

Politicians from 12 countries rarely engage with researchers on social media, but this can change when expertise gains salience

Sebastian Ramirez-Ruiz
Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow (SPS)

Hix Colloquium
January 22, 2026



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that spark my **curiosity**.

I also have **research interest** beyond what you will hear today...

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- Causal inference
- Politics, sociology, and generally science of science
- Public opinion
- Open science practices
- Political behavior and communication
- many more...

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Evidence can be an important **input** in
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Politicians and policymakers often **invoke** the **authority** of scientific knowledge and technical expertise

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Formalization of governance arrangements and *grand strategies* for **evidence integration** across polities (e.g., U.S., U.K., EU, AU)

Narrative spread of **evidence-based policymaking** (*and praxis?*) across the world



Despite its rational appeal, the notion of policymaking **guided** by **evidence** leaves some open questions

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And **policymakers have** the
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(e.g., Caplan, 1979; Weiss, 1979; Head, 2008; Contandriopoulos et al., 2010; National Research Council, 2012; Parkhurst, 2017; Walgrave and Dejaeghere, 2017; Senninger and Hansen, 2025)

In practice, information and evidence flows are:

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Studying **elites** is **not** an
easy feat

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 - rely on **retrospective** or **self-reported** accounts,
 - are **hard to scale** across countries/time,
 - miss the **granular** and **fluid** dynamics of information **flows**.

Large emphasis on:

(e.g., Baekgaard et al., 2019; Banuri et al., 2019; DellaVigna et al., 2024; Hjort et al., 2021; Lee, 2022; Li, 2017; Toma and Bell, 2024; Vivalt and Coville, 2023)

Large emphasis on:

“What **would** a policy
decisionmaker **do if** she were
confronted with **X** research
finding?”

(e.g., Baekgaard et al., 2019; Banuri et al., 2019; DellaVigna et al., 2024; Hjort et al., 2021; Lee, 2022; Li, 2017; Toma and Bell, 2024; Vivalt and Coville, 2023)

Information does not simply “travel” from researchers to elites—it is **filtered, selected, and ‘digested’** within complex environments.

Individual inclination to **engage with**
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"Would she encounter researchers and be confronted with X research finding in the first place?"



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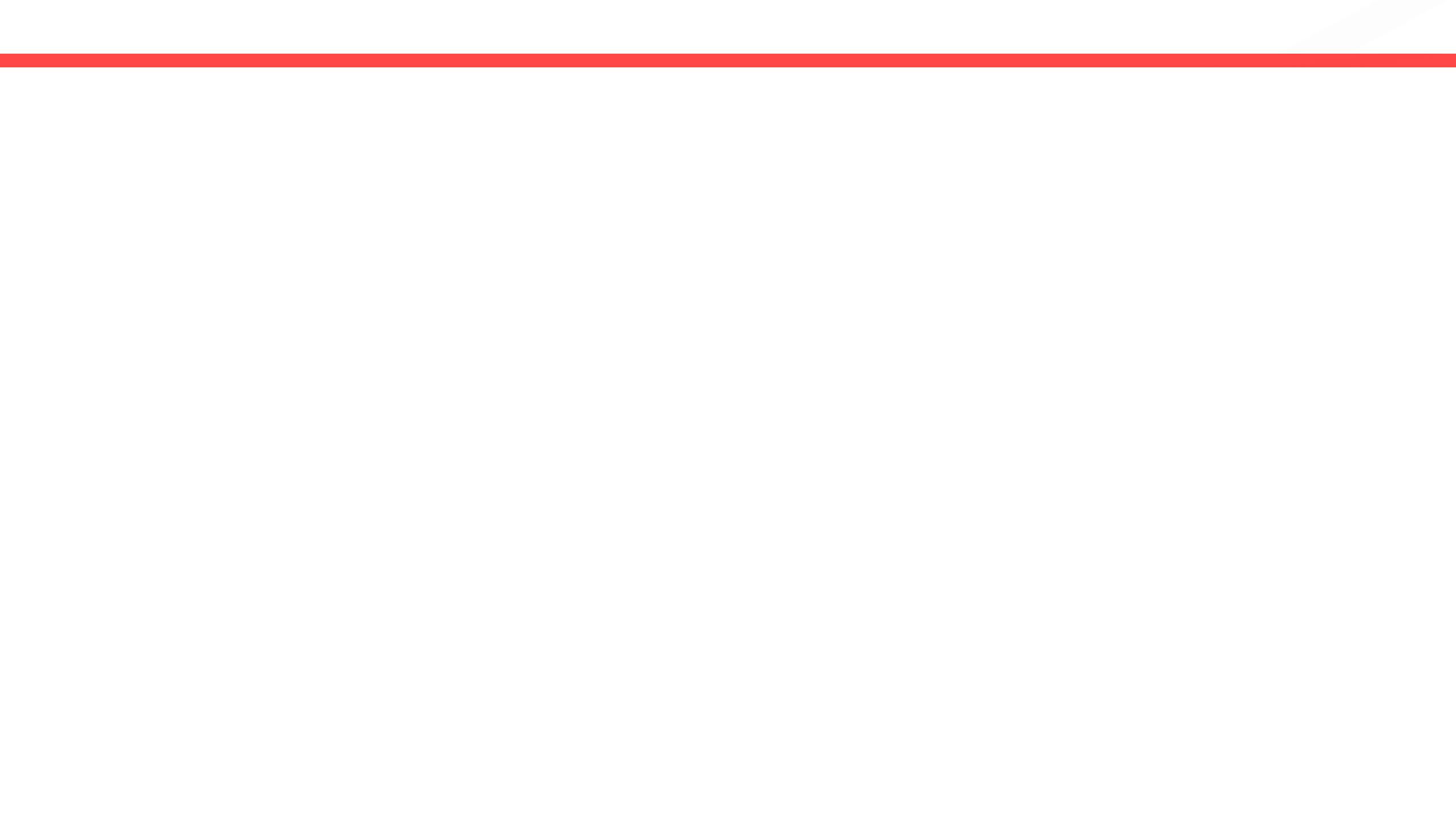
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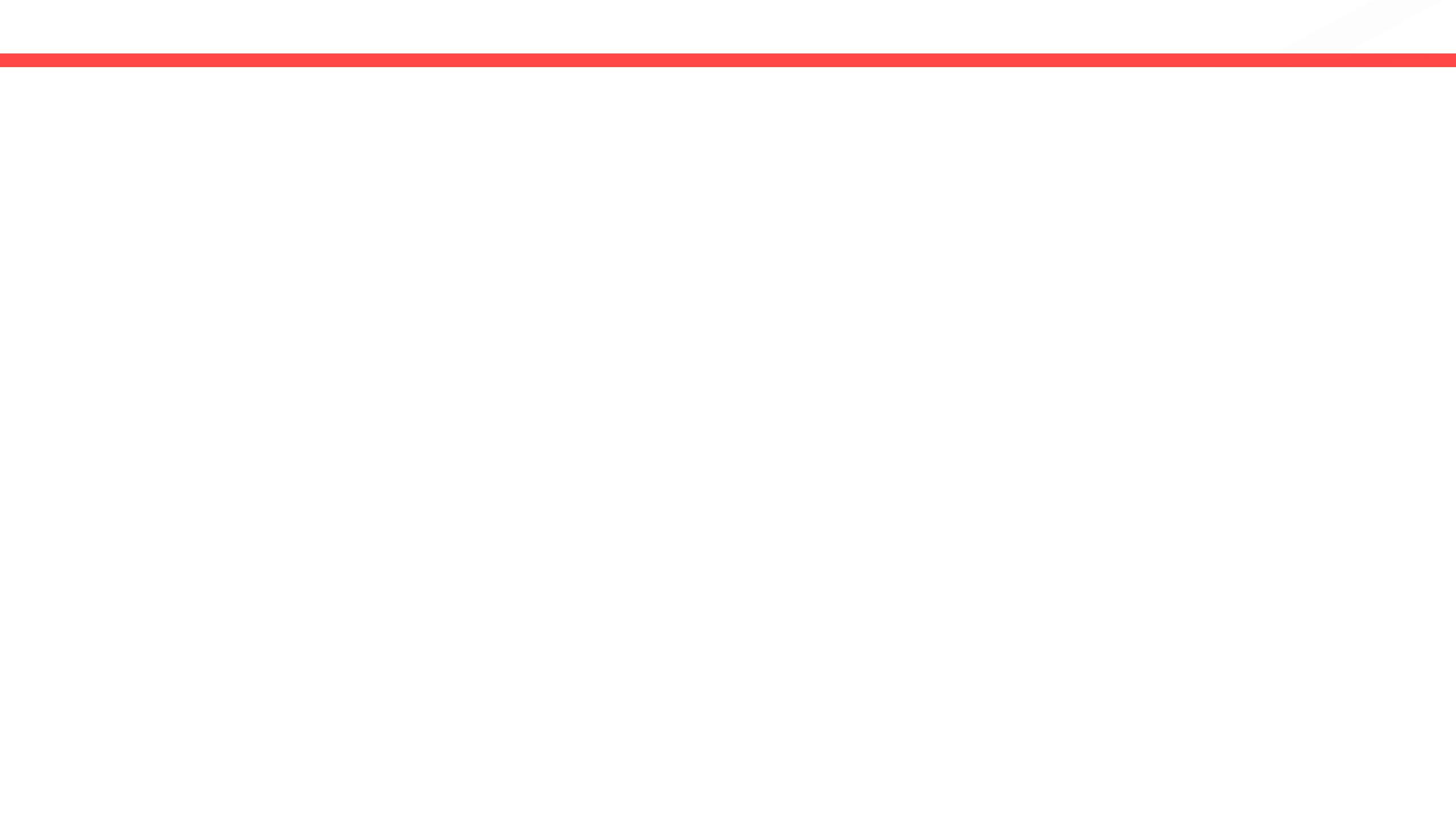
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- I want to know if what **we** (*scientists*) **discover** and **talk about** actually makes it in front of people who make big decisions.

