

Twitter and the Electoral Connection

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The vast majority of major US politicians utilize the social-media platform Twitter to engage directly with other political elites and voters. The exact motivations that determine the choice to use Twitter, and how much to use it, remain opaque. Politicians may want to engage in the same personal expression that millions of others engage in. They may also wish to use the platform to announce their official behavior directly to citizens, bypassing news media. However, we argue that there is a clear “electoral connection” for using Twitter that perhaps exceeds the influence of other motivations. Politicians use Twitter to cultivate support from electorally relevant actors. To test this, we analyze a set of statewide office holders who vary in their means of selection: state attorneys general. We find that elected AGs are more likely to have Twitter accounts, use the accounts more often, and receive more engagement with other Twitter users as a result. We also find that they engage in more automated tweeting in the style of corporate accounts. We replicate our primary findings on another statewide office, state secretaries of state, and find very similar results. Collectively, these findings point to the importance of elections for motivating social-media use by politicians.