

Raise your voice! Activism and peer effects in online social networks

Alejandra Agustina Martínez *

October 29, 2022

Abstract

Are individuals driven into political activism by their peers? To provide a quantitative answer, I study Argentina's abortion rights debate through Twitter - the social media platform. Pro-choice and pro-life activists coexisted online, and the evidence suggests peer groups were not too polarized. I develop a model of strategic interactions in a network - allowing for heterogeneous peer effects. Next, I estimate peer effects and test whether online activism exhibits strategic substitutability or complementarity. Combining tweets' and users' data, I create a novel panel dataset with observable links and actions. I provide a reduced-form analysis by proposing a network-based instrumental variable. The results indicate strategic complementarity in online activism, both from aligned and opposing peers. Notably, the evidence suggests homophily in the formation of Twitter's network, but it does not support the hypothesis of an echo-chamber effect.

Keywords: Political activism - Peer effects - Social networks - Social media

JEL Codes: D74, D85, P00, Z13

*Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain. Email for correspondence: am@eco.uc3m.es. I am indebted to Antonio Cabrales for his advice and support throughout this project. I thank valuable feedback from seminar participants at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, CAGE Centre - the University of Warwick, Royal Holloway University and Queen Mary University of London, Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, and Universidad Nacional de Tucumán.