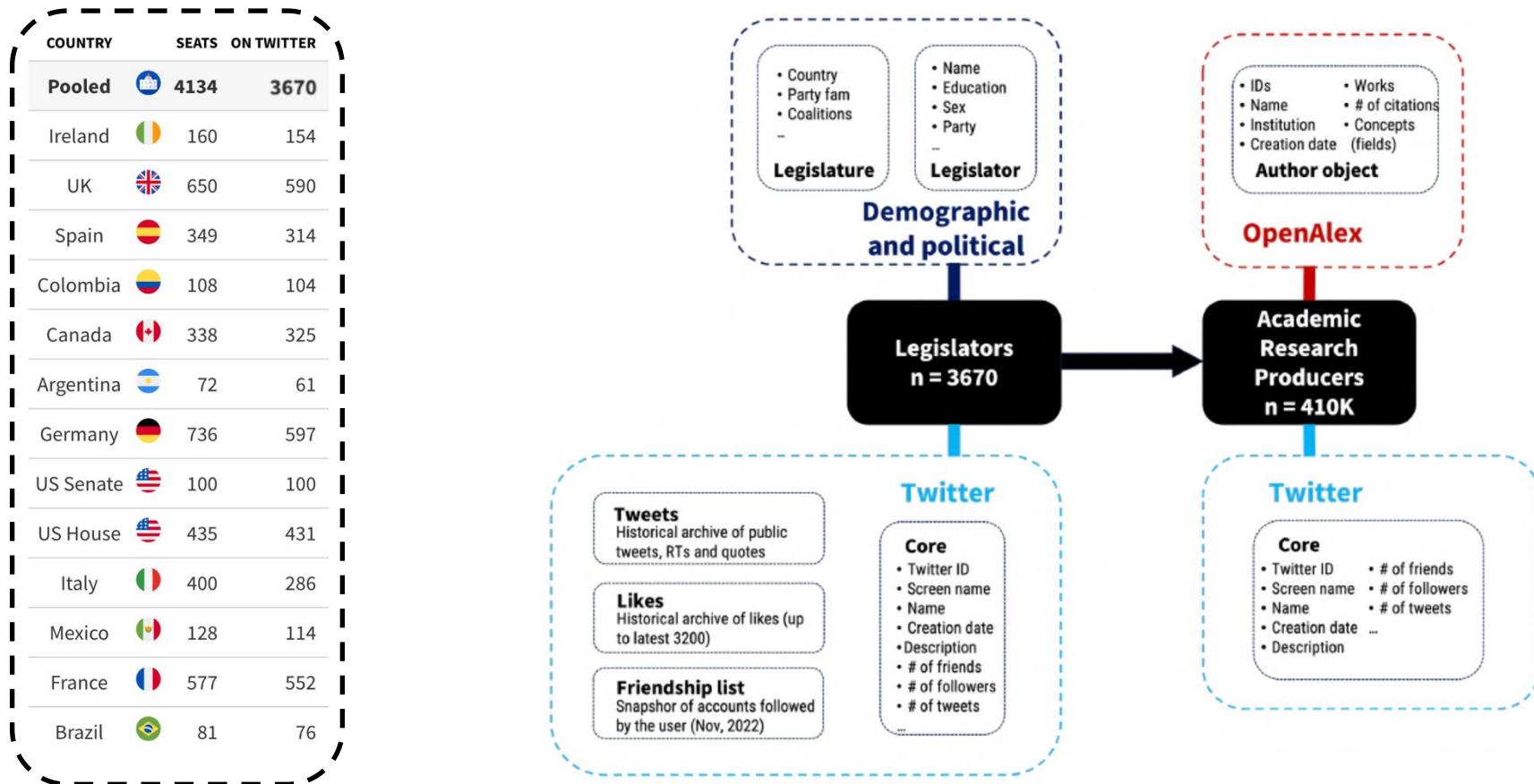
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- I gather lots of these clues, curate them, organize them, and **try to understand** the patterns.



