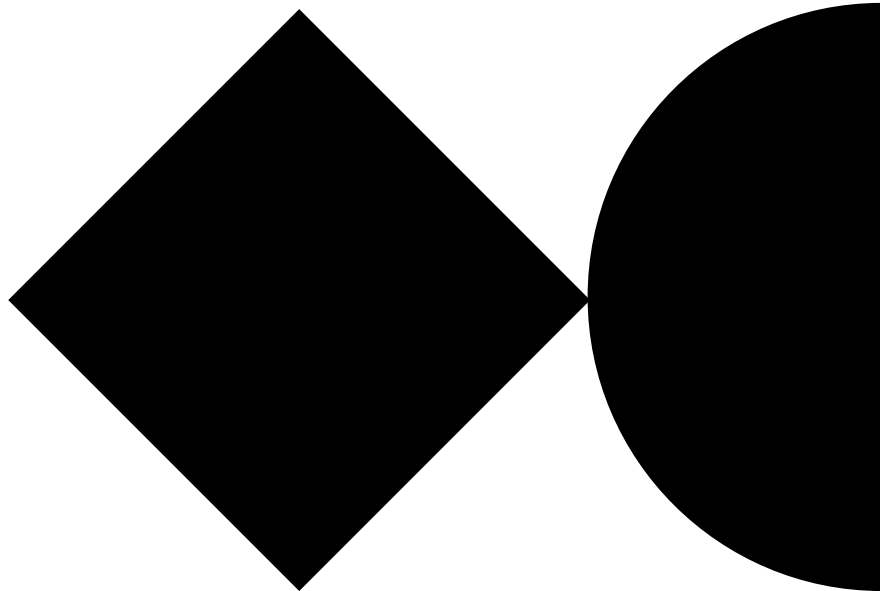
Policy and regulatory proposals also focus on increasing transparency in artificial intelligence systems, though with significant regulatory and corporate pushback.

The Solution

For both regulated and voluntary data access, there are **three recommendations** (based on 2025 workshops between researchers and regulators):

- **Support Data Access Infrastructure**

- **Build Best Practice for Research Community**

- **Foster Researcher-Regulator Relationships**

The *Better Access* Framework

The Better Access Framework

ONLINE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS

- Global
- Geographic
- Linguistic

HIGH-INFLUENCE PUBLIC PLATFORM DATA

- Highly Disseminated Content
- Government & Political Accounts
- Notable Public Accounts
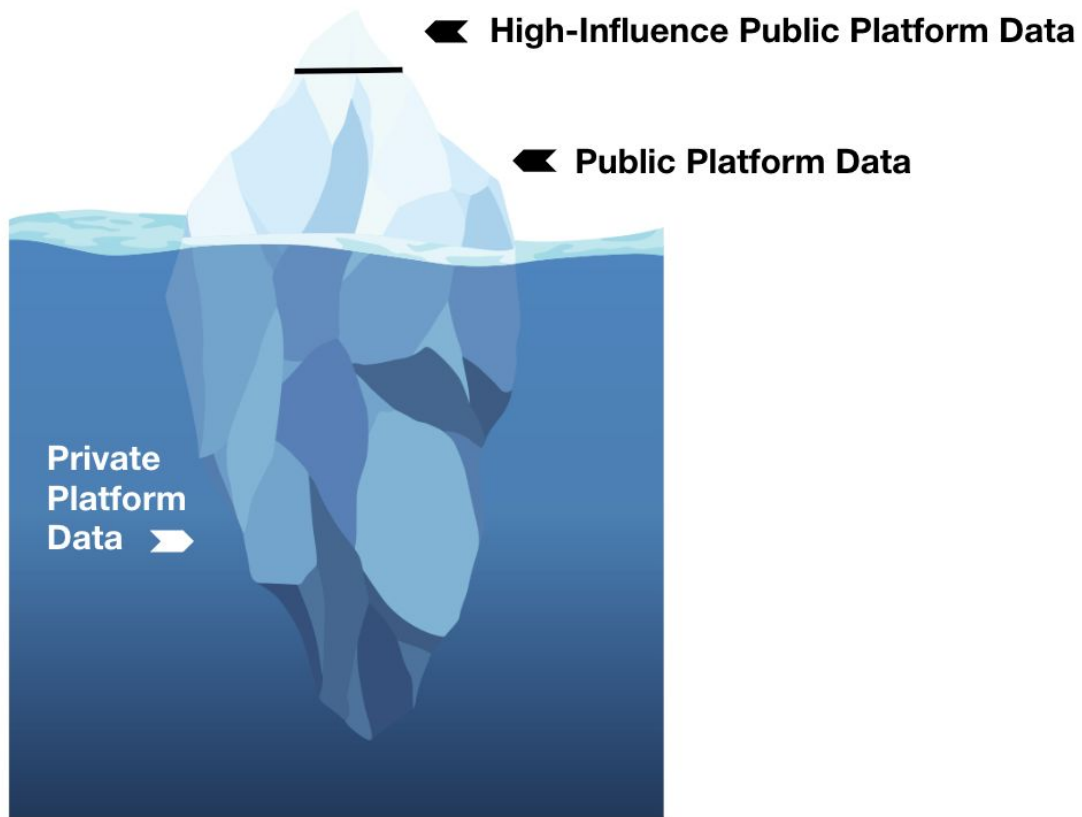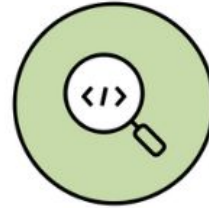- Businesses & Promoted Content

