Social Media and Political Agenda Setting

Fabrizio Gilardi¹  Theresa Gessler¹  Maël Kubli¹  Stefan Müller²

¹University of Zurich
²University College Dublin

EPSA Virtual Conference
June 18, 2020
(Updated on June 18, 2020)
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
Research question

We examine the connections between three agendas:

1. Traditional media agenda
2. Social media agenda of parties
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
News articles classification

Raw newspaper articles → Count Swiss political words and non political words → Text classified as Text with Swiss political content → Ensemble Topic Classifier for Articles

More Political Words → Text classified as Text with Swiss political content

Less Political Words

Match Found → Search for Swiss political Named Entities

No Match Found → Text Classified as not Political

Classified newspaper articles
Issue emphasis over time

Newspapers

Tweets by Parties

Tweets by Politicians

Environment | Gender | Europe | Immigration

Number of Documents per Week

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