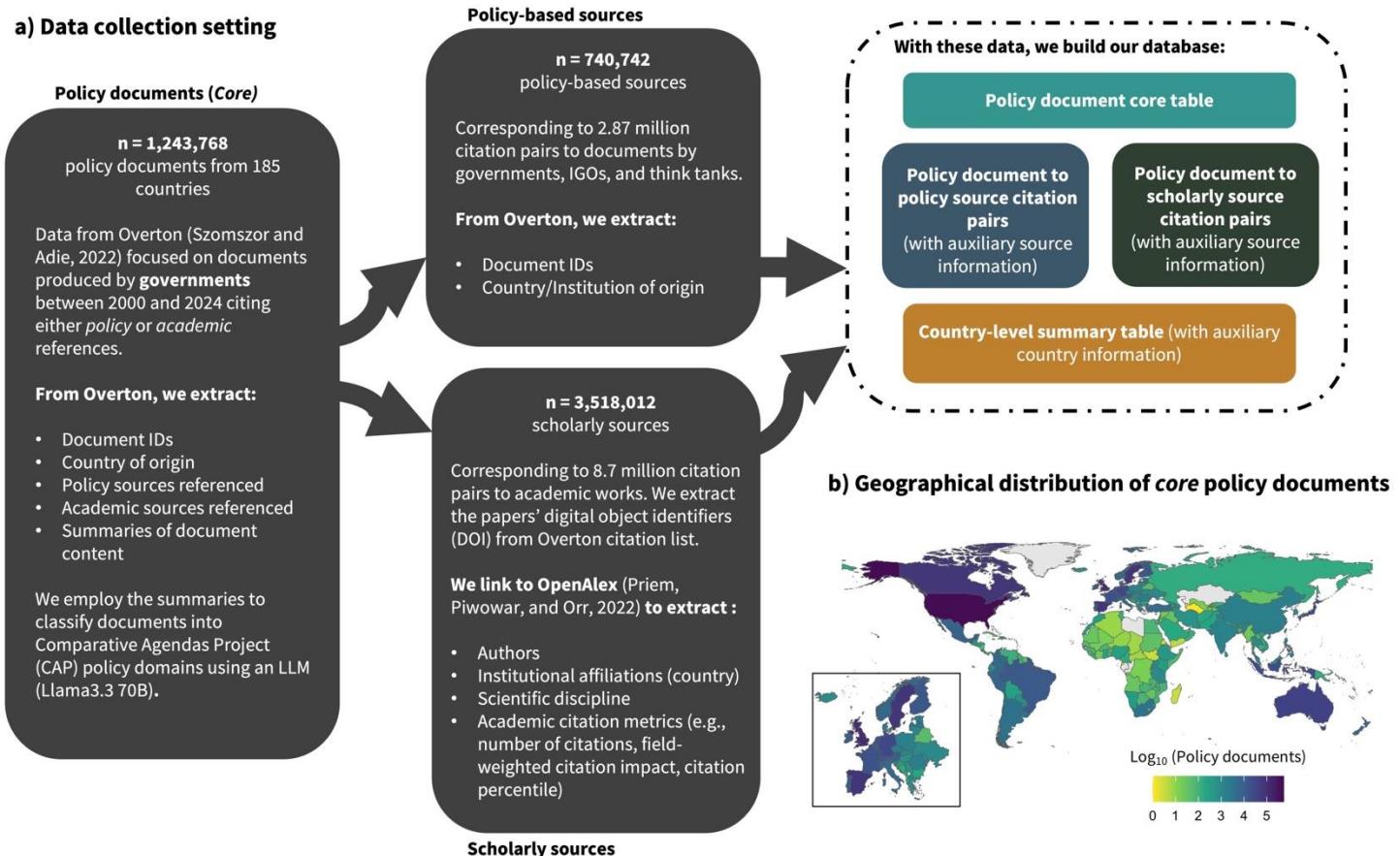
*Politicians from 12 countries rarely engage with researchers on social media, but this can change when expertise gains salience (Ramirez-Ruiz)

A complete archive of **Twitter digital trace data** from **~3.7K legislators in 12 countries** linked to a dataset of more than **410K researchers**



