

# Networked Democracy? How Social Media Is Transforming Political Behavior

**Pablo Barberá**

School of International Relations  
University of Southern California

[www.pablobarbera.com](http://www.pablobarbera.com)

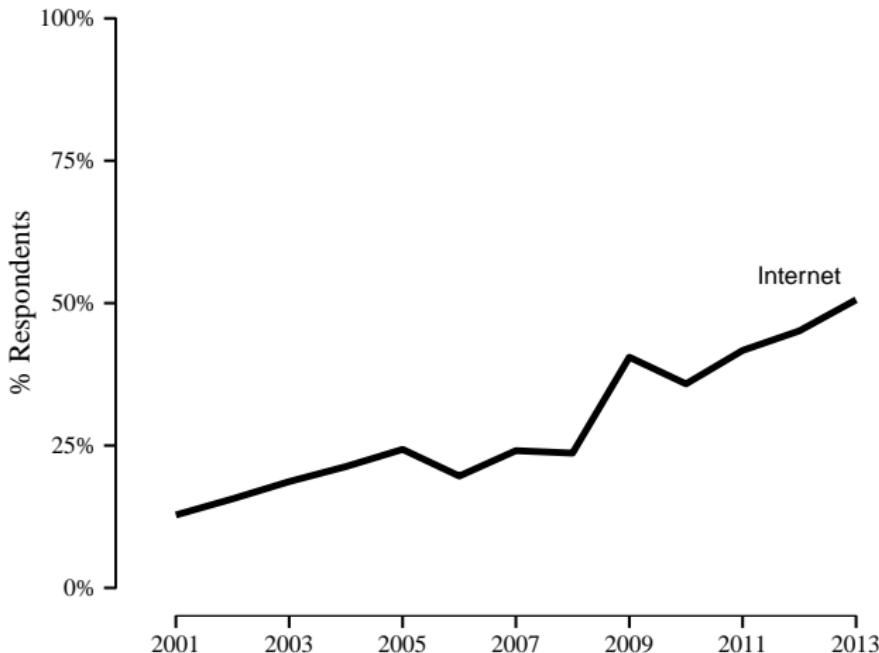
February 15, 2017





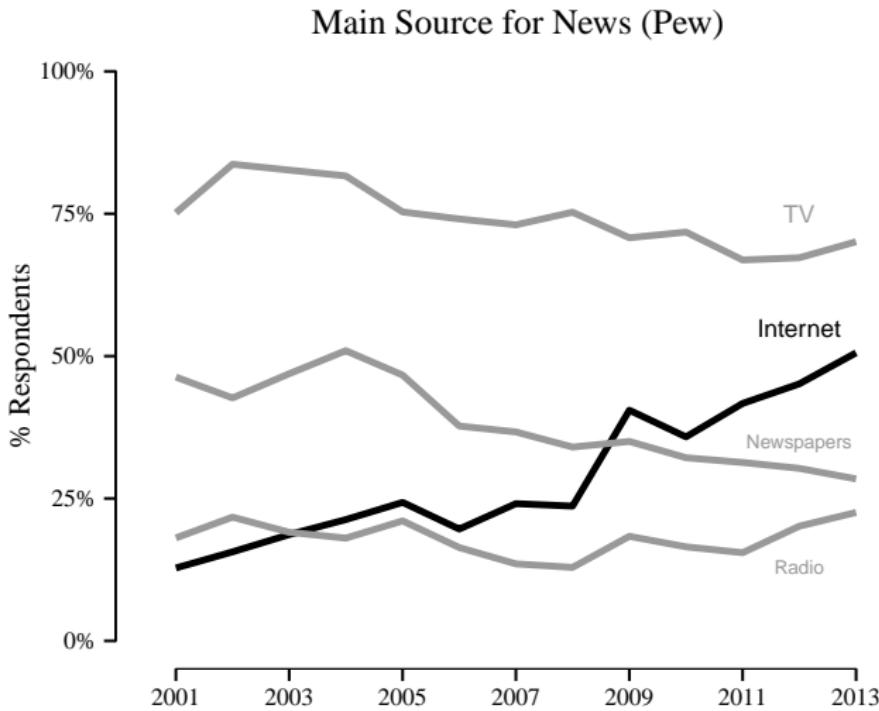
# Sources of Political Information

Main Source for News (Pew)



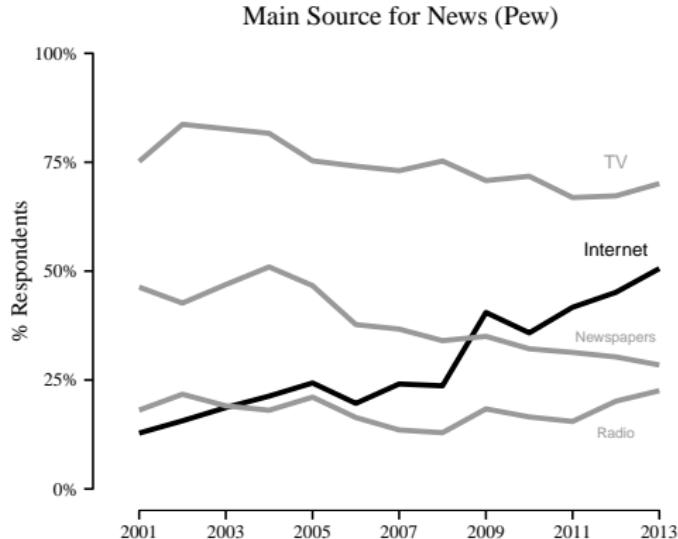
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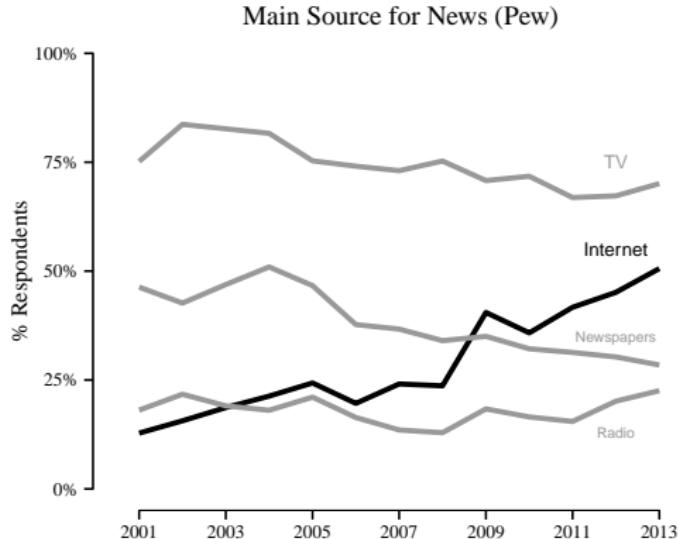
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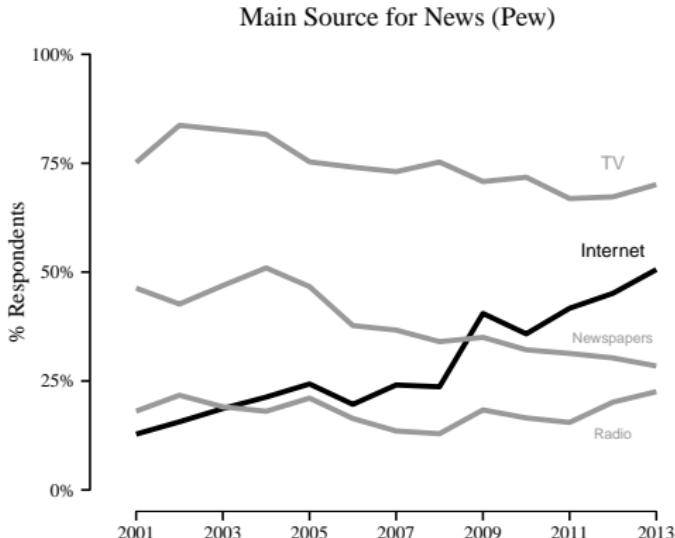
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- ▶ Social media: top source of news for U.S. young adults (Pew)



**Shift in communication patterns**



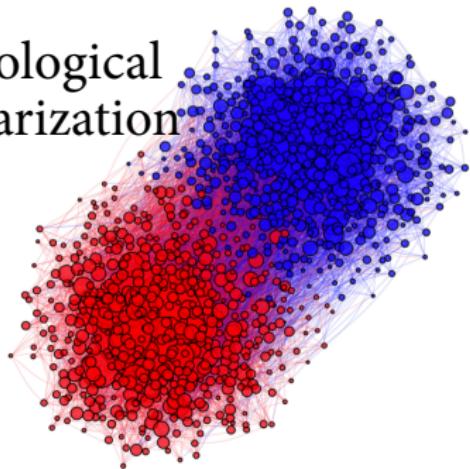
**Shift in communication patterns**



**Digital footprints of human behavior**

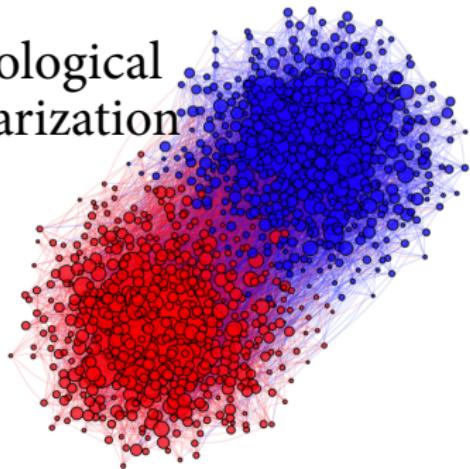
# How social media is transforming...

