Deplatforming and its determinants

Presentation

By Murad Ahmed

What is Deplatforming?

- "Deplatforming" emerged as a new "form" of private censorship that is usually concerned with the internet (social media) and to lesser degree mass media

- Online platforms such as Twitter have been engaging in "Deplatforming" Lebanese politicians, Burmese generals and even some right-wing US politicians for a long time [New York Times, 2021].

- The most notable recent example of Deplatforming is the banning of then-US President Donald Trump from using Twitter.

The problem with Deplatforming

- The motivating context: Deplatforming of political leaders/groups

- Do people support Deplatforming in principle?

- Do people view different dimensions, social, financial and technical, of Deplatforming differently or equally?

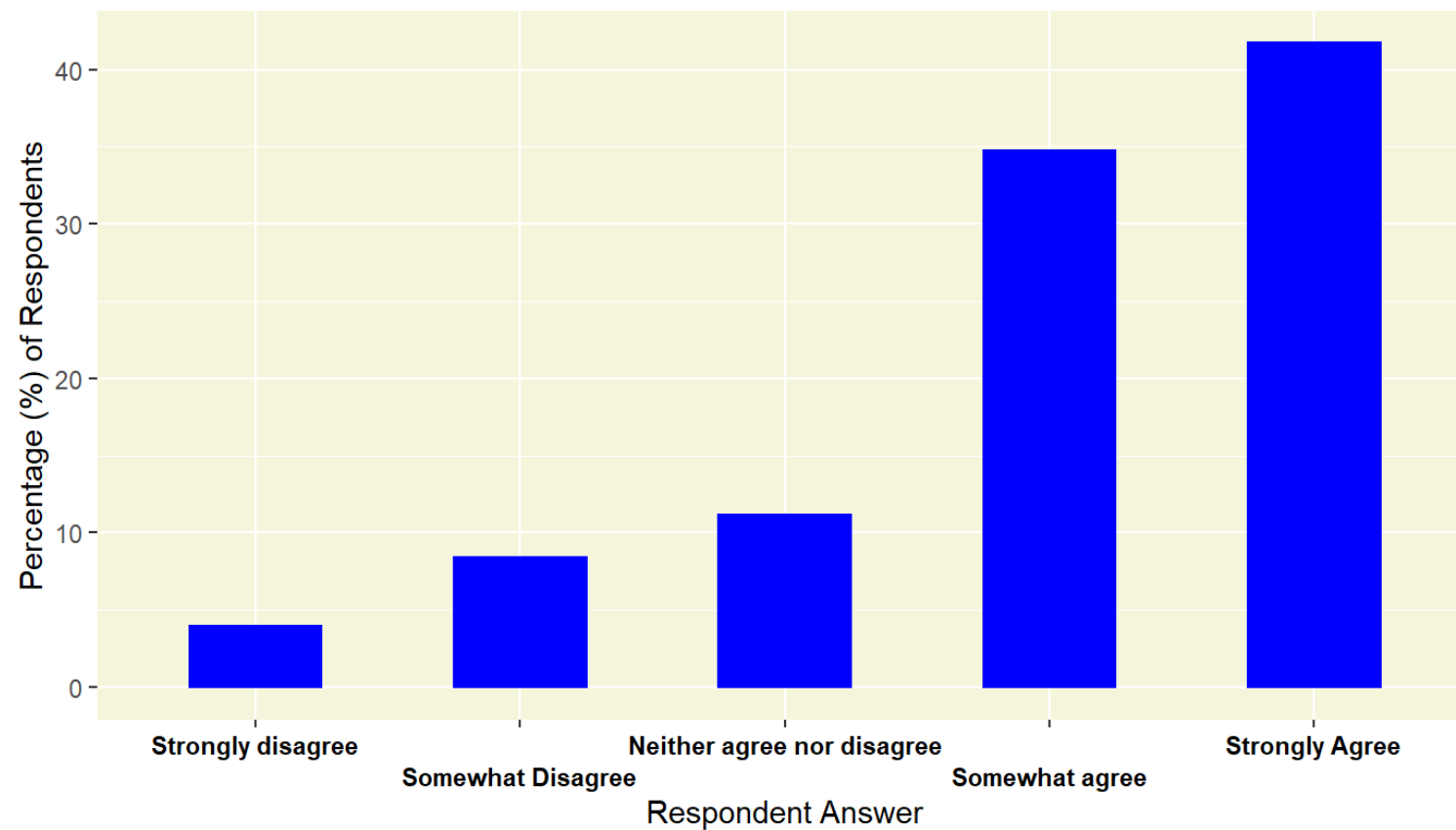- What are the determinants of the attitudes towards Deplatforming?
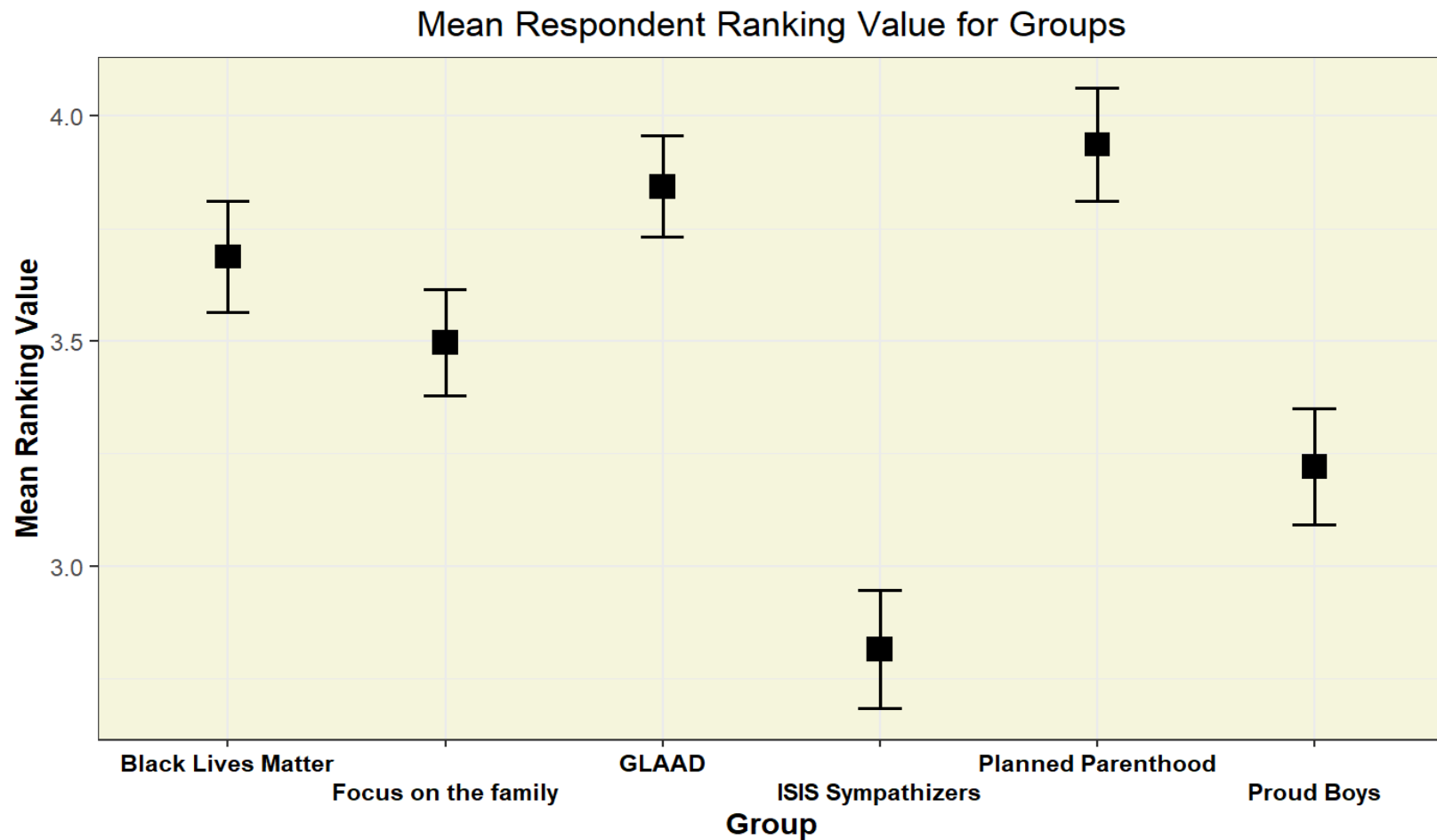
Research Approach

- Online survey (Amazon MTurk) of 688 American respondents

- Asking respondents to rank 6 groups from least to most liked

- Treatment/control experimental design such that respondents were randomly assigned either treatment or control

- Treatment is asking respondents questions about deplatforming their least liked group while control is asking respondents questions about deplatforming their most liked group in accordance with the Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus methodology (1979, 1982)

- Comparing attitudes before and after experiment as well as treatment vs control.