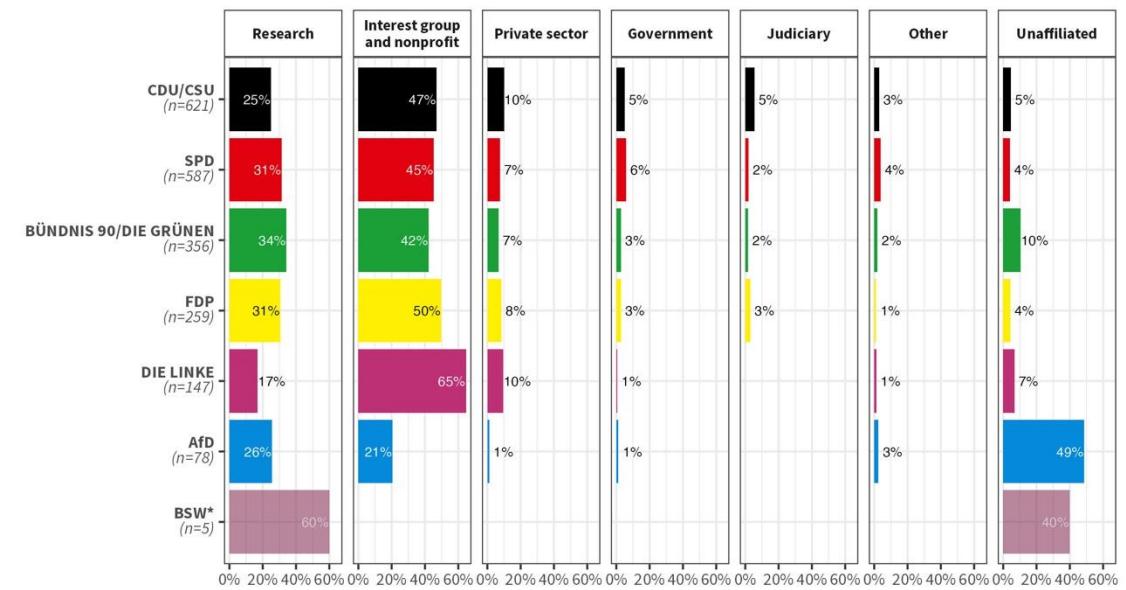
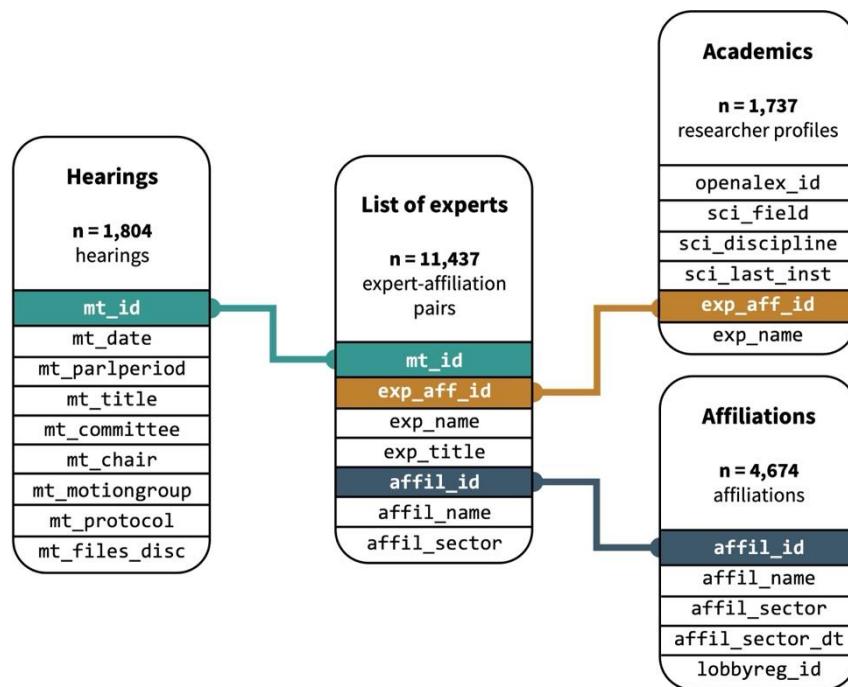
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A relational database of **≈1.2 million government policy documents** from **185 countries** linked to metadata about the **policy** and **scholarly** sources they cite



*Policy documents across 185 countries predominantly rely on evidence from the Global North (Ramirez-Ruiz and Senninger)

A **database of all public expert committee hearings** in the German Bundestag between 2009 to 2024 merged with metadata on the **expert witness** identities (**academic** and **lobbying** profiles)



*The Bundestag Expert Witness Tracker (BEWiT): A database of German Bundestag public expert hearings (Ramirez-Ruiz)

If you think these might
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If you think these might
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reach out to this guy
right here...



Politicians from 12 countries rarely engage with researchers on social media, but this can change when expertise gains salience

Sebastian Ramirez-Ruiz  (Hertie School)*

Abstract. Interactions between the policy and academic communities can play an important role in political decisionmaking. Still, the fact that much of the policymaking process happens behind closed doors obscures our understanding of the relationships between political decision-makers with academic researchers. To address this challenge, this paper introduces a novel approach that leverages online behavioral data from social media to examine how legislators interact with researchers. By analyzing data from 3,670 lawmakers in 12 countries merged to a novel database of 410K academic researchers on Twitter, this study provides new insights into these otherwise hidden interactions. The findings suggest that lawmakers do follow, yet rarely visibly engage with researchers online. Lawmakers from conservative and radical right parties follow and engage less with researchers online than their colleagues from other parties. While the base engagement is relatively low across legislatures, it can increase when expertise gains salience. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by policy uncertainty involving a novel and technically complex policy issue, lawmakers' overall inclination to follow and engage with scholars increased, most prominently targeting researchers from the medical sciences. These findings offer new insights into when and how lawmakers publicly attend to academic expertise, contributing to a broader understanding of political elites' symbolic and informational engagement with science.

Keywords. legislative elites | academic researchers | elite digital traces | social media

In this paper, I propose that digital traces from **legislators** can provide **valuable signals** about their **inclination to engage** with producers of research evidence

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- Social media, specifically Twitter, **are** were increasingly important for political and scientific communities (Brainard 2022; Castanho Silva and Proksch 2022; Jungherr, 2016)

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- Meaning that the different available behaviors have unique properties, such as their potential time demands, privacy, cognitive engagement, and capacity to deliver messages to constituents (Metaxas et al., 2015; Wojcieszak et al., 2022)