Ideological  
polarization



# How social media is transforming...

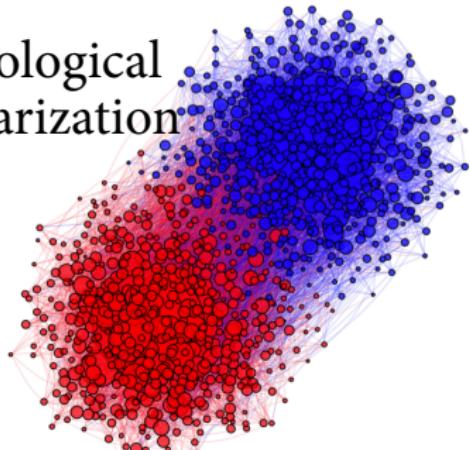
Ideological  
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Collective Action

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Ideological polarization



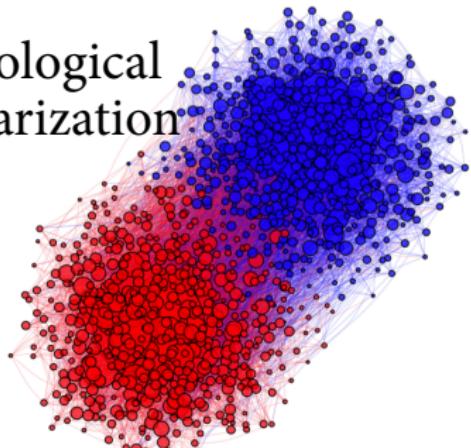
Collective Action

Political deliberation



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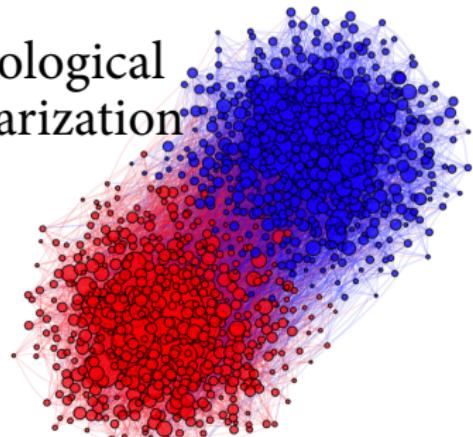
Political  
deliberation



Public diplomacy

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Collective Action



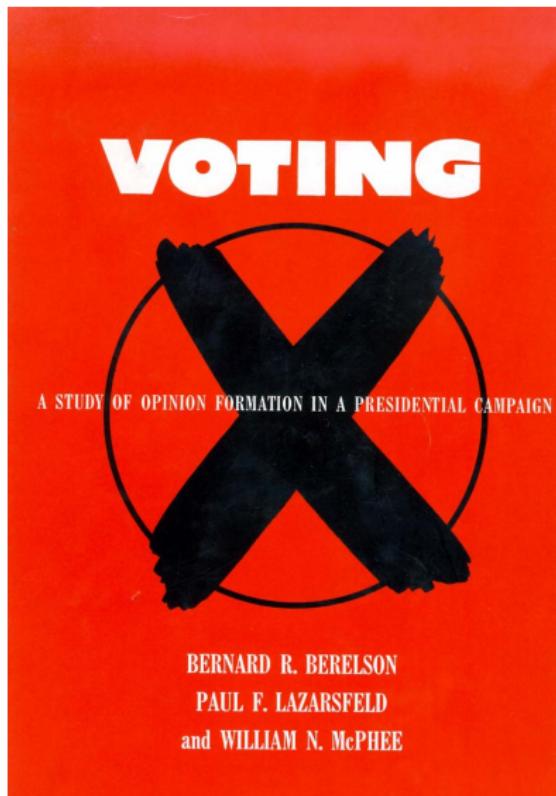
Political  
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Public diplomacy

## Political behavior is social

- ▶ Opinion formation as a *social process* (Berelson et al, 1954)



# Political behavior is social

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- ▶ *Voting is contagious* (Nickerson, 2008)

American Political Science Review

Vol. 102, No. 1 February 2008

DOI: 10.1017/S0003055408080039

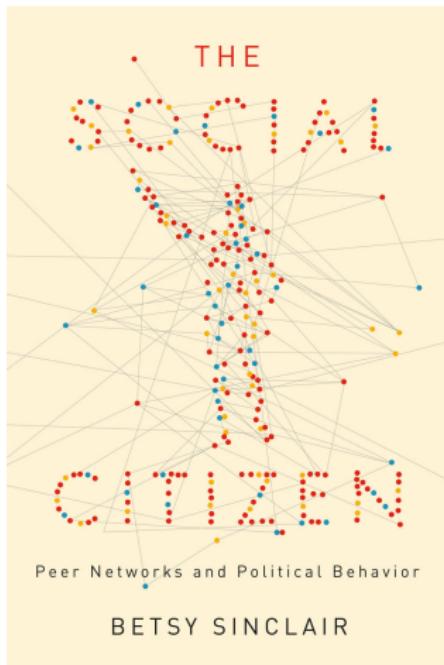
## Is Voting Contagious? Evidence from Two Field Experiments

DAVID W. NICKERSON University of Notre Dame

**M**embers of the same household share similar voting behaviors on average, but how much of this correlation can be attributed to the behavior of the other person in the household? Disentangling and isolating the unique effects of peer behavior, selection processes, and congruent interests is a challenge for all studies of interpersonal influence. This study proposes and utilizes a carefully designed placebo-controlled experimental protocol to overcome this identification problem. During a face-to-face canvassing experiment targeting households with two registered voters, residents who answered the door were exposed to either a Get Out the Vote message (treatment) or a recycling pitch (placebo). The turnout of the person in the household not answering the door allows for contagion to be measured. Both experiments find that 60% of the propensity to vote is passed onto the other member of the household. This finding suggests a mechanism by which civic participation norms are adopted and couples grow more similar over time.

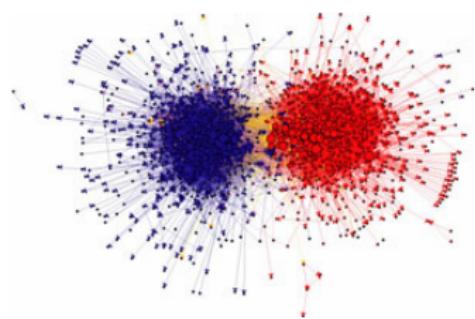
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- ▶ *Voting is contagious* (Nickerson, 2008)
- ▶ The *social citizen* (Sinclair, 2012)

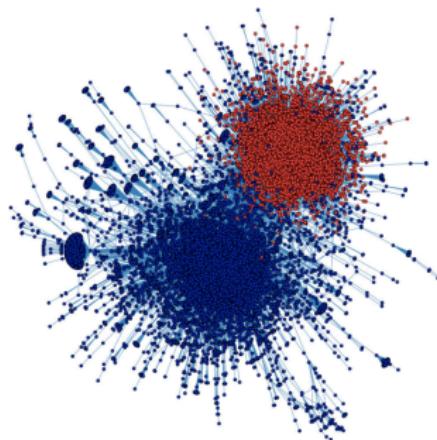


# Social media as echo chambers?

- ▶ communities of like-minded individuals (homophily)



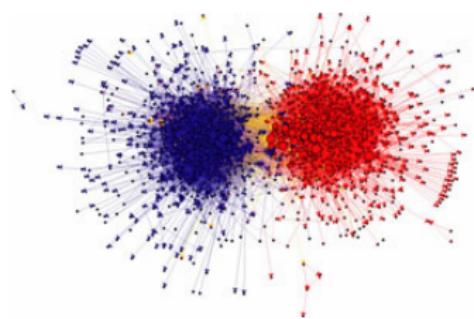
Adamic and Glance (2005)



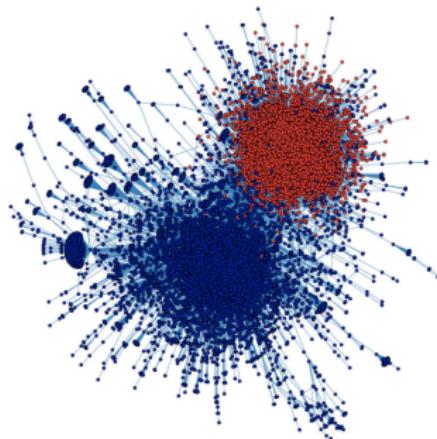
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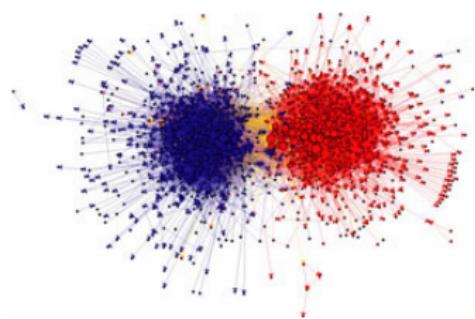


