Social Media and Political Agenda Setting

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Motivation

Agenda setting matters, a lot

Who leads, who follows?

· Politicians, parties, traditional media, the public?

· Still unclear; complex relationships

· Social media and “hybrid media systems” → new, additional layer of complexity

Few studies take into account multiple types of actors, traditional and social media, mutual influences, long periods
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2. Social media agenda of parties
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3. Social media agenda of politicians
Expectations

Traditional media agenda

Social media agenda (parties) → Social media agenda (candidates)
Research design

- Switzerland, January 2018–December 2019
  - Period includes national elections and multiple referenda
  - 2.78 million articles published in 84 newspapers (full text)
  - 6,500 tweets posted by parties on their official accounts (excluding retweets)
  - 210,000 tweets posted by politicians on their own accounts
- Machine-learning classifiers for four issues: environment, gender, Europe, immigration
- Vector autoregression (VAR) models (Barberá et al., 2019), controlling for press releases of parties and many organizations
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Issue emphasis over time

- **Newspapers**
- **Tweets by Parties**
- **Tweets by Politicians**

![Graph showing issue emphasis over time](image)
Effect of 10pp increase over next week (VAR)

Newspapers -> Parties
Newspapers -> Politicians
Parties -> Newspapers
Parties -> Politicians
Politicians -> Newspapers
Politicians -> Parties

Percentage points

Environment Gender Europe Immigration
Net effect of 10pp increase over next week (VAR)
Summary

Relationship between three agendas:
- Traditional media, parties, politicians

We consider:
- Multiple types of actors
- Traditional and social media
- Mutual influences between the agendas
- Long period (two years, including elections and referenda)

Results:
- For most issues, the agendas counterbalance each other
- Important exception: environment issue (parties → newspapers)

Next steps:
- Facebook
- Heterogeneity: across parties, over time
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