I collected Twitter digital trace data from ≈3.7K legislators in 12 countries

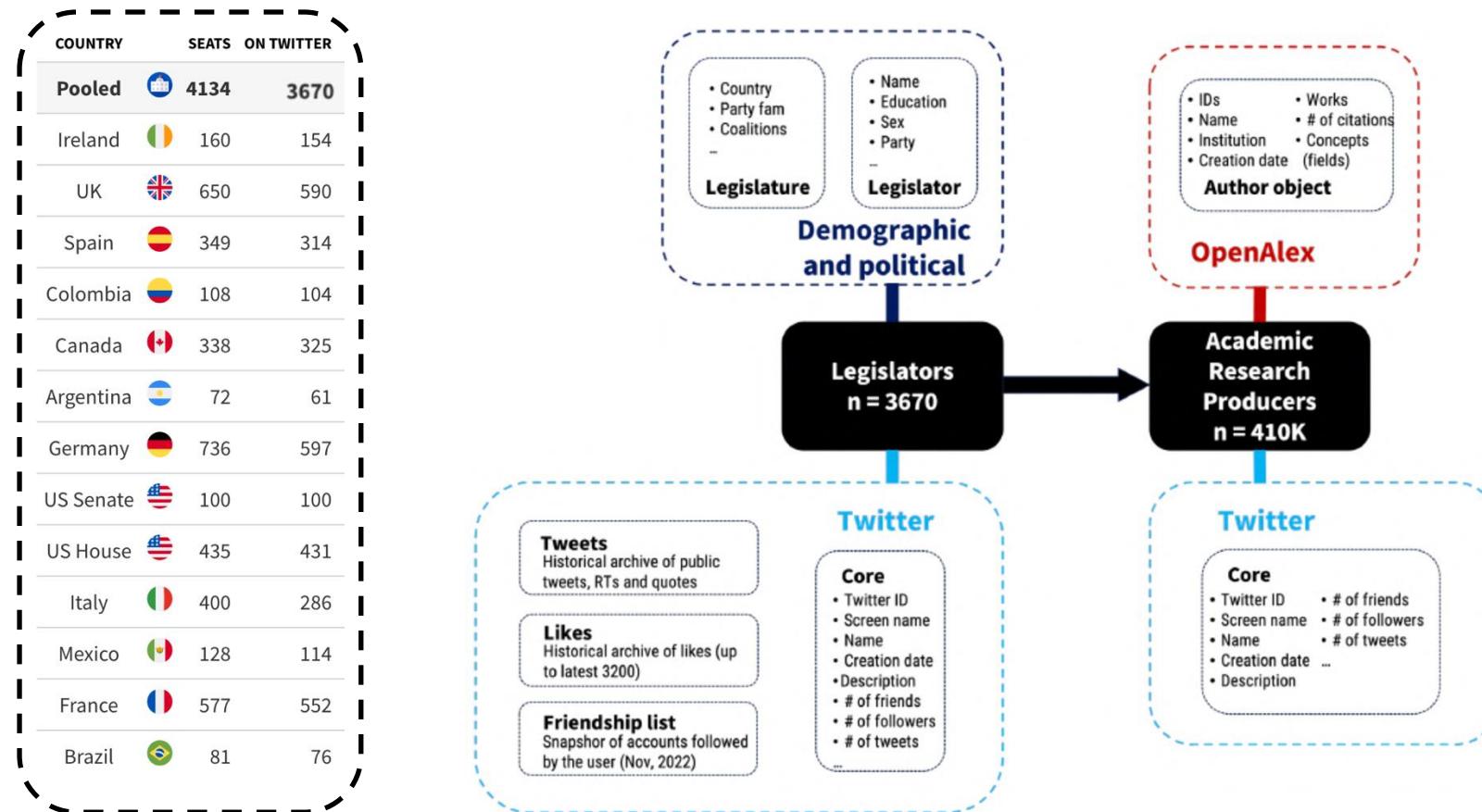
COUNTRY	SEATS	ON TWITTER
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Canada	338	325
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- historical archive of all their public posts (\approx 20M)
- followed accounts (\approx 2.6M)
- liked posts (\approx 6.5M)

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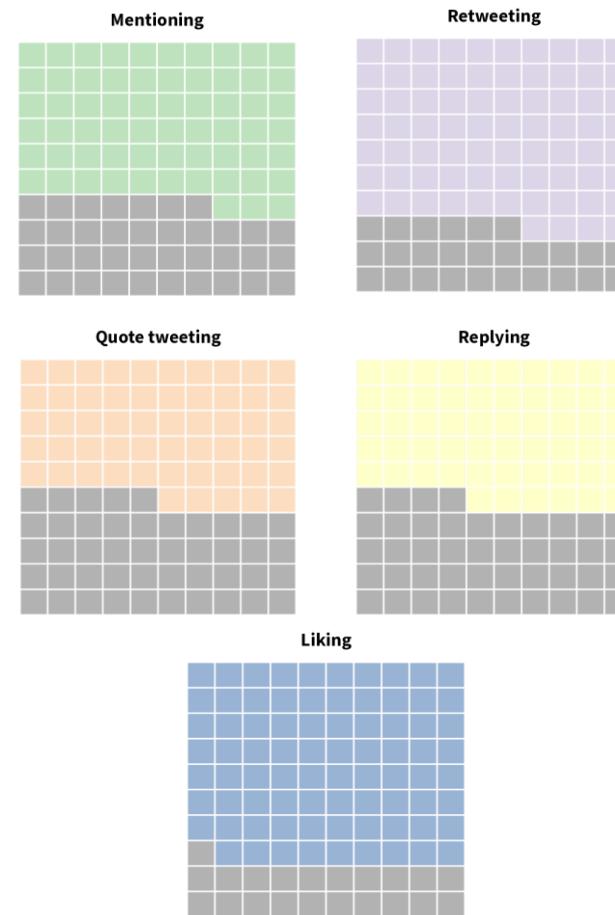
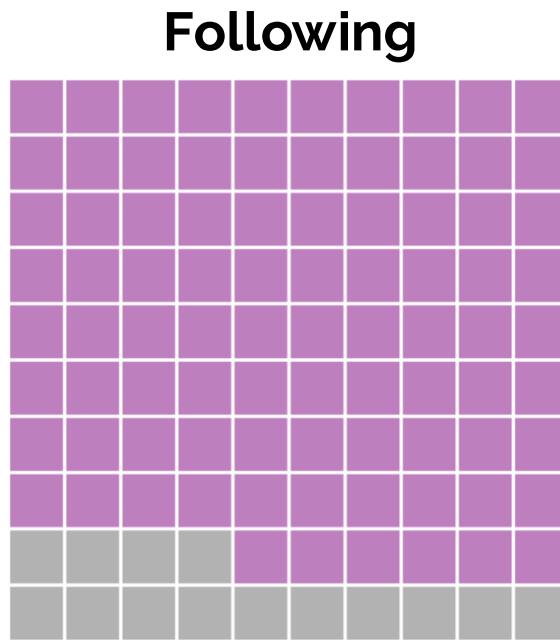
- Do we observe lawmakers following and engaging with researchers ‘in the wild’?
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- Do legislators adapt their behaviors to exogenous shocks to the salience of expertise?

What did I find?