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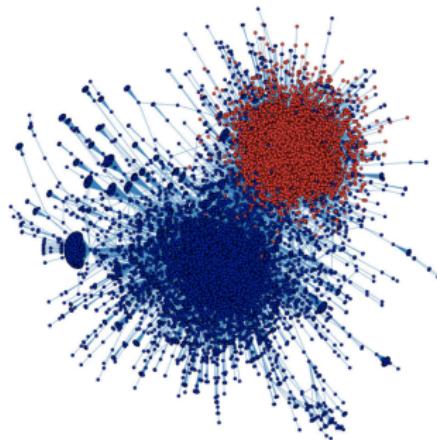
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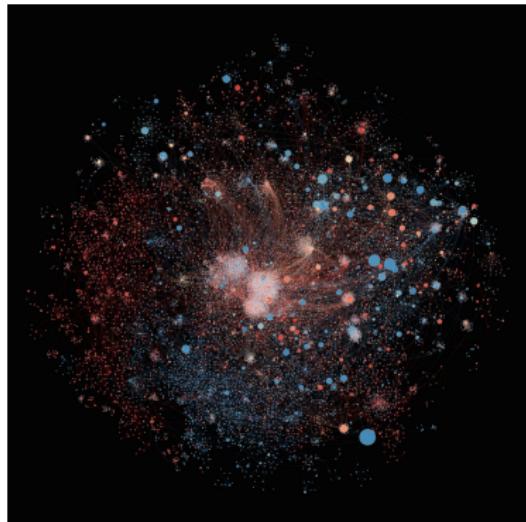
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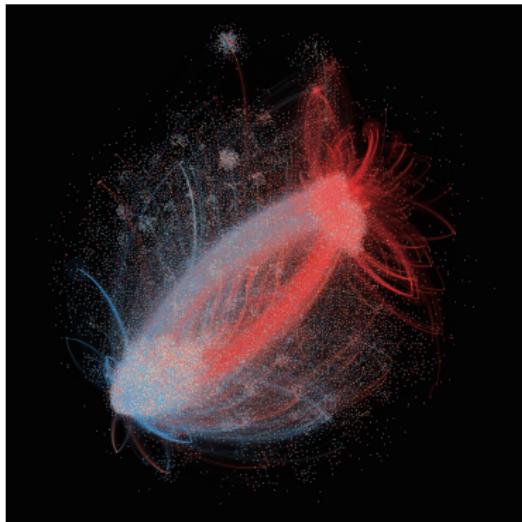
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- ▶ ...generates selective exposure to congenial information
- ▶ ...reinforced by ranking algorithms – “filter bubble” (Parisier)
- ▶ ...increases political polarization (Sunstein, Prior)

# Social media as echo chambers?



2013 SuperBowl

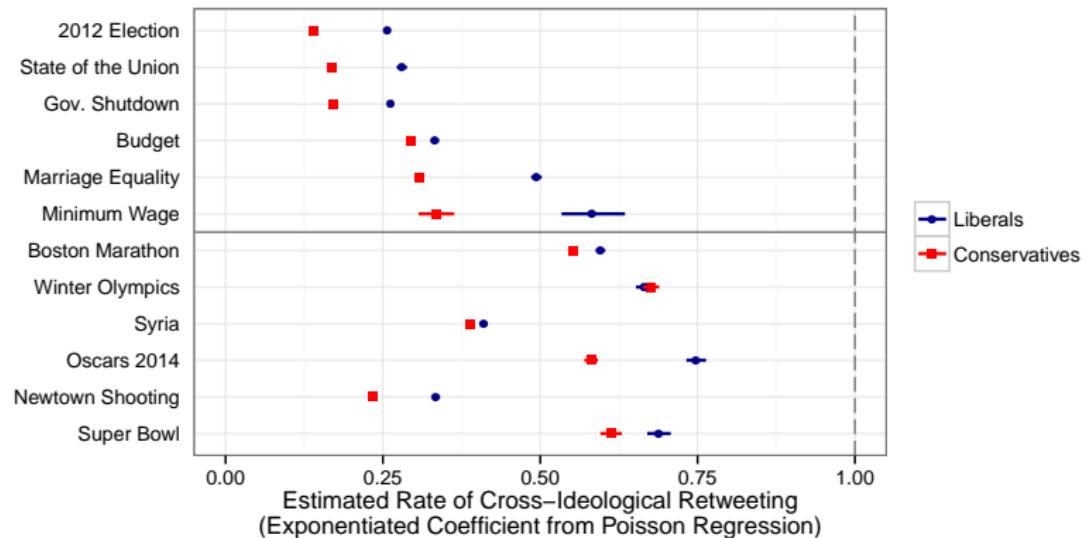


2012 Election

Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau (2015) "Tweeting From Left to Right: Is Online Political Communication More Than an Echo Chamber?"  
*Psychological Science*

# Social media as echo chambers?

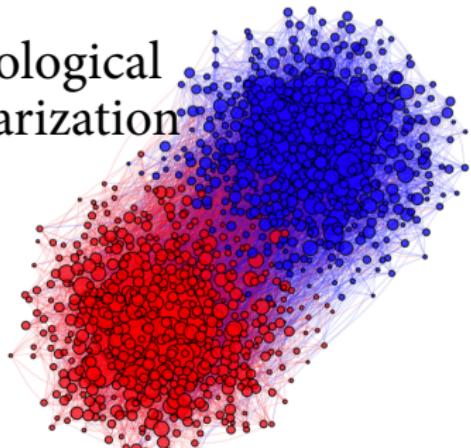
Ideological asymmetries: liberals are more likely to engage in cross-ideological interactions than conservatives.



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# How social media is transforming...

Ideological polarization



Collective Action



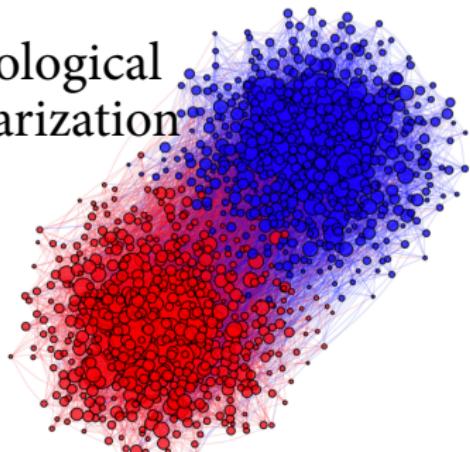
Political  
deliberation



Public diplomacy

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Collective Action

Political deliberation

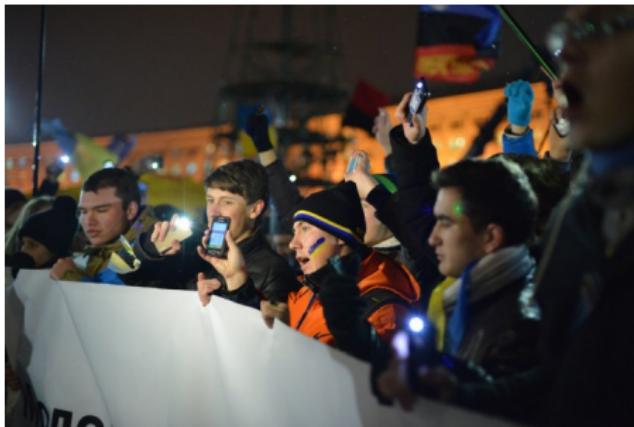


Public diplomacy





#OccupyGezi



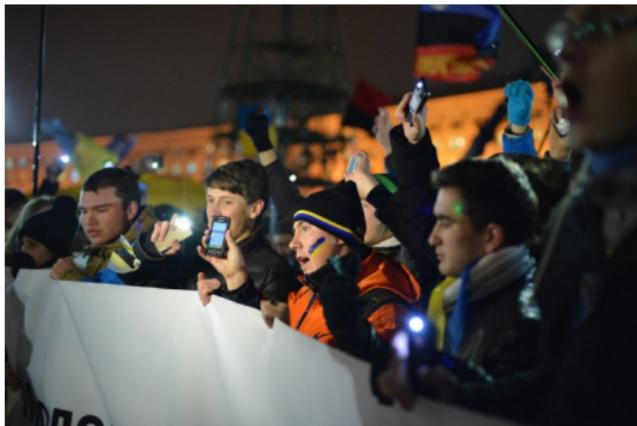
#Euromaidan



#OccupyGezi



#OccupyWallStreet



#Euromaidan



#Indignados



slacktivism?

## Why the revolution will not be tweeted

*When the sit-in movement spread from Greensboro throughout the South, it did not spread indiscriminately. It spread to those cities which had preexisting “movement centers” – a core of dedicated and trained activists ready to turn the “fever” into action.*

*The kind of activism associated with social media isn’t like this at all. [...] Social networks are effective at increasing participation – by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires.*

**Gladwell, Small Change (New Yorker)**

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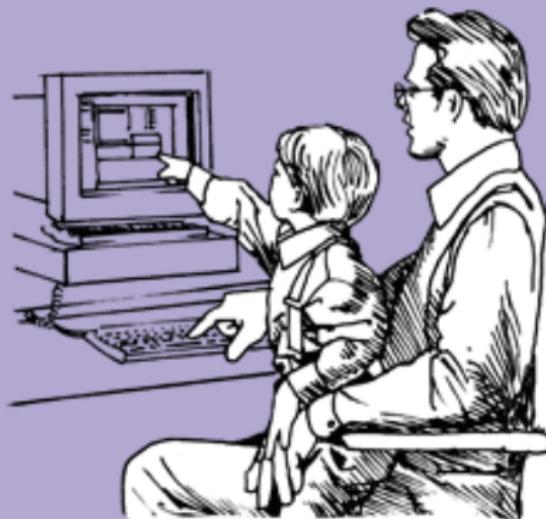
*You can’t simply join a revolution any time you want, contribute a comma to a random revolutionary decree, rephrase the guillotine manual, and then slack off for months. Revolutions prize centralization and require fully committed leaders, strict discipline, absolute dedication, and strong relationships.*

*When every node on the network can send a message to all other nodes, confusion is the new default equilibrium.*

**Morozov, The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom**

## Our argument

Look Daddy, we're changing the world one tweet at a time.



