Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election
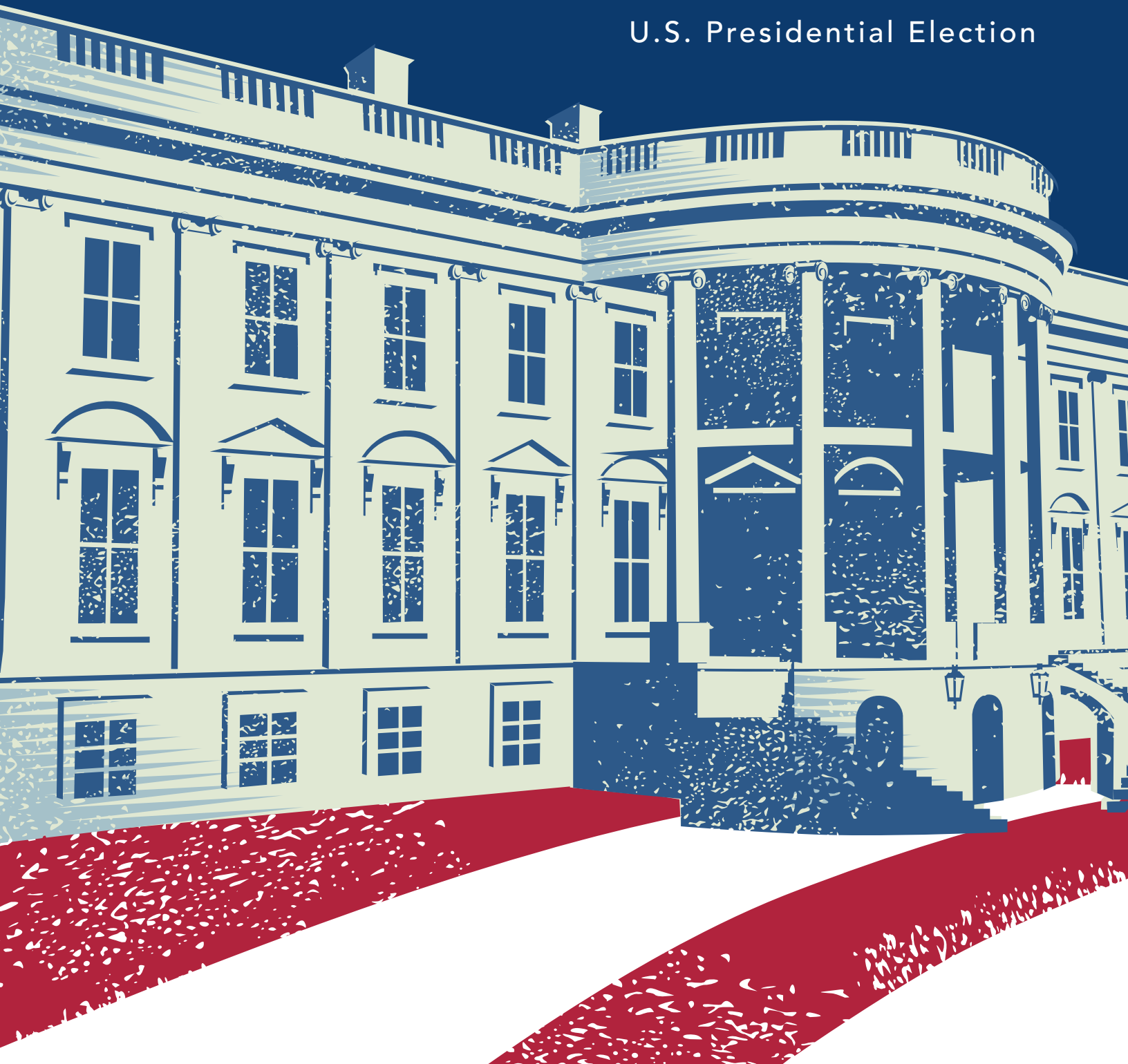
Citation