ACCESS MECHANISMS

- Proactive Data Interface
- Custom Data Requests
- Independent Data Collection

High-Influence Public Platform Data ◄

Public Platform Data ◄

Private Platform Data ➤

Information Environments

Global　　Geographic　　Linguistic

High-Influence Public Platform Data

Highly Disseminated Content

Government & Political Accounts

Notable Public Accounts

Businesses & Promoted Content

Access Mechanisms

Proactive Data Interface

Custom Data Requests

Independent Data Collection

High-Influence Public Platform Data

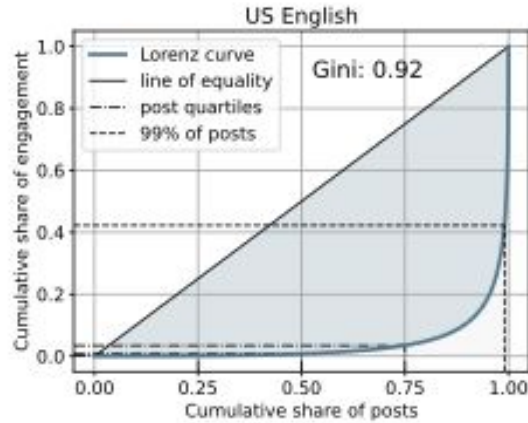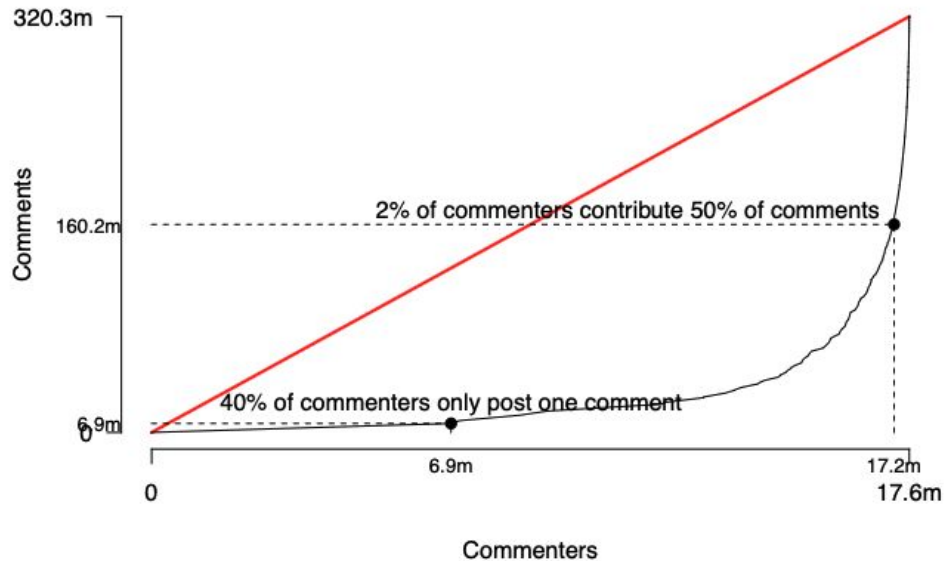Highly Disseminated Content