# The critical periphery



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Critical Periphery in the Growth of Social Protests

Pablo Barberá<sup>1\*</sup>, Ning Wang<sup>2</sup>, Richard Bonneau<sup>3,4</sup>, John T. Jost<sup>1,5,6</sup>, Jonathan Nagler<sup>6</sup>,  
Joshua Tucker<sup>6</sup>, Sandra González-Bailón<sup>7\*</sup>

- ▶ Structure of online protest networks:

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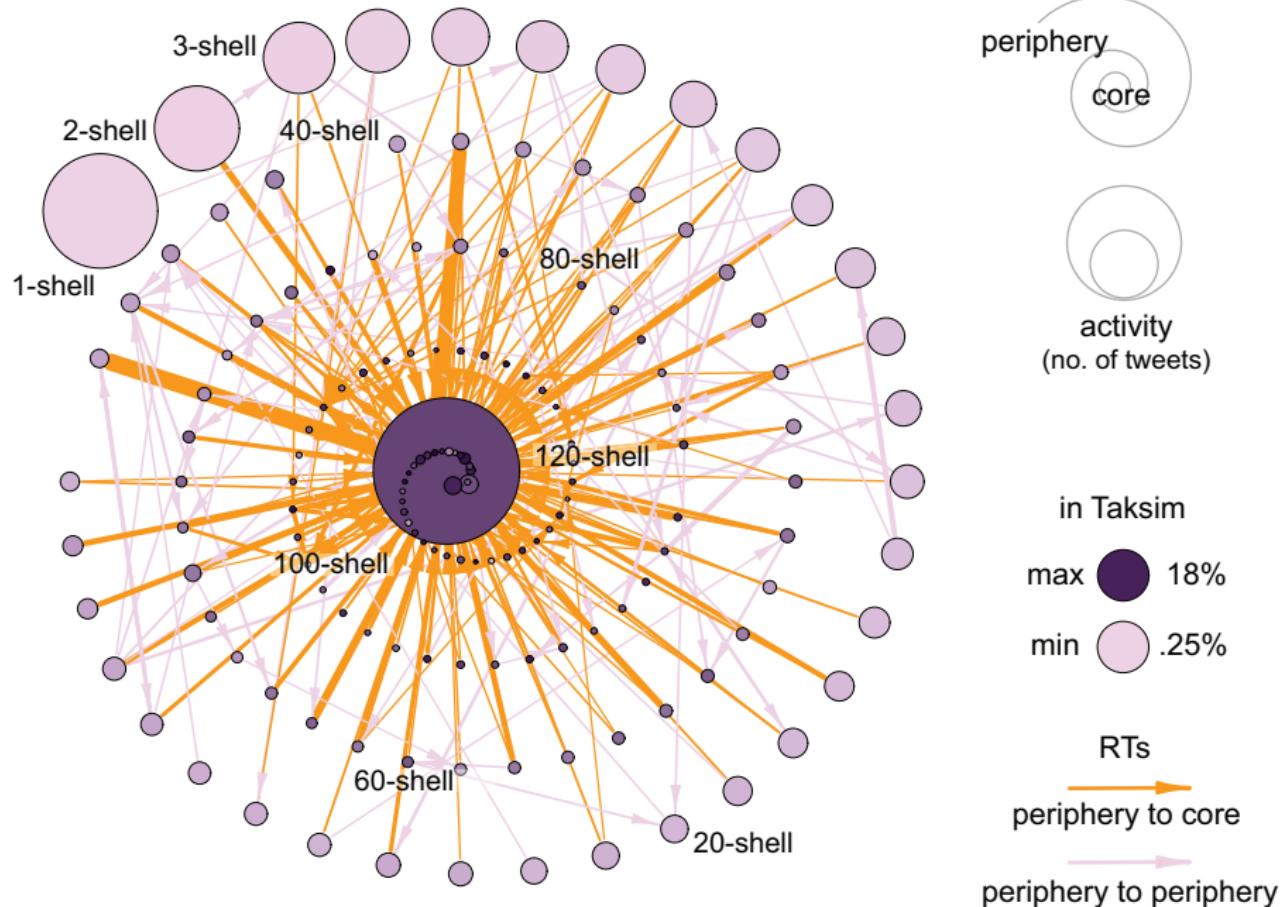
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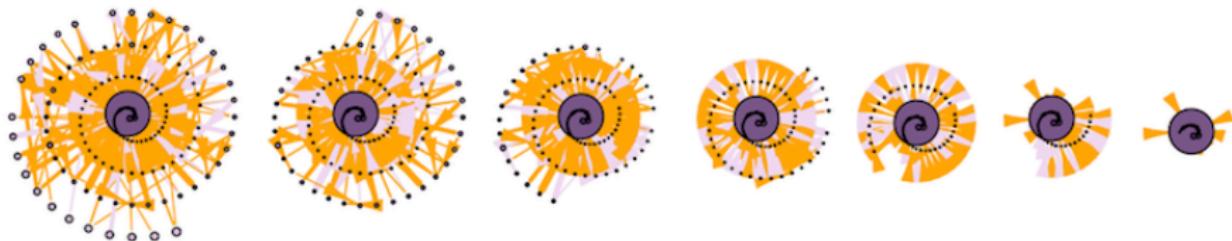
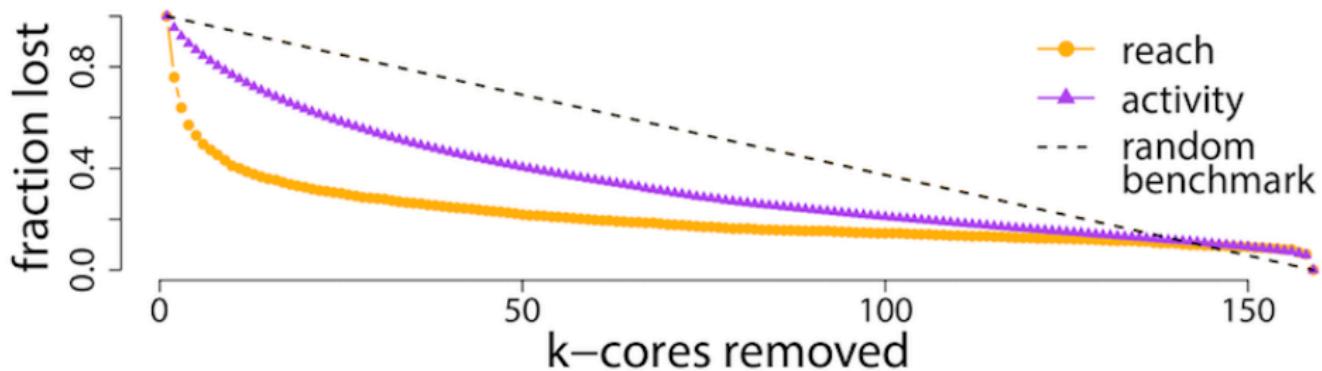
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→ **BOTH** core and periphery are necessary for success!

# k-core decomposition of #OccupyGezi network



# Relative importance of core and periphery

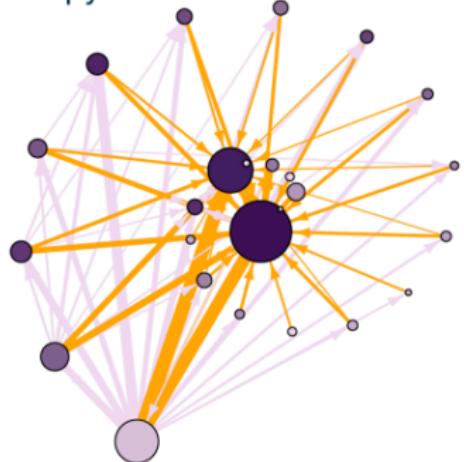


reach: aggregate size of participants' audience

activity: total number of protest messages published (not only RTs)

# k-core decomposition of Occupy & Indignados networks

Occupy

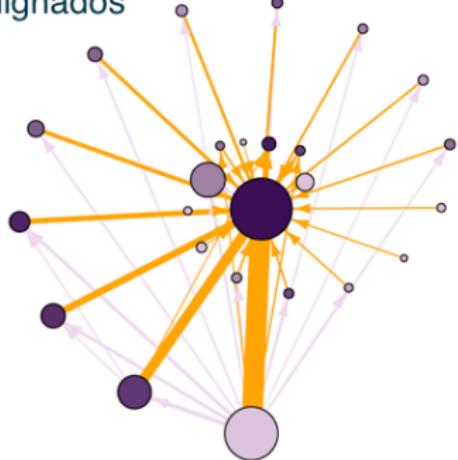


RTs  
core (orange)  
periphery (light purple)

instrength (normalized)  
1 (dark purple)  
0 (light purple)