Deplatforming in principle

People should be free to express their opinions,
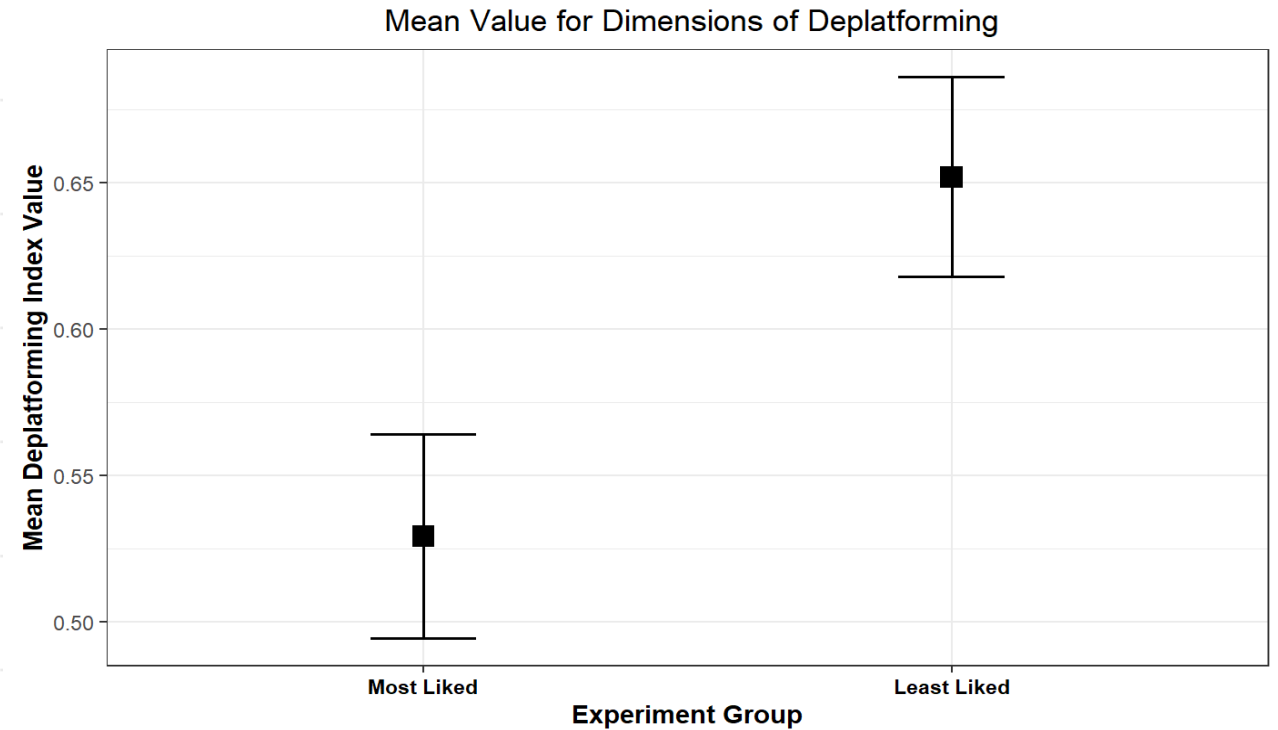without fear of being harassed or punished by anyone

Group ranking

Mean Respondent Ranking Value for Groups

Deplatforming within the experiment

Dimension of Deplatforming	Average Treatment Effect (Mean of Least – Mean of Most)	T-Test p-value	Statistical Significance at the 95% confidence level
Social Media	3.6 - 3.11 = 0.49	Approx. Zero	Significant
Online Financial Services	3.67- 3.06 = 0.61	Approx. Zero	Significant
Application Development	3.56 - 3.18 = 0.38	0.000615	Significant
Deplatforming Index	3.61 - 3.12 = 0.49	Approx. Zero	Significant

Mean Value for Dimensions of Deplatforming

Regression Analysis

Regression Table

Variable Name	Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value	Significance
Gender (Male)	0.091022	0.038175	0.0174	95%
Moderately Conservative	-0.143167	0.072836	0.0489	95%
Political Activity	0.035798	0.017479	0.0410	95%

Insignificant potential determinants included in the model: age, education, political affiliation/leaning, ethnicity, religion, degree of religiousness.

Conclusions

- People's views on Deplatforming mainly vary according to their preference towards the deplatformed group; this contradicts their pre-treatment opposition to Deplatforming in principle

- ISIS Sympathizers and the Proud Boys are the least liked groups on average

- Gender, ideological leaning and the frequency of political activity are determinants of the Deplatforming index

- Males and those frequently engaged in political activity are more likely to support Deplatforming, while moderate conservatives are less likely to support Deplatforming.

Experiment integrity test

Mean Ranking for Groups by Experimental Group Assignment