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Abstract

Twitter has become an increasingly used social networking resource for politicians, social movements, and citizens. Politicians often use twitter to communicate with the public, campaign, advocate for themselves and their policies, and send out calls to action. Twitter has also provided a convenient and public way for the public and organizations to call on elected officials to take action on relevant issues facing the public. We investigate whether state governors twitter habits regarding the Black Lives Matter movement correlates with passage of police reform laws in the state policy diffusion network.

Keywords: 3 to 6 keywords, that do not appear in the title

1 Introduction

Twitter users often observe elected officials communicating their stance on political issues or making promises of policy change via Twitter. Politicians and their teams invest significant effort into curating a tweets and communicating with the public via online social networking sites. When evaluating the political performance of politicians, we expect that they "practice what they preach" and at least make good-faith attempts to pass legislation regarding issues they have publicly tweeted their support for. However, it is difficult to know whether tweeting about an issue predicts passage of legislation without actively seeking out this information. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, politicians were facing unprecedented societal pressure to crack down on police violence and enact substantial police reform laws. Though a controversial issue that saw many bills die in committee in Congress, the states had more power to pass police reform legislation if pursued. This provides the motivation of our work investigating whether tweeting about the Black Lives Matter movement correlates with police reform policy adoption.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Politician use of Twitter

Social media has become an increasingly pervasive presence in our daily lives and its impact has been far-reaching. Consequently, social media has been increasingly used in a political context. There are several studies regarding the use of social media in general and in a political context. Many studies have focused on the way politicians use social media, finding that common motivations are a desire to grow their support base (sometimes by inciting an extreme reaction), to disseminate information, and to network with other politicians. Hemsley (2019) finds that in the context of the U.S. 2014 gubernatorial election, candidates for governor used Twitter to advocate for themselves, their policies, what they believe in, and calls-to-action in addition to attacks on their opponents and their policies. Further, Hemsley finds that the the most popular tweets that reach the widest audience are call-to-action and attack tweets. Therefore political candidates wishing to broaden their

support base may disproportionately send out attack or call-to-action tweets. In the Korean political context, Park et al. (2016) find that Tweets from leading government officials are more likely to increase citizen perceptions of credibility in a government Twitter feeds and government overall. This use of Twitter as a mechanism for politicians to increase trust in government also appears in the U.S., where Song & Lee (2015) find that government use of social media websites increases perceived government transparency and citizens' trust in government. Notably, Song and Lee's work used 2009 survey data, and may not be consistent with current public perception of government Twitter feeds, and Park et al.'s work may not be applicable in the U.S. political context. Former U.S. president Donald Trump, the highest elected official in the U.S. from 2016-2020, frequently made false or misleading claims on Twitter, and these false or misleading tweets were among his most popular (Rattner, 2021).

The way politicians are using Twitter can also be broken down by party, gender, and incumbency, among other factors. Evans et al. (2014) offer a more granular analysis of how politicians are using Twitter in their study of candidates for the 2012 U.S. House. They find that women tweet more overall and are more likely to criticize their opponents. It may be true that female candidates have to work harder to grow their support base, as they are underrepresented in many areas of U.S. government, and may face gender-specific roadblocks to getting elected (Bos et al., 2018). Paired with Hemsley's findings, it is possible that female political candidates tweet more opponent-criticizing or "attack" messages in an attempt to produce more viral tweets and grow their support base. However, our study focuses on state governor Tweeting during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, and thus the findings of Evans et al. may not correlate with trends observed in our data. Additionally, our data was not collected during an election cycle, and thus opponent-attacking and campaigning tweets are likely not as prevalent in the dataset. Pivoting to studying politician use of Twitter specific to the BLM movement, Panda et al. (2020) find that in a study of Tweets from 520 U.S. Congress members that Democrats are more likely to tweet about the movement in general and express their concern for police brutality, while Republicans are less likely to tweet about the movement overall and more likely to express concern about perceived protest violence associated with the movement.

Because of these findings, we hypothesize that Democratic governors will be more likely to tweet about BLM and police reform overall.

Hypothesis$_1$: Democratic governors will be more likely to tweet about BLM and police reform overall.

