Polarization and Social Media Usage in Canada

Simon Kiss & Rafael Campos-Gottardo

Increased levels of political polarization are often linked to social media usage. More specifically many studies posit that consuming news on social media leads to increased levels of both affective and policy polarization. However, most of these studies were conducted in the United States with limited evidence that this relationship also exists in Canada. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between social media usage and both types of political polarization through regression estimation using LISPOP’s 2018 Ontario election survey. The results show that impact of social media usage on polarization is mediated by political interest, whereby individuals who are more interested in politics seek out more online and and social media news sources more readily than individuals who are less interested in politics and are more polarized. These findings indicate that despite the conventional wisdom consuming news from social media does not lead to increased levels of polarization. Instead, political interest seems to drive higher levels of political polarization in Ontario.

The media, public opinion, and democratic backsliding in the Global South: Evidence from El Salvador