Changes in Twitter/X usage in European Parliament Election Campaigns

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Background

What happened to Twitter?

- Before 2022 the main social media platform used by politicians

  Change in ownership and name

- Loosening of moderation practices, leading to the platform being flooded by extremist views and an increase in bots
- Loss in (add) revenue
- Decrease in usage (e.g., 23% less daily users in US)

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Racism, misogyny, lies: how did X become so full of hatred? And is it ethical to keep using it?

Background

How could this affect (mainstream) politicians?

- Decrease in usage => less useful as a broadcasting platform
- Less moderation => increase changes of vitriol and abuse

BUT

- Racist xenophobic, antisemitic, and conspiracy-related content became more widespread

Research Questions

1. **Is X is still a relevant arena for political actors across the EU?**

2. **Did the changes help far-right politicians increase their notoriety and spread their appeals?**

   Comparison: 2019 vs 2024 EP elections candidates
   Benchmark: 2014

Previous Work, mostly anecdotal evidence

- **Twitter particularly successful in amplifying radical-right content**
  (see e.g. Fernandes & Won, 2023; Davidson & Enos, 2024)

- **Purge of boots substantial decreased follower count of far-right politicians**
  (Silva & Proksch , 2011)

Data and methods

- All candidates of "relevant" parties (i.e parties polling above 3%) across 2014, 2019 and 2024 EP elections
- All their tweets and metadata for the last 4 weeks of the campaign
- Presenting simple descriptive results
- Ran 3-level nested model with candidates nested in parties, nested in countries

Presence on Twitter/X

Table: Twitter/X Adoption by Election

Election	Candidates	Twitter/X Adoption
2014	6,547	40.1%
2019	6,483	53.7%
2024	6,174	47.5%

Table: Twitter/X Adoption by Party Type

Party Type	Adoption Rate			Net Change	
	2014	2019	2024	14–19	19–24
Far left	34.7%	56.1%	40.3%	+21.4	-15.8
Far right	29.7%	51.2%	49.7%	+21.5	-1.5
Other	43.2%	54.1%	47.6%	+10.9	-6.5

Twitter/X Usage

Table: Twitter/X Usage by Party Type

Party Type	Total Tweets			Net Change	
	2014	2019	2024	14–19	19–24
Far left	30,565	35,313	22,373	+4,748	–12,940
Far right	47,173	78,295	83,776	+31,122	+5,481
Other	237,331	291,113	102,474	+53,782	–188,639

Table: Twitter/X Usage by Party Type

Party Type	Avg Tweets/Candidate			Net Change	
	2014	2019	2024	14–19	19–24
Far left	147	167	147	+20	-20
Far right	137	167	173	+30	+6
Other	115	138	79	+23	-59

Twitter/X Engagement

Table: Twitter/X Likes by Party Type

Party Type	Mean Likes/Candidates		
	2019	2024	19–24
Far left	2,408	33,256	**+30,848**
Far right	12,967	23,006	**+10,039**
Other	3,419	45,416	**+41,997**

Table: Twitter/X Retweets by Party Type

| Party Type | Mean Retweets/Candidates | | |
	2019	2024	19–24
Far left	31,823	86,170	+54347
Far right	28,639	75,975	+47336
Other	28,388	17,173	−11215

Next Steps

- Examine returning candidates (2019–24)
- Account deletion versus live but inactive accounts
- Use "full" models including controls
- Content of Tweets

References

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