Government & Political Accounts

Notable Public Accounts

Businesses & Promoted Content

Better Access Thresholds
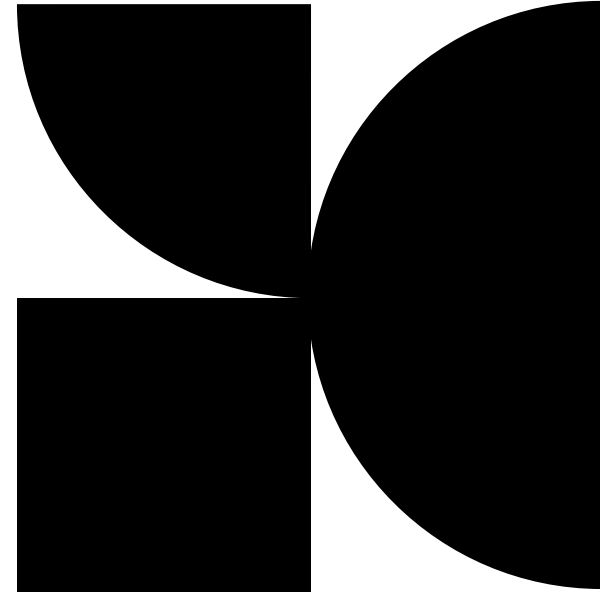
Highly Disseminated Content: Engagement

Source: Edelson et al., "Measurement and Metrics for Content Moderation."
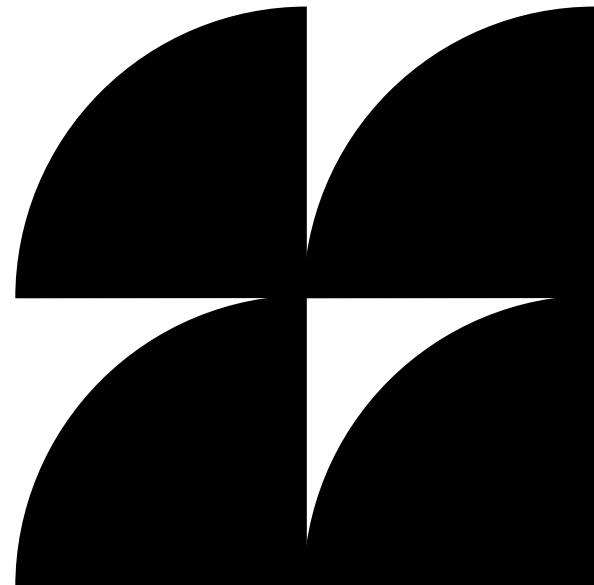
Highly Disseminated Content: Engagement

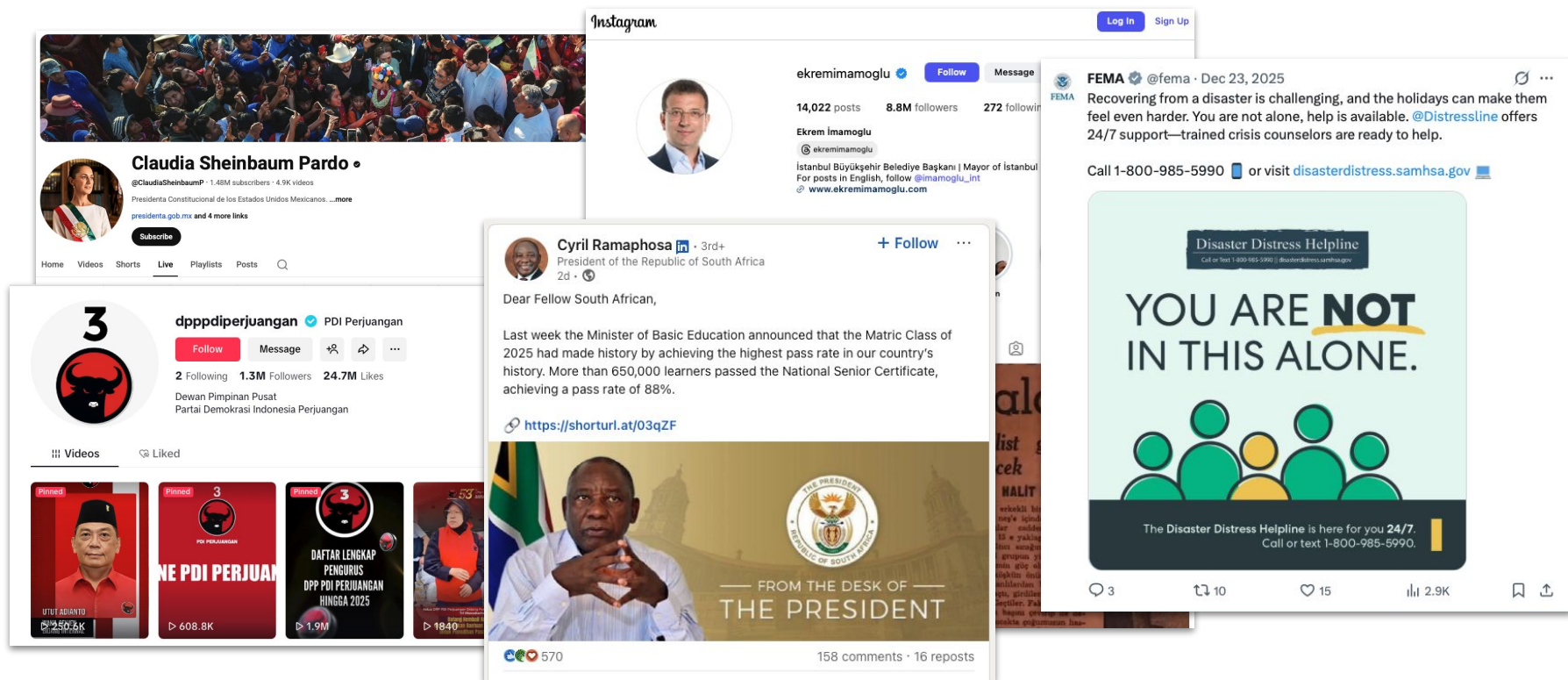Source: Munger et al., "Pressing Play on Politics."