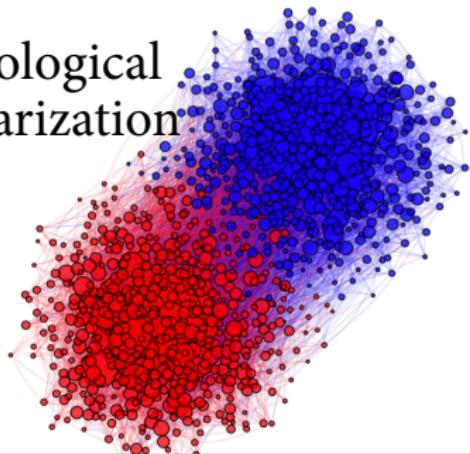
activity (no. of tweets)

Indignados



# How social media is transforming...

Ideological polarization



Collective Action



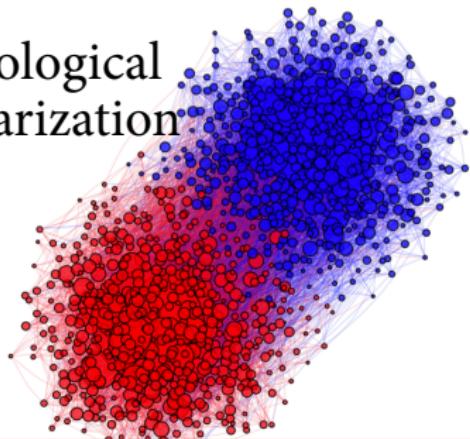
Political  
deliberation



Public diplomacy

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Collective Action



Political  
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Public diplomacy

# Social media as a public space for political deliberation?



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*- George Osborne, UK Chancellor (10:50 pm. 10 May 2013)*

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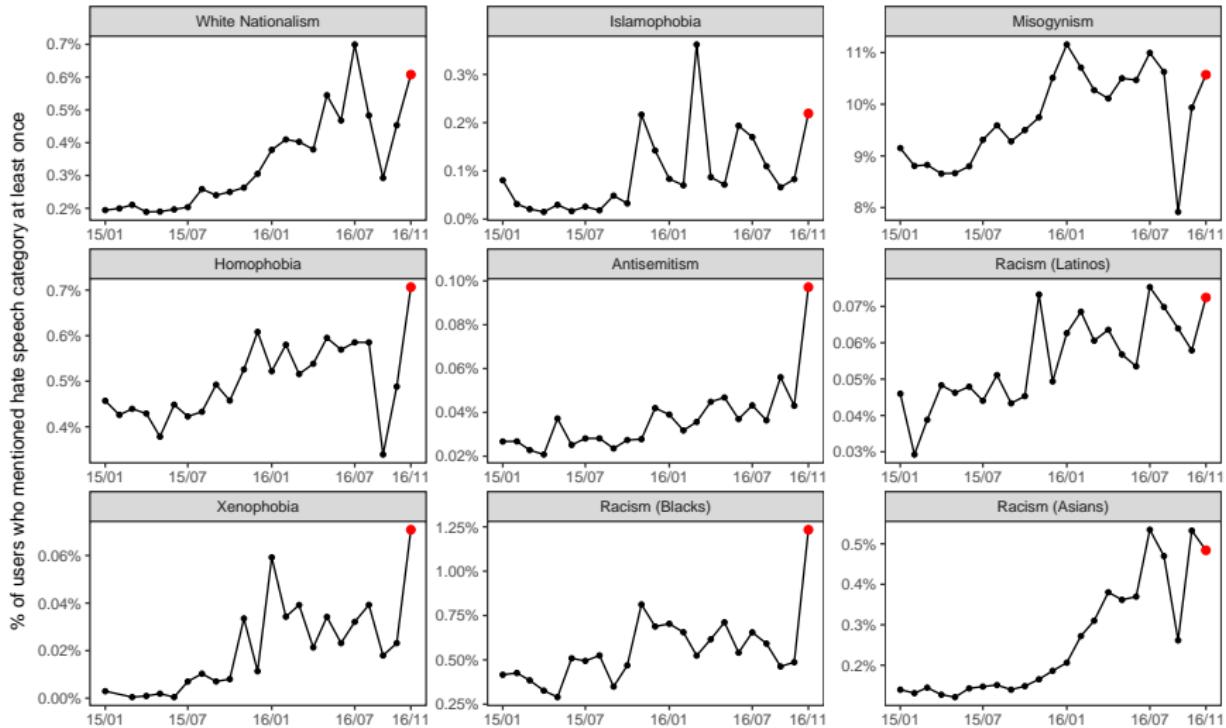
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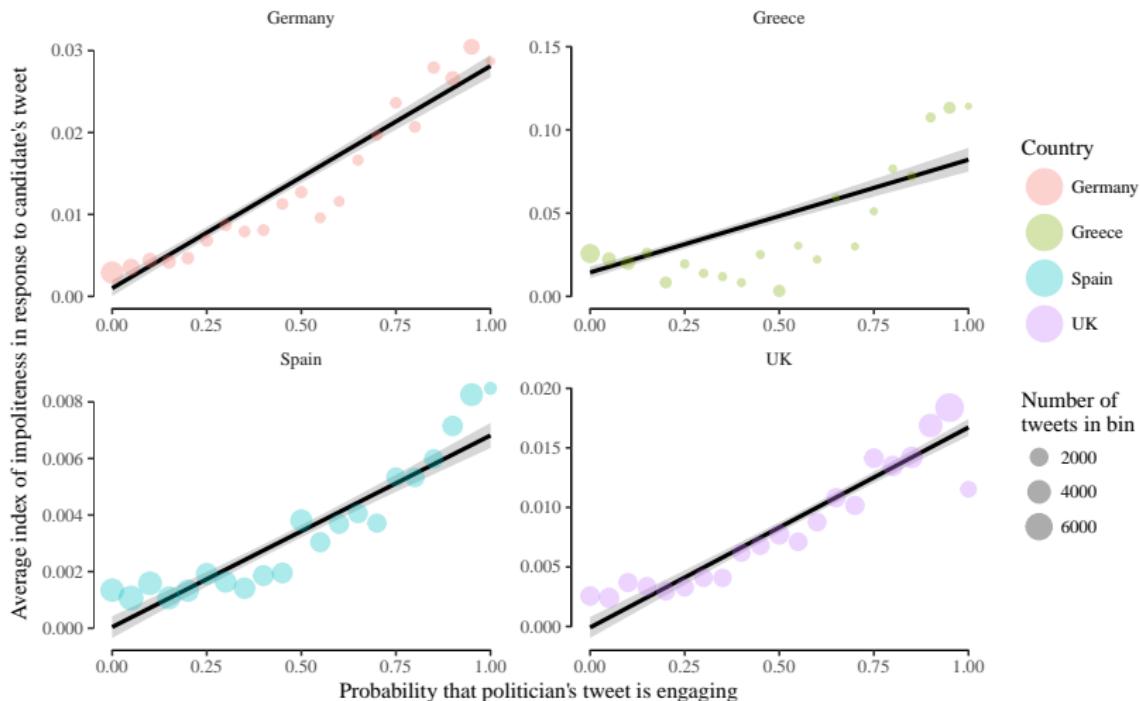
**“@GeorgeOsborne Is Darth Vader your dad?”**

*– doctorstuffandguff, Twitter user (10:55 pm. 10 May 2013)*

# Measuring the prevalence of hate speech on Twitter



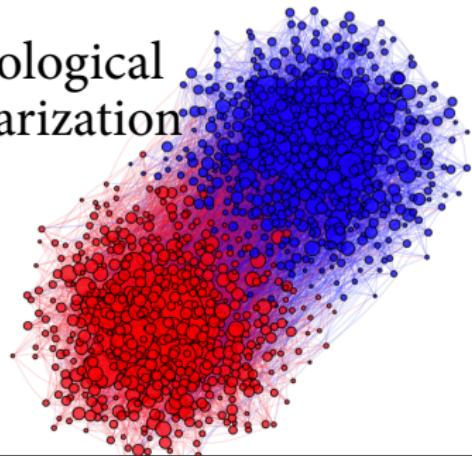
# Incivility reduces politicians' incentives for deliberation



Theocharis, Barberá, Fazekas, Popa (2016) “The Consequences of Citizens’ Uncivil Twitter Use When Interacting With Party Candidates”. *Journal of Communication*.