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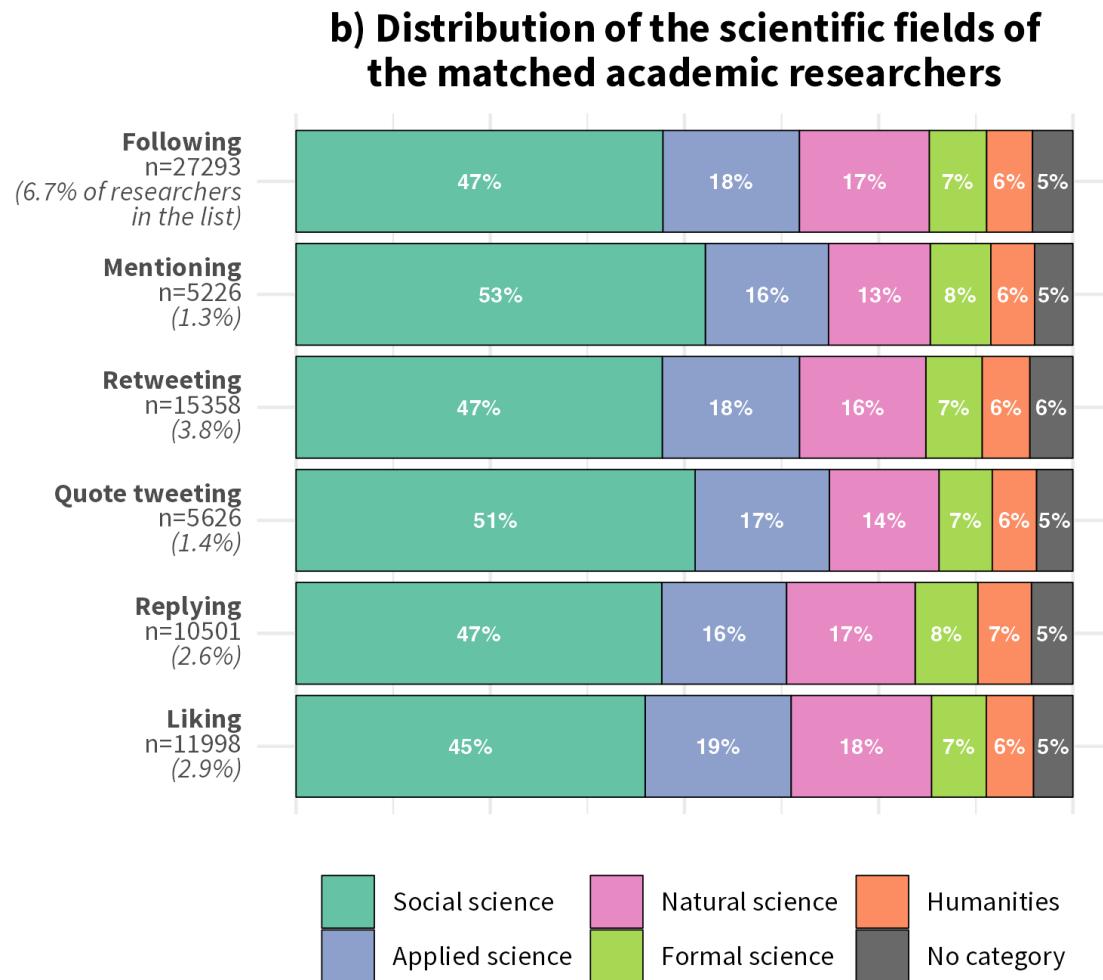
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The **majority** of these legislators do **follow** and **engage** with researchers **in the wild**

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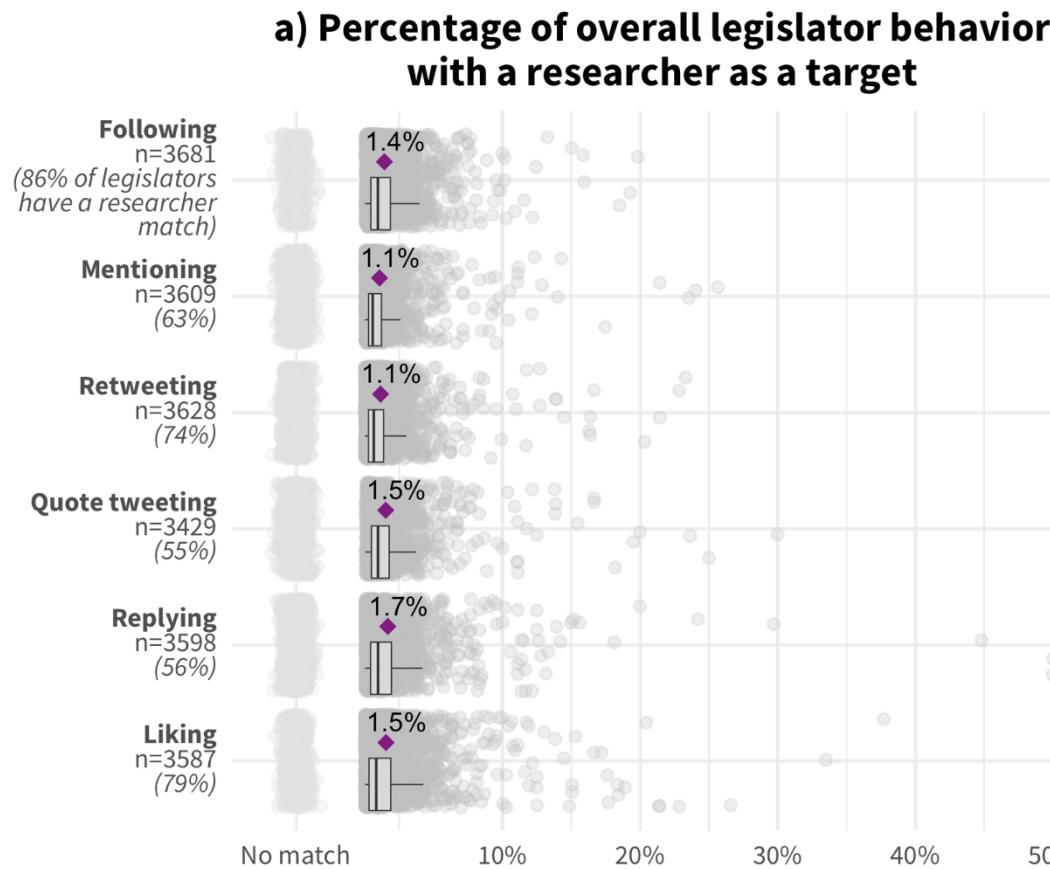
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Most legislators' “attention” goes to
social scientists

What did I find?