Definition

Better Access Thresholds for Highly Disseminated Content

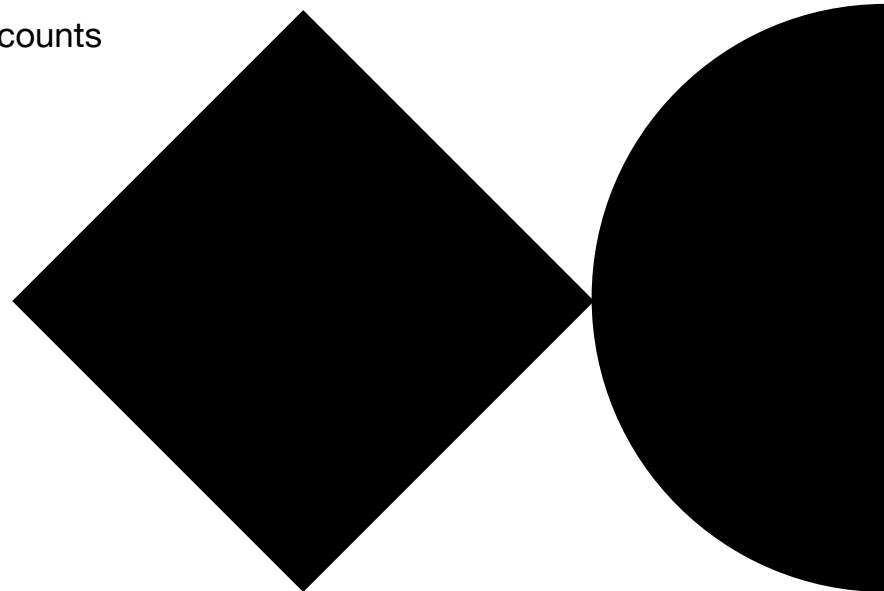| Content may be highly disseminated through either reach or engagement, defined as:	
Reach	**Content that has either:** **Proactive Data Interface** — Greater than 10,000 instances of total distribution, including unique views, listens, or downloads; or **Custom Data Requests** / **Independent Data Collection** — Top 2% of cumulative weekly platform reach, including unique views, listens, or downloads.
Engagement	**Content that has either:** **Proactive Data Interface** — Greater than 1,000 instances of aggregate platform engagement; or **Custom Data Requests** / **Independent Data Collection** — Top 2% of cumulative weekly platform engagement.

Government and Political Accounts

Definition

Better Access Thresholds for Governments and Political Accounts

Data associated with an account belonging to a major political party, candidate, government official, or institution, defined as:		
Proactive Data Interface	**Custom Data Requests**	**Independent Data Collection**
National level	**National and Subnational level**	
Persons elected, appointed, or assigned to a major government position		
Registered political candidates running for office		
Political parties and major party officials		
Government institutions and related officials		

Discussion

What's Next

✅ Reach out! We are eager to engage with researchers, policymakers, and platforms. kgi@georgetown.edu.

✅ Join our mailing list! https://kgi.georgetown.edu/.

Thank *You*

kgi@georgetown.edu