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# Twitter vs IRL

## Carbon Tax Online Debate

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# Outline

1. Background
2. Motivation for the paper
3. Research question
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# Background

## Carbon Tax Proposal

Background: In 2018, Initiative 1631 was on the ballot in Washington state. It created a carbon emissions tax and used the revenue to invest in green energy. Carbon taxes are one policy option to reduce carbon emissions. However, like many other tax increases, carbon taxes are unpopular with voters.

The referendum did not pass (59% to 41%), but we want to compare online support to real life outcomes. Ballot initiatives will continue to be part of Washington and other state politics for the foreseeable future, so we want to compare an example of online support vs real-life voting behavior.

# Motivation

*Twitter as a tool for and object of political and electoral activity: Considering electoral context and variance among actors -  
Shannon C. McGregor, Rachel R. Mourão & Logan Molyneux*

In recent years, journalist, political elites, the public have used Twitter as an indicator of political trends. The authors used Twitter as a tool for and an object of political communication to study twitter volume as an outcome of other electoral antecedents and develop an understanding of its relevance in election campaigns.

Methodology: The study measures the volume of Twitter chatter about each candidate from three distinct sources: the news media, political actors, and the rest of the general public.

Data Analysis: *T* - test were conducted to assess the difference in the mean of volume of social media conversations about candidates who won and the candidates who lost the elections. Pearson's Correlation was calculated to see how variables related to each other. Then Multiple Linear Regressions model were estimated with political characteristics and other specific group controls.

Results: Twitter volume did not predict vote share for any of the 35 races studied. Findings suggested that Twitter is better understood as a tool for political communication and its usage may be predicted by money spent and race characteristics. As an object, Twitter has a limited power to replace electoral outcomes.

# Research Question

- Main research question: How did the online conversations and support for Initiative 1631 compare to actual election outcomes?
- Additional areas for consideration:
  - How does the geographic distribution of Twitter users differ from actual voters?
  - What topics or facets of the referendum did online users discuss?
  - What were the main topics or keywords that users discussed to support the measure?
  - What were the main topics or keywords that users discussed to oppose the initiative?

# Data Sources

- Twitter data pulled using Twitter's API
  - Geocoded for Washington state
  - Tweeted in October and November 1-6, 2018
- Referendum results from Washington Secretary of State
- Keywords searched:
  - "1631"
    - "Yes on 1631 campaign"
    - "No on 1631 campaign"
  - "Carbon tax"
  - "Energy tax"
  - "Tax increase"
  - "Climate change"