Permanent link

Terms of Use

Share Your Story

BERKMAN
KLEIN CENTER
FOR INTERNET & SOCIETY
AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Robert Faris
Hal Roberts
Bruce Etling
Nikki Bourassa
Ethan Zuckerman
Yochai Benkler

PARTISANSHIP, PROPAGANDA, & DISINFORMATION

Online Media & the 2016
U.S. Presidential Election

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Media Cloud project is an open platform for the qualitative and quantitative study of online media. Media Cloud archives and analyzes hundreds of millions of stories published online and makes that data available through a suite of web tools as well as an API, both freely available to the public and implemented through an open source code base. The project is a joint effort by the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and the MIT Center for Civic Media.

https://mediacloud.org/

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

In this study, we analyze both mainstream and social media coverage of the 2016 United States presidential election. We document that the majority of mainstream media coverage was negative for both candidates, but largely followed Donald Trump's agenda: when reporting on Hillary Clinton, coverage primarily focused on the various scandals related to the Clinton Foundation and emails. When focused on Trump, major substantive issues, primarily immigration, were prominent. Indeed, immigration emerged as a central issue in the campaign and served as a defining issue for the Trump campaign.

We find that the structure and composition of media on the right and left are quite different. The leading media on the right and left are rooted in different traditions and journalistic practices. On the conservative side, more attention was paid to pro-Trump, highly partisan media outlets. On the liberal side, by contrast, the center of gravity was made up largely of long-standing media organizations steeped in the traditions and practices of objective journalism.

Our data supports lines of research on polarization in American politics that focus on the asymmetric patterns between the left and the right, rather than studies that see polarization as a general historical phenomenon, driven by technology or other mechanisms that apply across the partisan divide.

The analysis includes the evaluation and mapping of the media landscape from several perspectives and is based on large-scale data collection of media stories published on the web and shared on Twitter.

Overview of Methods

- Cross-linking patterns between media sources offer a view of authority and prominence within the media world.

- The sharing of media sources by users on Twitter and Facebook provides a broader perspective on the role and influence of media sources among people engaged in politics through Twitter and Facebook.

- The differential media sharing patterns of Trump and Clinton supporters on Twitter enable a detailed analysis of the role of partisanship in the formation and function of media structures.

- Content analysis using automated tools supports the tracking of topics over time among media sources.

- Qualitative media analysis of individual case studies enhances our understanding of media function and structure.

Donald Trump succeeded in shaping the election agenda.
Coverage of Trump overwhelmingly outperformed coverage
of Clinton. Clinton's coverage was focused on scandals, while
Trump's coverage focused on his core issues.
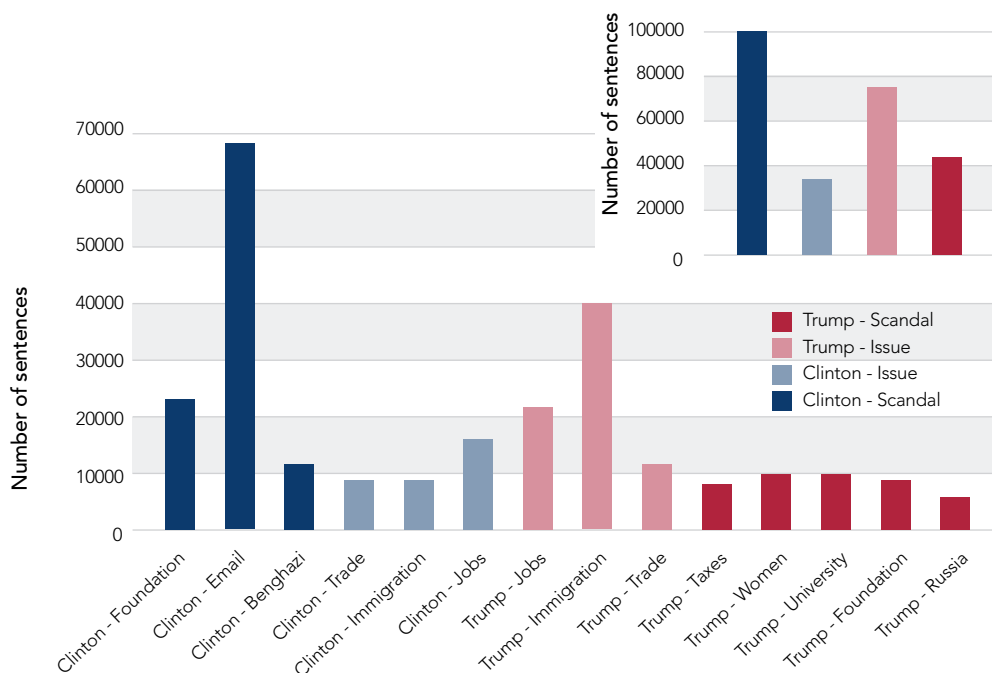
Figure 1: Number of sentences by topic and candidate from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016