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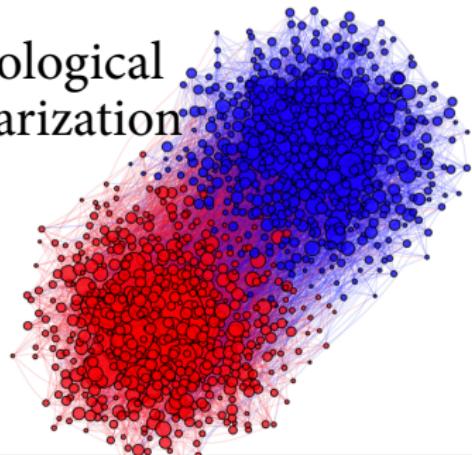
Collective Action



Public diplomacy

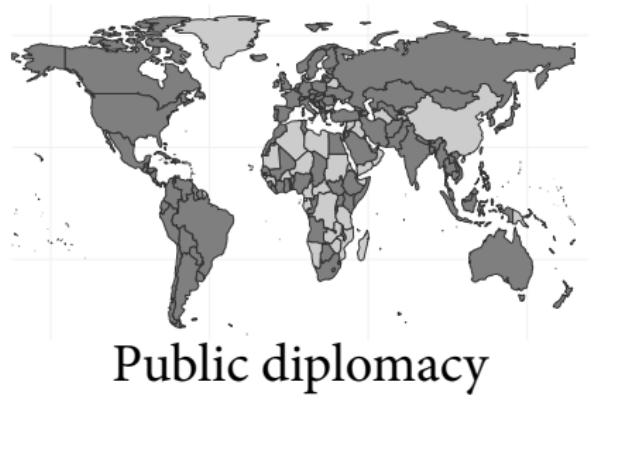
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Collective Action

Political  
deliberation



Public diplomacy

# World leaders on social media



Hassan Rouhani

@HassanRouhani



Follow

Foreign Ministry will be in charge of Iran's  
#Nuclear Negotiations. Ready for constructive  
interaction with the world  
[president.ir/fa/70924](http://president.ir/fa/70924)

Reply Retweet Favorite More

RETWEETS

219

FAVORITES

75



8:39 AM - 5 Sep 2013

# World leaders on social media

 **Dmitry Medvedev**   
@MedvedevRussiaE

The harmonious development of Crimea and Sevastopol as part of our state is one of the main objectives of the Russian Government

 [Reply](#)  [Retweet](#)  [Favorite](#)  [More](#)

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RETWEETS <b>144</b>	FAVORITES <b>57</b>	        
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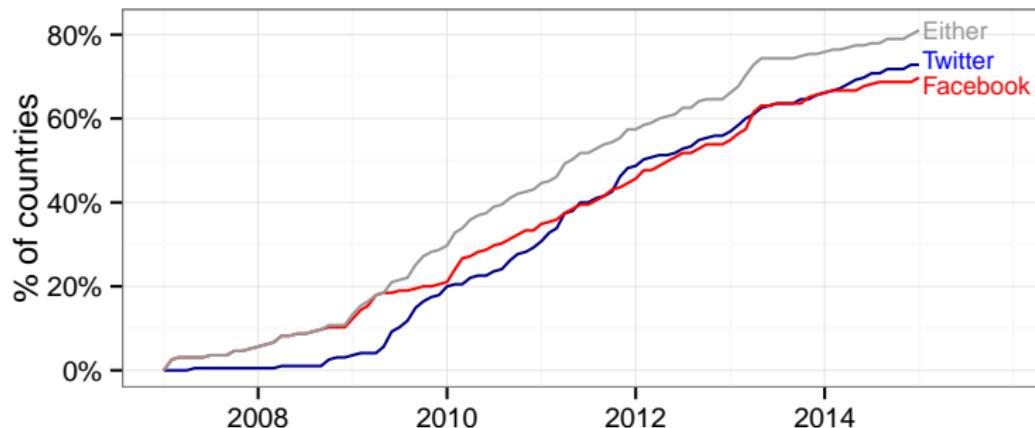
10:39 AM - 21 Mar 2014

# World leaders on social media



80% of world leaders of countries with population > 500,000 had an active presence on Twitter as of late 2014 (countries in dark grey)

## World leaders on social media



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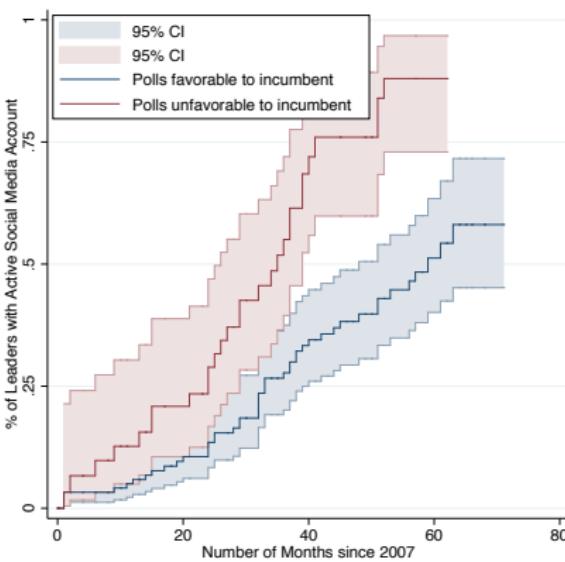
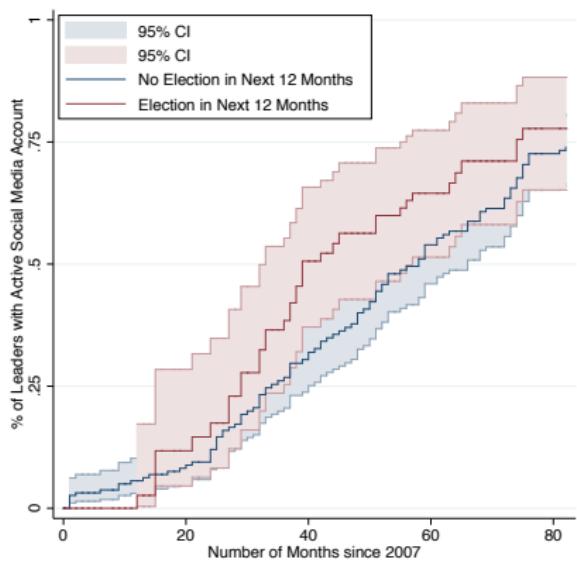
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  - What is the effect of social media use on political survival, international public opinion, and diplomatic interactions?

# Digital diplomacy



Barberá, Zeitzoff (2016) “The New Public Address System: Why Do World Leaders Adopt Social Media?”. R&R at *International Studies Quarterly*.

## What we know so far

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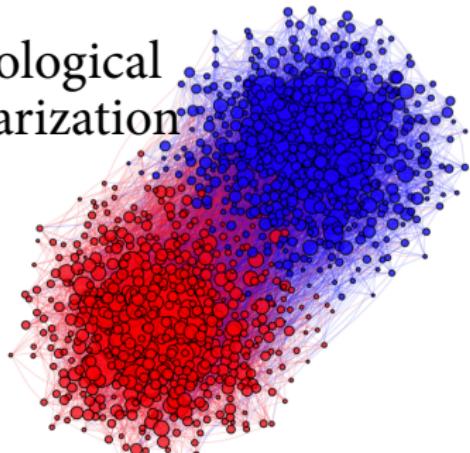
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- ▶ Do they have different “tweeting styles” depending on the emergence of political challenges? e.g. distraction strategy vs attack strategy.

# How social media is transforming...

Ideological polarization



Collective Action



Political  
deliberation



Public diplomacy

# What social media reveals about...

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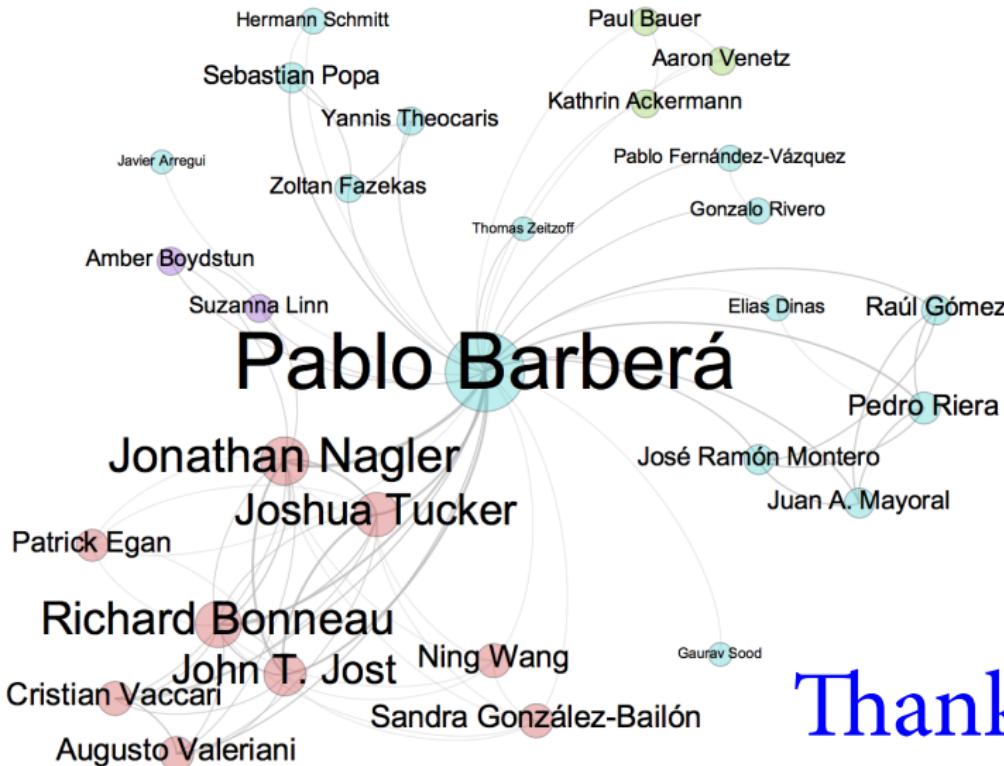
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- ▶ Electoral pressures and social unrest drive world leaders’ adoption of social media tools



Thanks!