2.2 Black Lives Matter movement and Twitter

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which peaked in support following the murder of George Floyd, and declined in support from June 2020 - August 2020, has had a steady support level since (Horowitz). Twitter and social media websites played critical roles in helping the movement build momentum during this time period. Mundt et al. (2018) note that Twitter was critical in helping the BLM movement expand and strengthen its internal ties by decreasing roadblocks to organizing and amplifying narratives, among other mechanisms. Freelon et al. (2018) find that BLM, categorized as a powerful Twitter social movement, was correlated with increased mainstream news coverage of issues relevant to the movement, such as police brutality, which is the strongest attention driver for political elites. Americans look to their elected officials for leadership and support regarding contentious and relevant public issues, and this is often portrayed by citizens and organizations communicating with politicians via Twitter and calling on them to take action on important issues. For example, The Campaign to End Qualified Immunity [@campaign-toendqi] (2023) recently tweeted that Congress should revive efforts to pass the Justice in Policing Act, a call to action that is not uncommon among social movements active on Twitter. Additionally, the Black Lives Matter [@Blklivesmatter] (2021) tagged Nancy Pelosi in a tweet responding to her commentary on the death of George Floyd, showcasing that Twitter is a direct communication line to public officials that is more convenient and public than traditional methods of citizen-politician communication such as letter-writing or emailing.

Citizens rely on elected officials to implement policy and make change when the public is faced with injustices. When politicians tweet support for certain policies or ideas, this is important, but besides declarations of signing bills into law or cosponsoring legislation, how does the public know if this support holds up when it comes time to vote? For exam-

ple, Governor Jay Inslee [@GovInslee] (2020), governor of the state of Washington, tweeted during the height of the BLM movement's popularity that Washington's state government is "going to take a hard look at how we manage independent investigations of police use of force in WA". However, it is not know empirically whether this show of support resulted in legislative action being taken unless citizens seek it out or he publicly communicates the passage of a law, as Massachusetts governor Charlie Baker [@MAGovArchive] (2020) and California governor Gavin Newsom [@GavinNewsom] (2019) did when they passed comprehensive police reform legislation in 2020 and new standards for police use of force in 2019, respectively.

2.3   State Policy Adoption

State policy reform is a complex process that cannot be captured by the actions of an individual state governor alone. There has been much scholarship in the field of policy diffusion and investigation of the factors and underlying network that cause states to adopt certain policies. In their study of the correlation between perceived state similarity and similar policy adoption, Bricker & LaCombe (2021) find that factors like perceived state similarity, legislative professionalism, population size differences, and different partisan control of state legislatures can significantly impact whether a state will adopt a policy similar to a policy previously adopted by another state. Desmarais et al. (2015) model a latent underlying state policy diffusion network that correlates with media state policy emulation stories, finding that California tops the list, especially in more recent years (2005-2009), as a leading policy innovator. In Gavin Newsom's tweet regarding California's passage of new standards for police use of force in 2019, he says the passage "[makes California] a model for the rest of the nation", highlighting that he likely expects the rest of the states to observe the efficacy of this legislation and adopt it if successful. This showcases an important factor in policy diffusion, learning (proposed by Shipan & Volden (2008)), in which states may observe policy efficacy in other states before deciding to implement it themselves. Given the results of Desmarais et al. and Governor Newsom's statement, it is possible that we will find California to be a policy innovator in our network. Overall, we know that there is non-independence among states regarding choice of policy

adoption, which is something we control for in our analysis by treating state policy adoption as a network object.

Hypothesis$_2$: California will be a policy innovator in our network, adopting police reform legislation early on in the diffusion process.

2.4 The Relationship Between Twitter and Police-Reform Policy Adoption

From the selected studies and tweets, we've found that politicians use Twitter for increasing credibility and transparency, building a support base, and communicating their support for policies and ideas, and that Twitter has immense power in helping social movements expand their reach and influence, and communicate with political elites. However, no studies have been found that investigate whether promises made, stances declared, or movements talked about by politicians via Twitter correlate with how they implement policies. We investigate whether tweeting about the Black Lives Matter movement during its peak correlates with police reform policy adoption in U.S. states. We hypothesize that a state governor tweeting about BLM will positively correlate with that state adopting some level of police reform policy.

Hypothesis$_3$: A state governor tweeting about BLM will positively correlate with that state adopting some level of police reform policy.

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