Attempts by the Clinton campaign to define her campaign on competence, experience, and policy positions were drowned out by coverage of alleged improprieties associated with the Clinton Foundation and emails. Coverage of Trump associated with immigration, jobs, and trade was greater than that on his personal scandals.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

6

Immigration and Muslims/Islam were the two most widely covered substantive issues of the campaign.
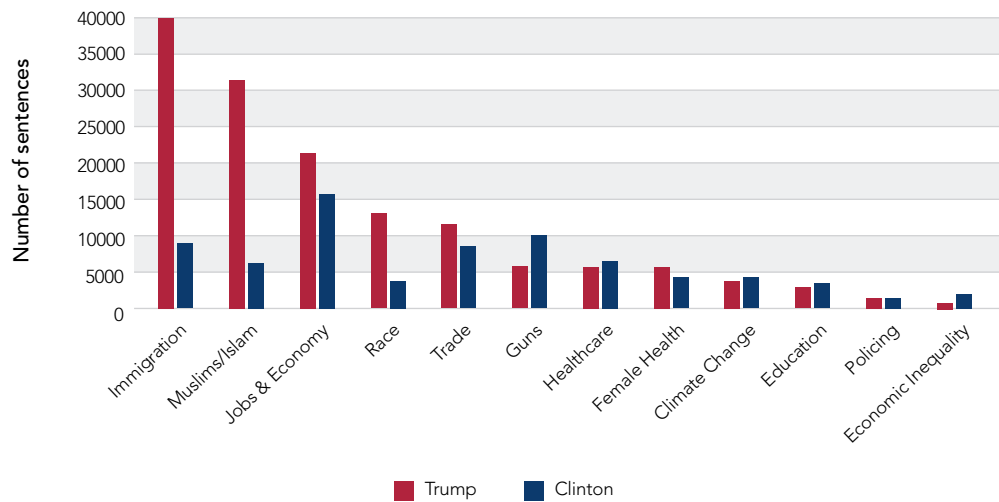
Figure 2: Number of sentences by substantive topic and candidate from media on the open web

Immigration emerged as the leading substantive issue of the campaign. Initially, the Trump campaign used a hard-line anti-immigration stance to distinguish Trump from the field of GOP contenders. Later, immigration was a wedge issue between the left and the right. Pro-Trump media sources supported this with sensationalist, race-centric coverage of immigration focused on crime, terrorism, fear of Muslims, and disease.