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# Networked Democracy? How Social Media Is Transforming Political Behavior

**Pablo Barberá**

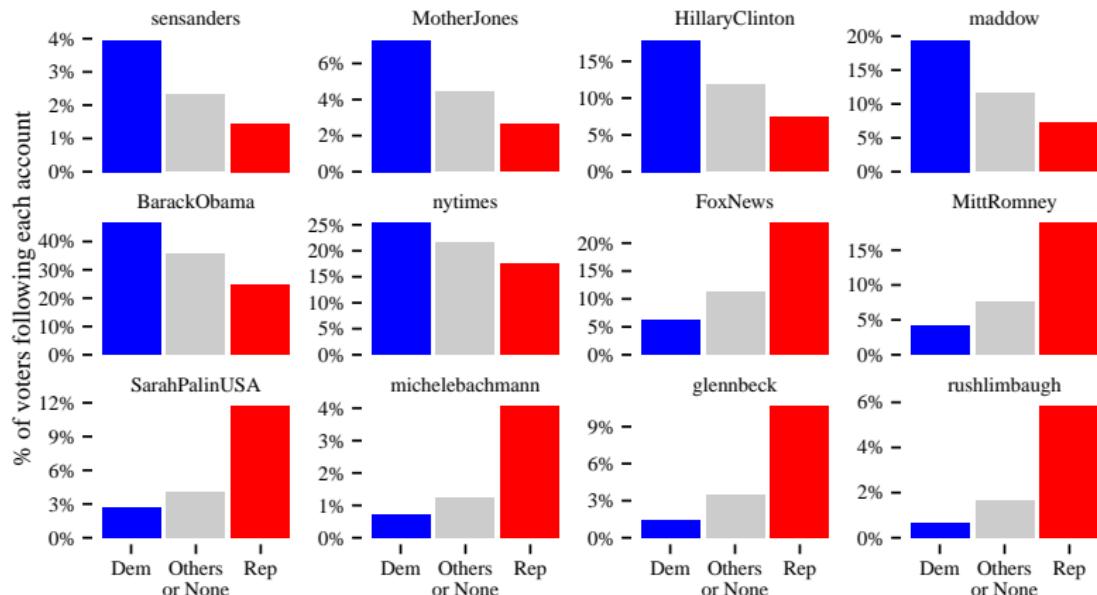
School of International Relations  
University of Southern California

[www.pablobarbera.com](http://www.pablobarbera.com)

February 15, 2017

# But how to measure political ideology of Twitter users?

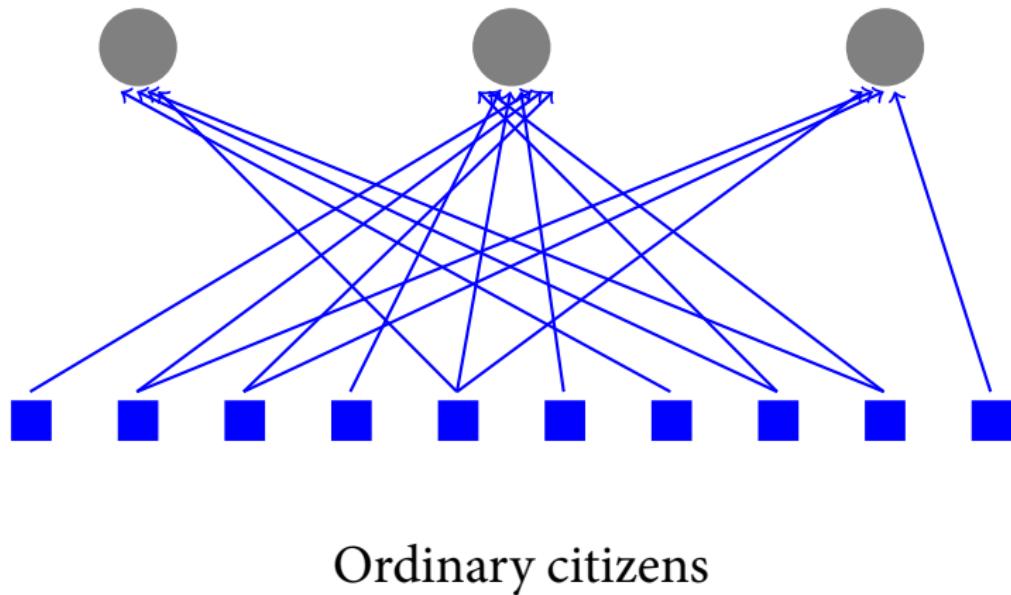
Ideological distance and following decisions: Observed proportion of users following a sample of political accounts (U.S. sample of voters matched with Twitter profiles)



(Accounts are ordered from most liberal to most conservative)

