

# When do social movements reach out? Evidence from abortion campaigns' tweets in Northern Ireland

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CW: Discussion of abortion campaign messaging 8th April 2022

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# Theory

## Literature:

- ▶ Outsiders: people who do not themselves directly benefit from a social movement's aims
  - ▶ Pro-abortion groups: men
  - ▶ Anti-abortion groups: women
- ▶ Outsiders are not always helpful → so when to movements seek their help?

# Previous research

Previous studies have been conducted in Ireland. They found:

- ▶ Groups whose position = SQ "claim" celebrity allies less (Hunt, 2019)
- ▶ Groups whose position = SQ get less human rights frames repeated in the media (Hunt, 2021)
- ▶ These results suggest that groups respond to the status quo but hard to distinguish status quo from other things in a referendum.

# Expectations

Hypotheses:

*H1*: Movements will reach out less when their position becomes for the status quo.

*H2*: Movements will reach out more when their position becomes against the status quo.

# Method

## Sample

- ▶ Accounts found manually
  - ▶ 92 groups in total
- ▶ Tweeted collected from Twitter API
  - ▶ 613,731 tweets from 2009 to 2022

## Measurement

- ▶ Dictionaries to detect human rights frames and references to non-beneficiaries
- ▶ Built by manually coding tweets

# Measurement evaluation

Validation statistics calculated from a sample of 300 tweets

Measure	% agree	% FN	% FP
Direct appeal	98.3	0.333	1.33
Human rights	97.7	1.67	0.667
Combined	96.7	1.67	1.67

# Examples of tweets:

## Direct appeals

- ▶ Anti-abortion group: *“women and girls deserve better than the lie that to end an innocent life will empower us”*

## Human rights frames

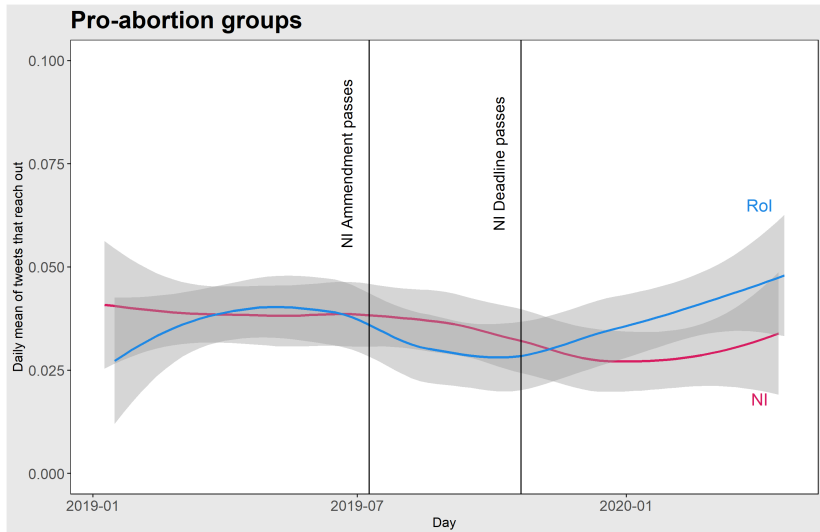
- ▶ Pro-abortion group: *“the 8th amendment creates extra barriers to healthcare for people with disabilities”*

# Identification strategy

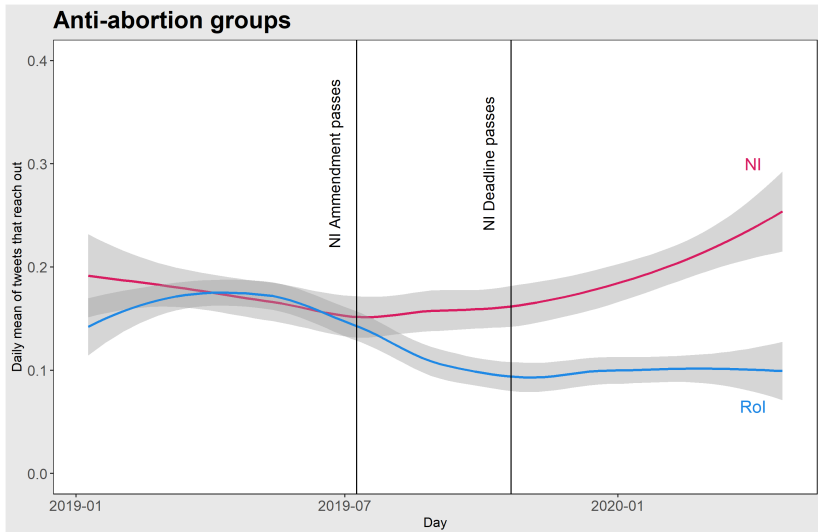
- ▶ Change in abortion policy in Northern Ireland
  - ▶ Amendment in Westminster → exogenous change in SQ.
  - ▶ No change in SQ in RoI at the same time → I use RoI as a baseline
- ▶ Allows us to isolate the changes around a change in status quo



# Changes over time



# Changes over time



# Findings

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Amendment		Deadline	
	Pro	Anti	Pro	Anti
DiD (Amendment)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)		
DiD (Deadline)			0.01 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.03
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	-0.14	-0.08	-0.14	0.03
Num. obs.	2943	4187	3020	3748

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$

**Table:** Regression models around changes to the status quo in Northern Ireland. All models use a differences-in-differences estimator and control for group-level fixed effects

# Hypothesis tests

- ▶ No significant change for pro-abortion groups, contradicting  $H1$
- ▶ Significant increase in reaching out for anti-abortion groups after the deadline passes, supporting  $H2$

# Interpretation

Groups **reach out more** when the status quo goes **against** them but they **keep reaching out at the same rate** when the status quo changes in their favour.

## Next steps

- ▶ Do the two types of reaching out change differently?
- ▶ Does the same thing happen in the Republic of Ireland for Republic of Ireland groups?
- ▶ Would we see the same results looking at different social movements?