While coverage of his candidacy was largely critical, Trump dominated media coverage.
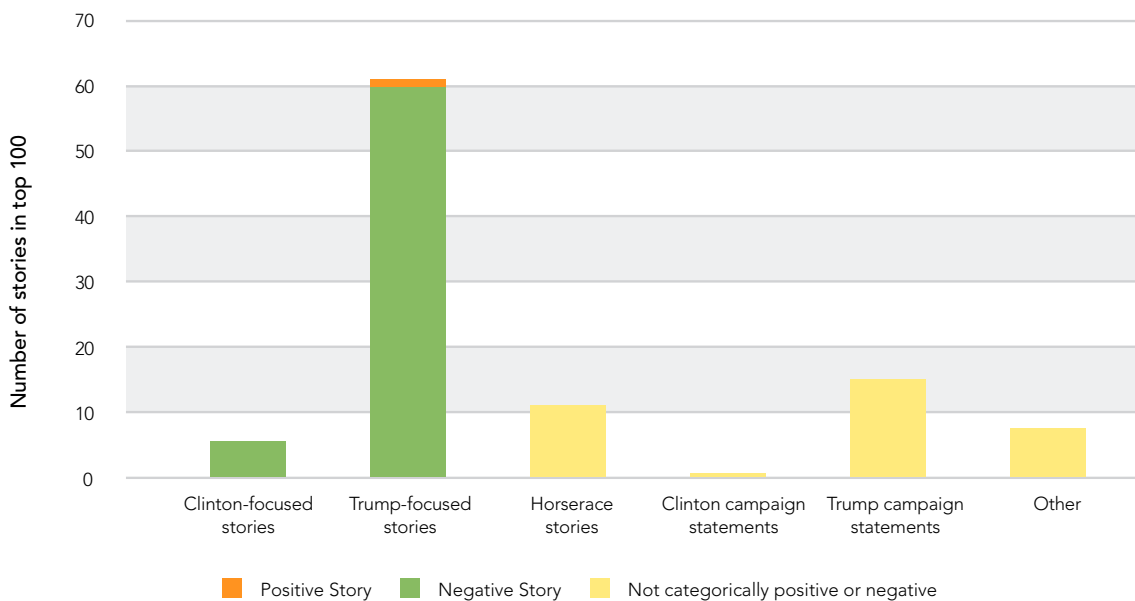
Figure 3: Valence and focus of the 100 most linked-to stories. Stories were hand-coded for topic and tone.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

7

The media landscape is distinctly asymmetric.

The structure of the overall media landscape shows media systems on the left and right operate differently. The asymmetric polarization of media is evident in both open web linking and social media sharing measures. Prominent media on the left are well distributed across the center, center-left, and left. On the right, prominent media are highly partisan.
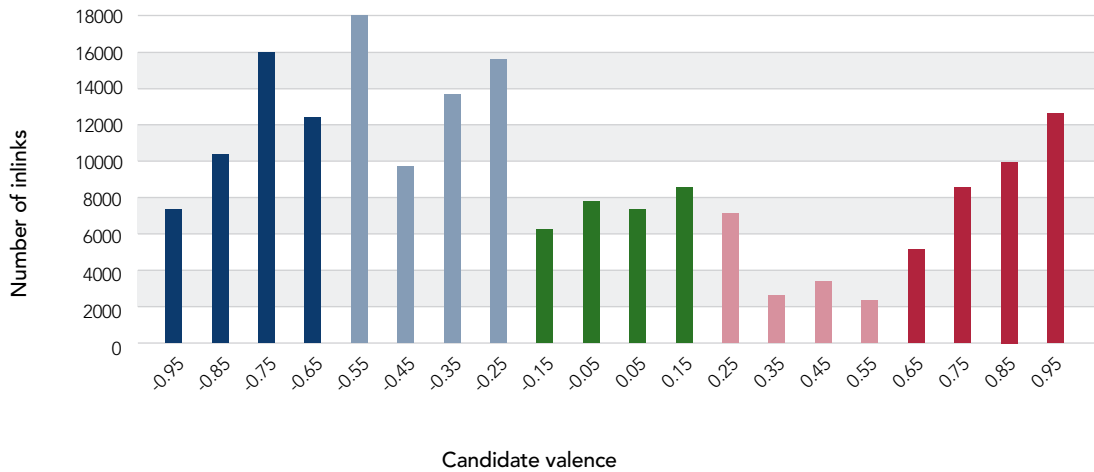
Figure 4: Partisan distribution of top 250 most-linked-to media sources by total inlinks*
*"Inlinks" refers to the incoming cross-media hyperlinks to stories and media sources.