# Measuring ideology using Twitter networks

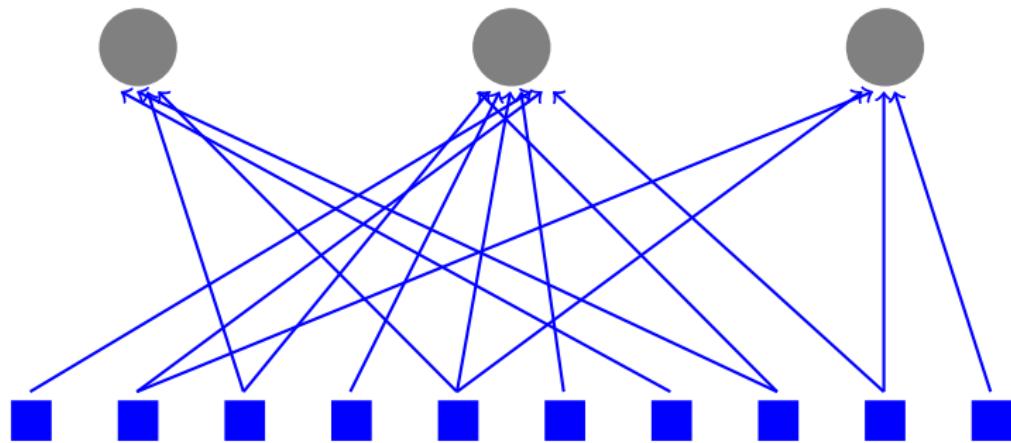
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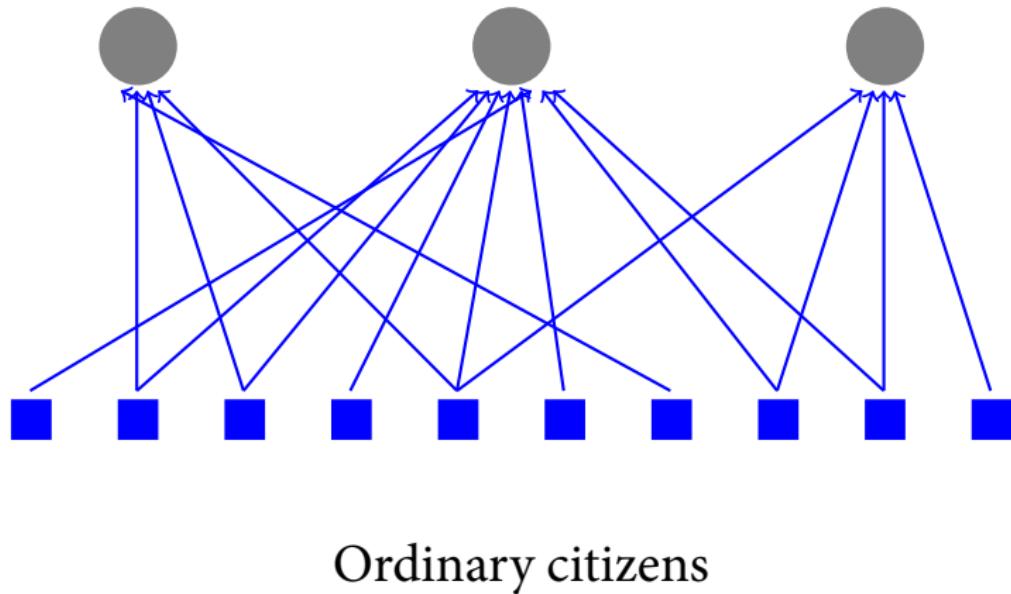
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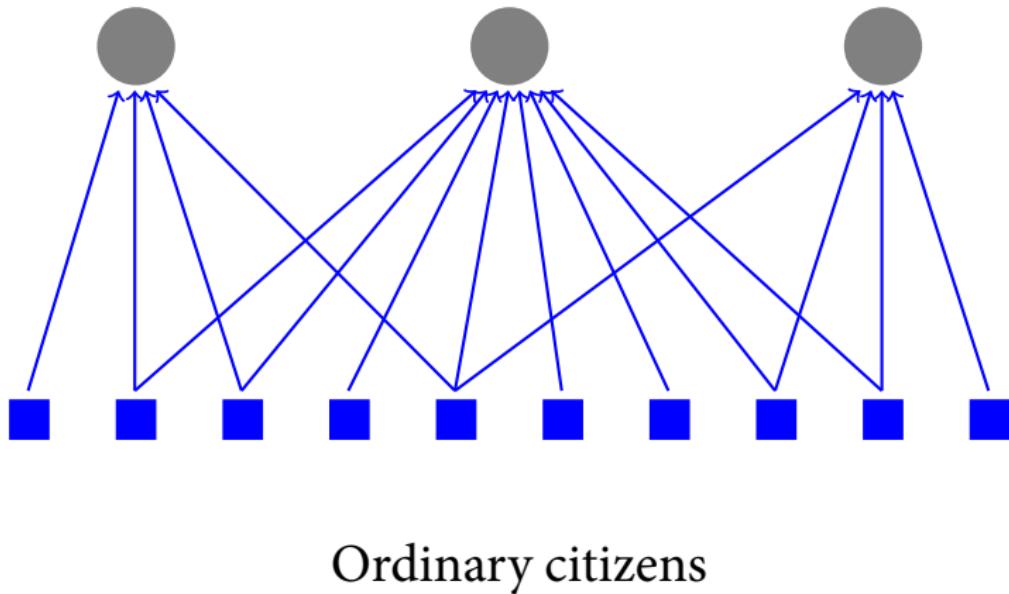
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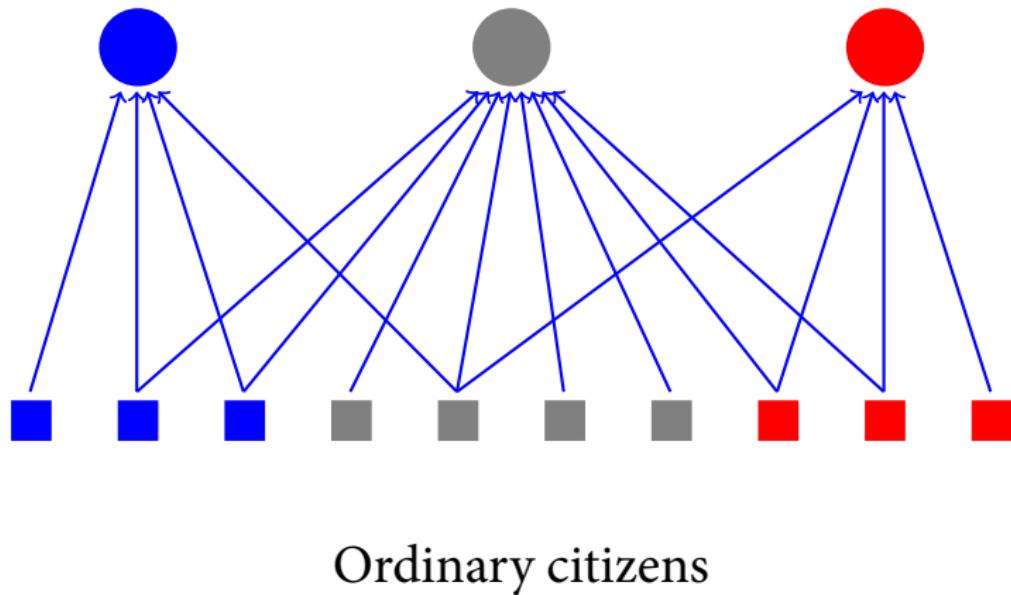
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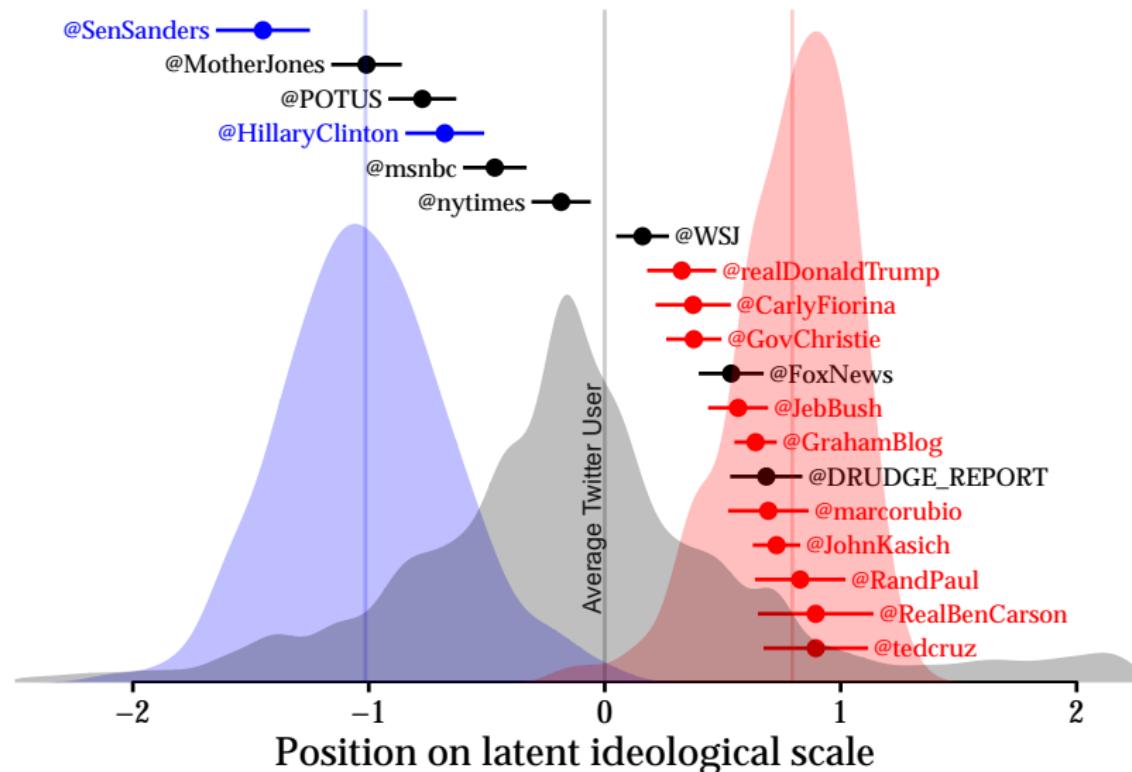
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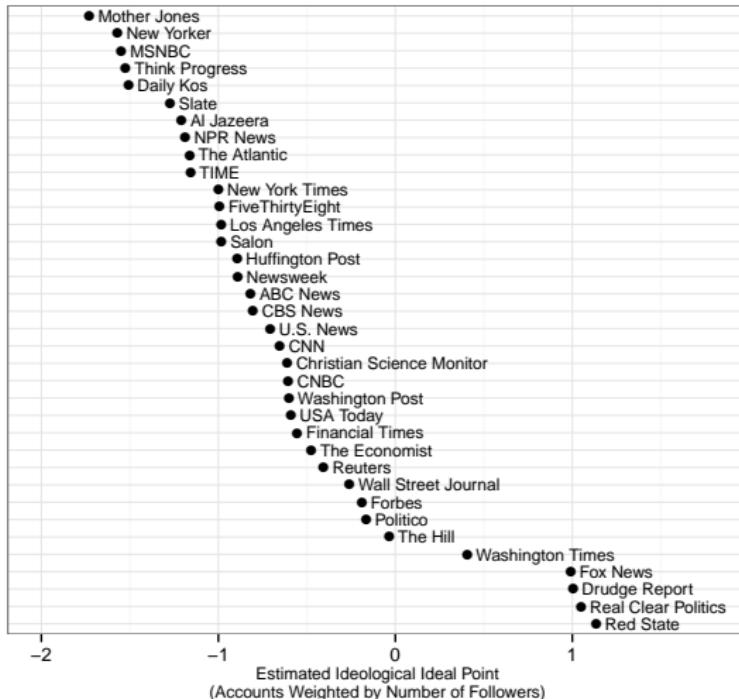
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# Estimated ideology of presidential candidates



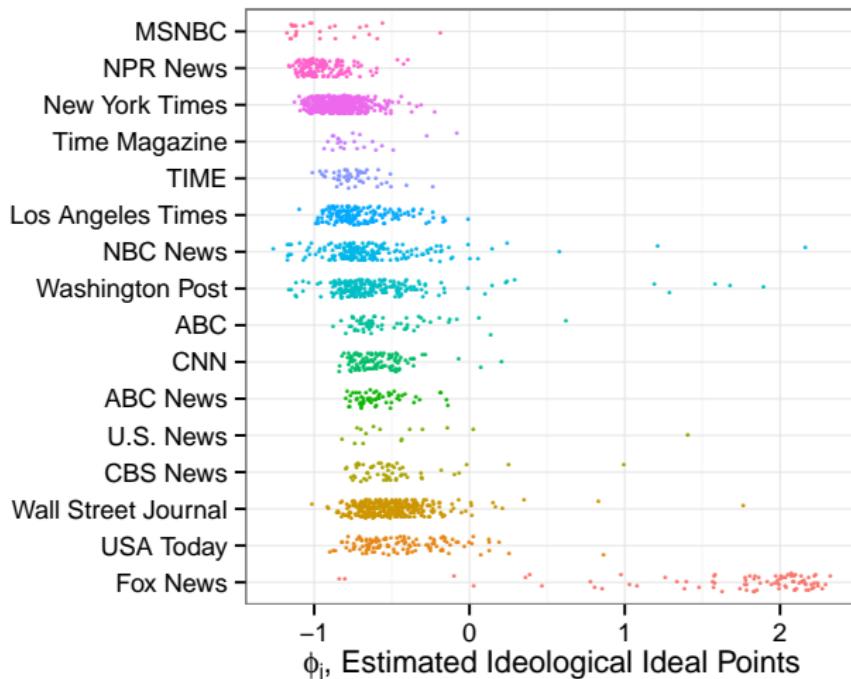
Barberá “Who is the most conservative Republican candidate for president?”  
*The Washington Post*, June 16 2015

# Estimated ideology of media outlets and journalists



Barberá & Sood (2014) “Follow Your Ideology: A Measure of Ideological Location of Media Sources”, MPSA conference paper

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