

Policy Precedence: Examining the Connection of Social Media and Bill Sponsorship

Kesicia Dickinson, Shane Wery, and Elizabeth Brannon

Michigan State University

Changing Channels of Influence

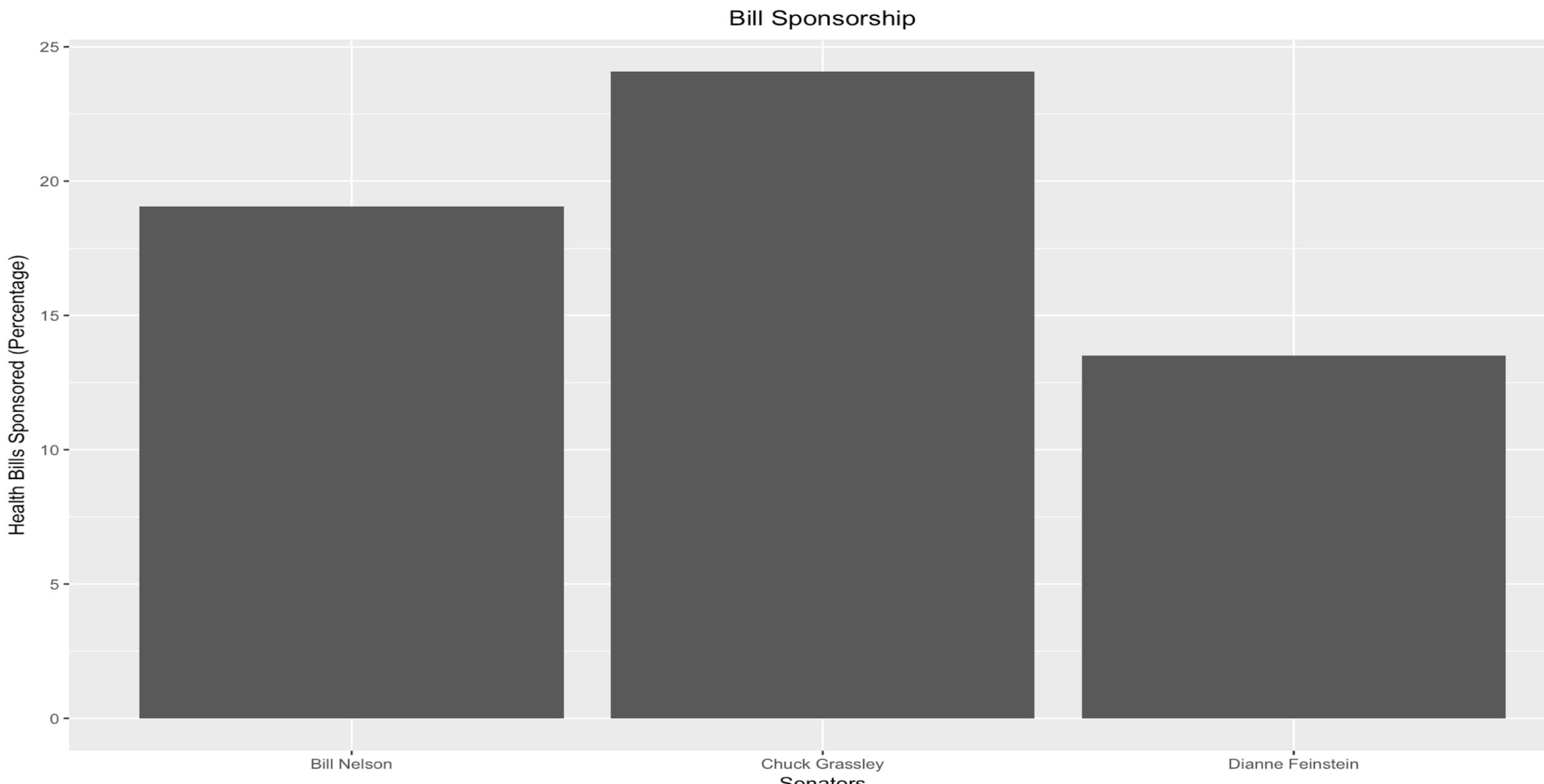
How does social media influence representatives? More specifically, how are constituents able to influence issues brought to the docket and how their lawmakers vote through Twitter?

Twitter allows lawmakers to communicate their issue stances faster and creates room for more immediate open dialogue.



Data and Methods

Our data sample includes 5,000 tweets from each United States Senator’s main, verified twitter handle. We analyze tweets to determine what policy issues tweeters are talking about when they mention each U.S. senator. To process the tweets, we use the quanteda package. We use a Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic model which relies on Gibbs sampling and generates a set of words based on probabilistic topic representation to get at the underlying topics within the document (Blei 2012). We then compare this to bill sponsorship.



Prominent Topics in Senator Tweets March & April 2018

Senator Richard Shelby (Alabama)	Senator Dianne Feinstein (California)	Senator Bill Nelson (Georgia)	Senator Chuck Grassley (Iowa)	Senator Amy Klobuchar (Minnesota)
"End," "Trade," "Government," "Action," "Cheating," "Chairman"	"Federal," "Court," "Uphold," "Corrupt"	"Trade," "War," "China"	"Vote," "Second Amendment," "Infringe"	"Facebook," "Twitter," "Google," "Implement"
Senator Bob Menendez (New Jersey)	Senator Ron Wyden (Oregon)	Senator John Thune (South Dakota)	Senator Bob Corker (Tennessee)	Senator Orrin Hatch (Utah)
"Trump," "Admin," "Neglecting," "Denuclearize "	"Comey," "Fired," "Removed," "Corruption," "Fraud"	"Data," "Facebook," "Accountable," "Voice," "Zuckerburg"	"Vote," "Relief," "American," "Legacy," "Fake"	"Better," "Example," "Bringing," "Light"

Tweets to Senator Feinstein

Most popular Twitter handles

Do Policymakers Respond?

Scholars have discovered that rather than acting in the interest of constituents, members of Congress (MCs) act in their own self-interest. To fulfill their goal of reelection, they devote substantial resources to advertising, credit claiming, and position taking (Mayhew 1974; Fiorina 1977). Social media largely contributes to those basic activities. It also creates an environment for constituents to exchange dialogue with MCs in real time.

Bill Sponsorship

Senator	Bill Type	% of bill sponsorship	Sponsorship Rank
Grassley	Rights	10%	2 nd
Thane	Corporate	13.5%	1 st
Nelson	Foreign Policy	7%	3rd
Menendez	Foreign Policy	10%	2 nd

Top Tweet Topics

1. Trade and employment
 2. Police brutality
 3. Campaigns
 4. The environment
 5. Gun control