Twitter is a more partisan environment than the open web media landscape.
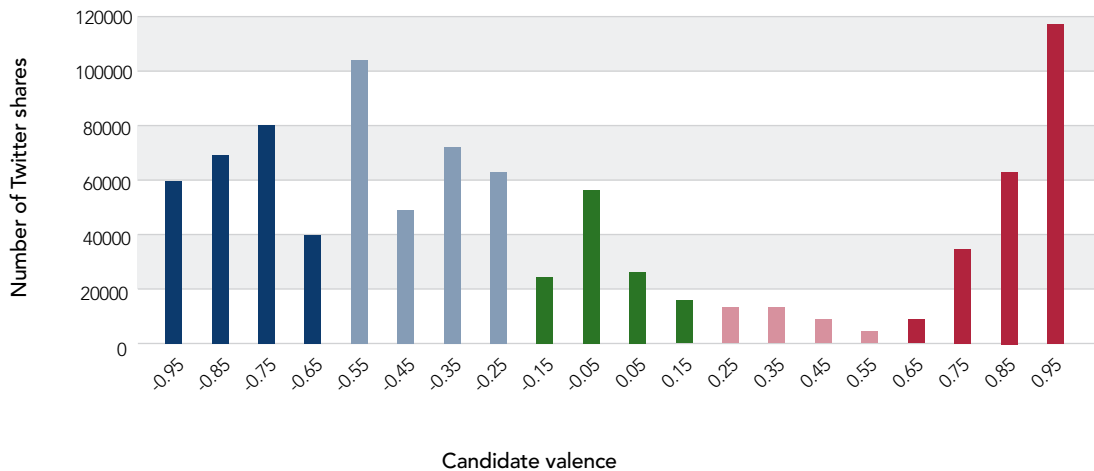
Figure 5: Partisan distribution of top 250 media sites by Twitter shares

Facebook is more partisan than Twitter.
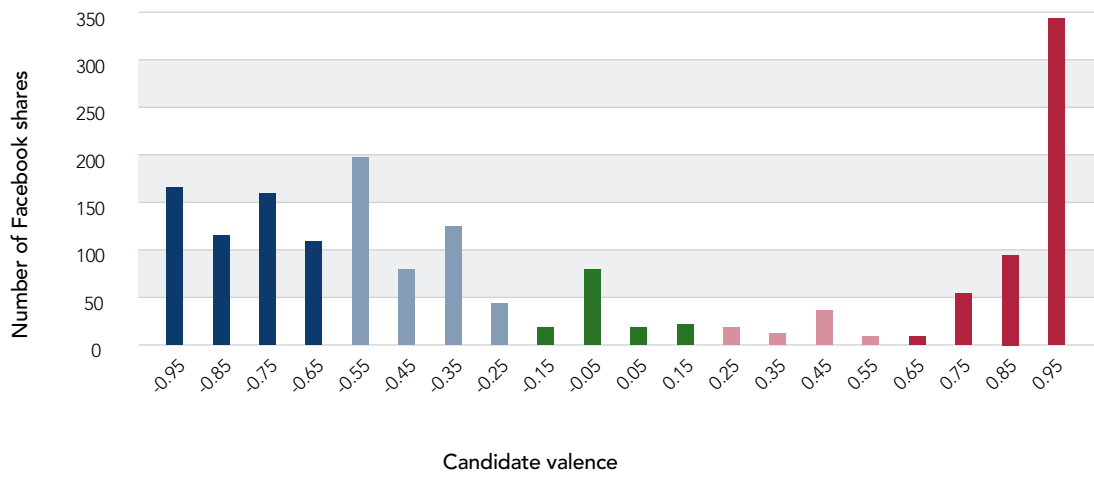
Figure 6: Partisan distribution of top 250 media sites by Facebook shares

From all of these perspectives, conservative media is more partisan and more insular than the left.

The center-left and the far right are the principal poles of the media landscape.