1. Do we **observe** lawmakers following and engaging with researchers '**in the wild**'?



There are **some differences**, but for the most part these researchers represent a **small fraction** of whom lawmakers follow and engage with on social media

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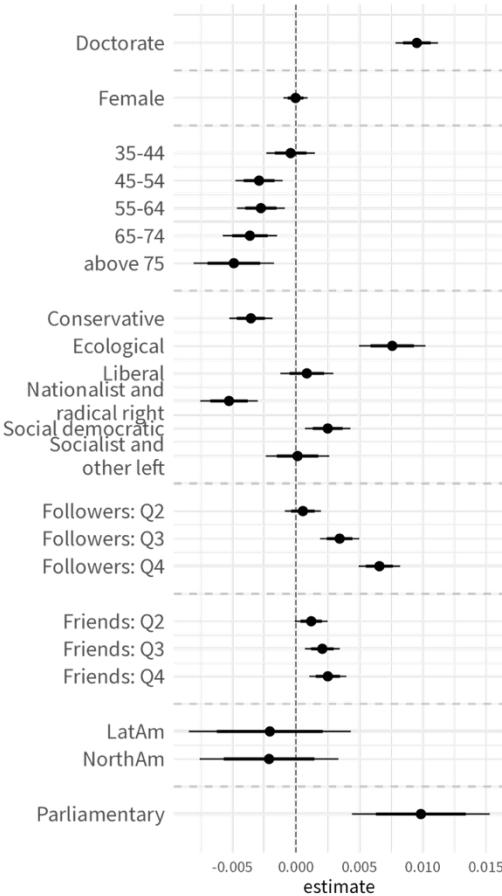
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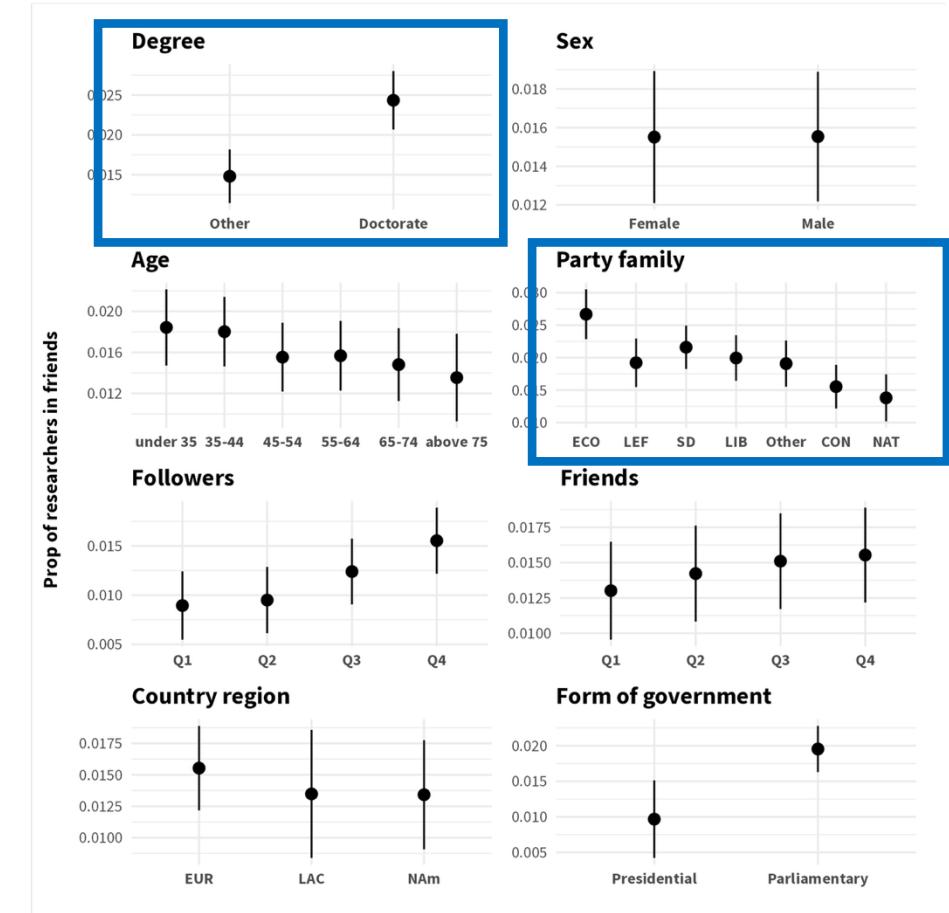
Legislators' research background and political ideology are strong predictors across behaviors

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a) Fixed effects estimates



b) Conditional predictions



Estimated effects of legislator and legislature characteristics on the proportion of researchers in their networks. Estimated effects of legislator and legislature characteristics on the proportion of researchers in their networks. Results from a linear mixed-effects model with legislature random effects with age (under 35), party family (other), country region (Europe), system (presidential), and Q1 for followers and friends as references for categorical variables. Number of observations: 3,247. Panel a presents the coefficients with 80% and 95% confidence intervals. The conditional predictions are computed with numeric covariates are held at their means and the other covariates at their modes: no research degree, presidential, European, male, 45-54, Q1, and Conservative party..

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A '**green**' legislator is **3.5x**
more likely to follow
researchers compared to a
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The New York Times

Covid-19 | New Shots | The New Variants | Testing | Mask Guidance | Covid Fatigue | Reinfections | Paxlovid Rebounds

W.H.O. Declares Global Emergency as Wuhan Coronavirus Spreads

The announcement came as nearly 10,000 cases have been reported worldwide.

 Share full article   301



People outside the Beijing Railway Station on Thursday. The vast majority of coronavirus infections have occurred in China. Carlos Garcia Rawlins/Reuters



By Sui-Lee Wee, Donald G. McNeil Jr. and Javier C. Hernández

Published Jan. 30, 2020 Updated April 16, 2020

The World Health Organization declared a global health emergency on Thursday as the [coronavirus](#) outbreak spread well