The center of gravity of the overall landscape is the center-left. Partisan media sources on the left are integrated into this landscape and are of lesser importance than the major media outlets of the center-left. The center of attention and influence for conservative media is on the far right. The center-right is of minor importance and is the least represented portion of the media spectrum.
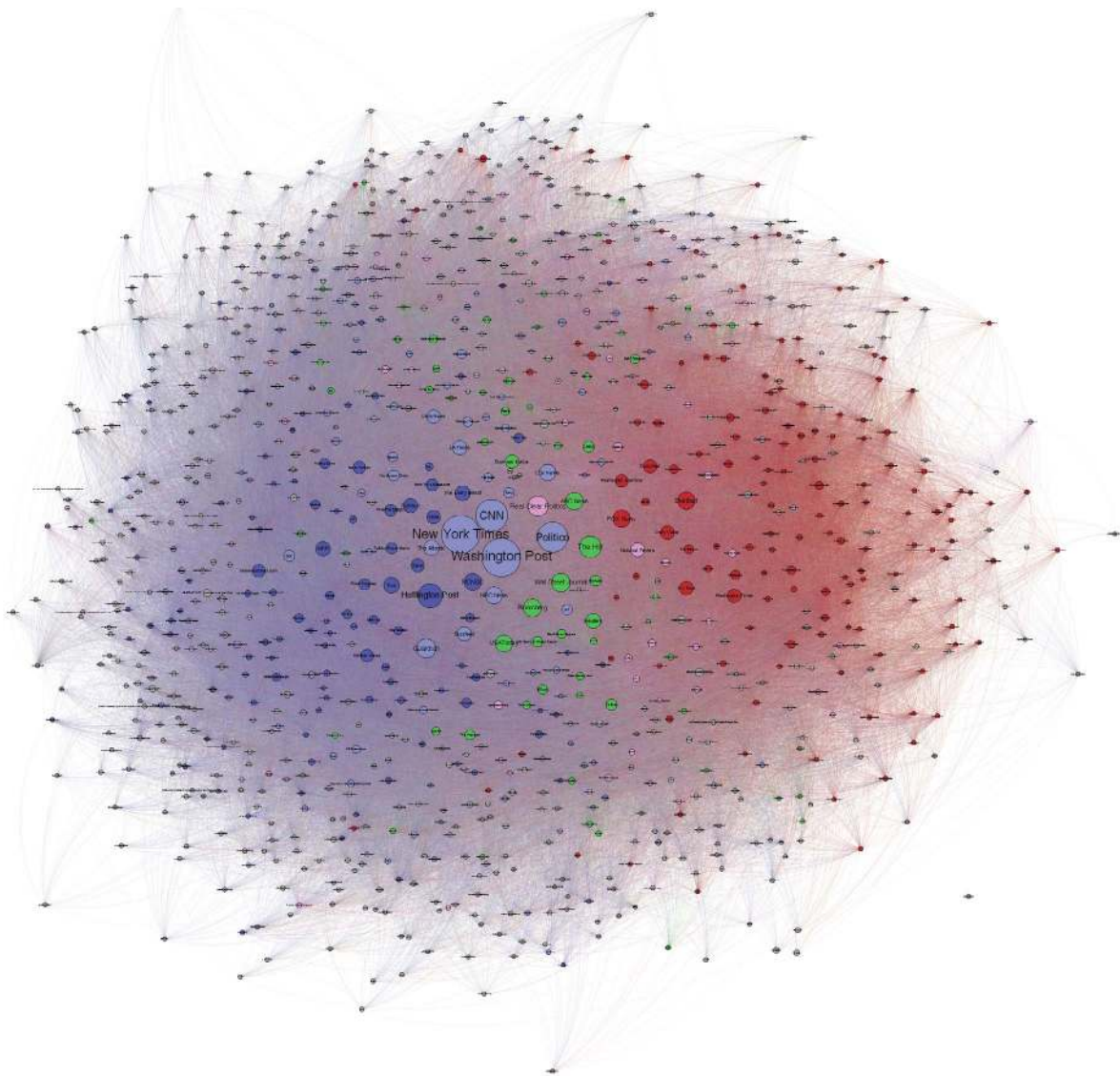
Figure 7: Network map based on open web media from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016
(explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

Conservative media disrupted.