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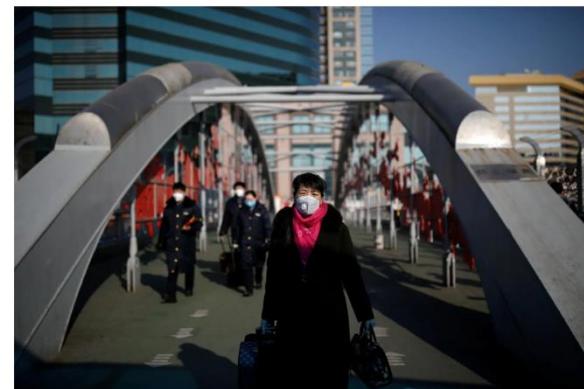
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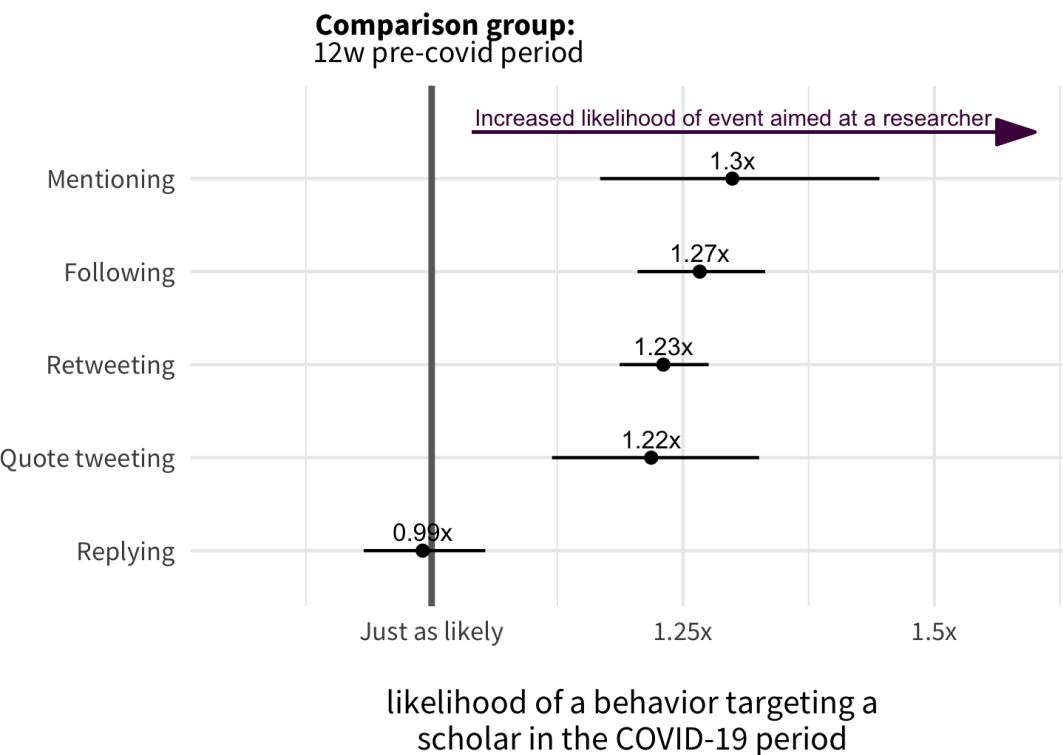
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Pooled scholars

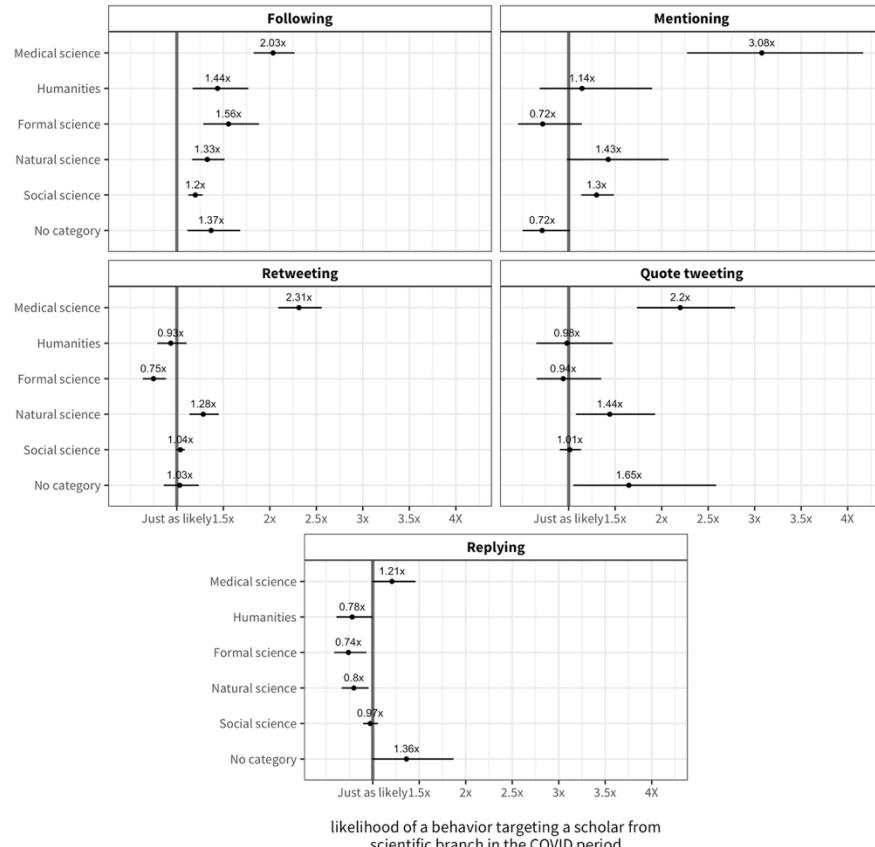


Observable increases in engagement

Marginal effects of public health crisis on following and engagement with academic researchers during the COVID versus pre-COVID periods with a ±12 week bandwidth. Results from a logistic mixed-effects models with legislature random effects. The estimates in the figure are relative risks representing the ratio of the probability of an event in the COVID period to the probability of an outcome in a pre-COVID period.

What did I find?

Scholars by branch



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Observable increases in **engagement** targeted at researchers in the **medical sciences** in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19

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- I employ a **novel set of behavioral measures** to gauge legislators' engagement with academic research providers in the **digital realm**
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- I investigate **potential shifts in the digital engagement** behaviors of legislators with research producers in times when the demand for evidence should be pronounced

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- Slightly edited version for political science
 - desk reject from AJPS, reject with mixed reviews from *JOP and *BJPS
 - Modal reviewer comment -> “Twitter is dead”, my favorite: “THIS IS NOT SURPRISING”, and develop some theoretical expectations so that it feels political science-y enough
 - *outlets did not have research note (or feasible short article option)

What to do now?

- **High investment:** Full re-write with *post-hoc* theoretical accounts?
(e.g., ideological and competence signaling, constituency alignment,
<insert your ideas>)
 - Submit as full article (CPS, PSRM, EJPR, Political Behav, PolComm, J. Legis. Stud.?)
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 - Submit as full article (CPS, PSRM, EJPR, Political Behav, PolComm, J. Legis. Stud.?)
 - “Twitter is dead”?
- **Mid investment:** Trim to ≈4K and narrow?
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 - Info loss? Already too minimal?

What to do now?

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 - Info loss? Already too minimal?
- **Low investment:** Keep the “weird format” paper, update, send to interdisciplinary outlet?
 - (e.g., Public Understanding of Science, PLOS One, Research Policy)
 - Signal for hiring in poli sci and CSS?

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Thank you!



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