Breitbart emerges as the nexus of conservative media. The Wall Street Journal is treated by social media users as centrist and less influential. The rising prominence of Breitbart along with relatively new outlets such as the Daily Caller marks a significant reshaping of the conservative media landscape over the past several years.
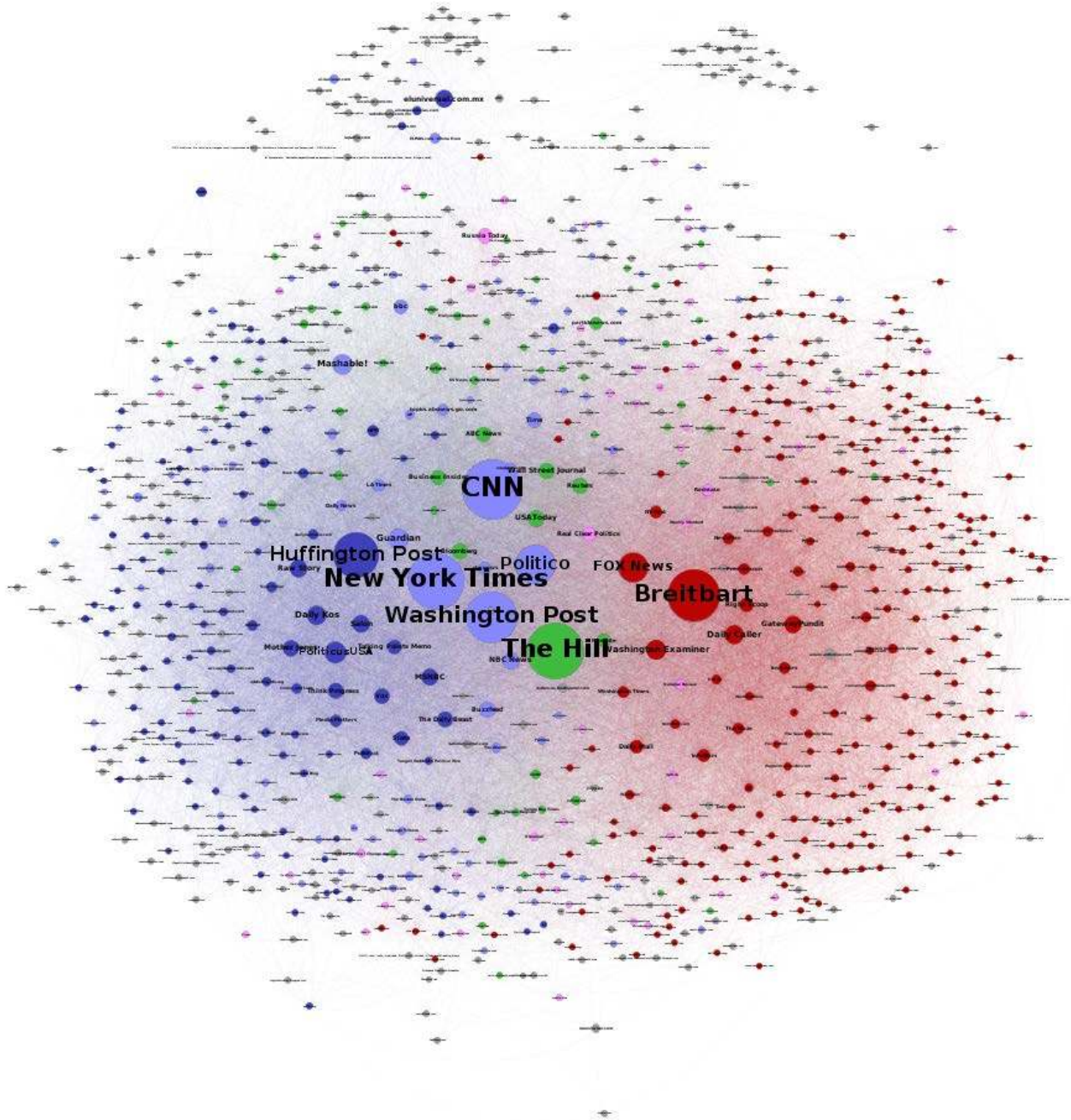
Figure 8: Network map based on Twitter media sharing from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016 with nodes sized by number of Twitter shares (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)
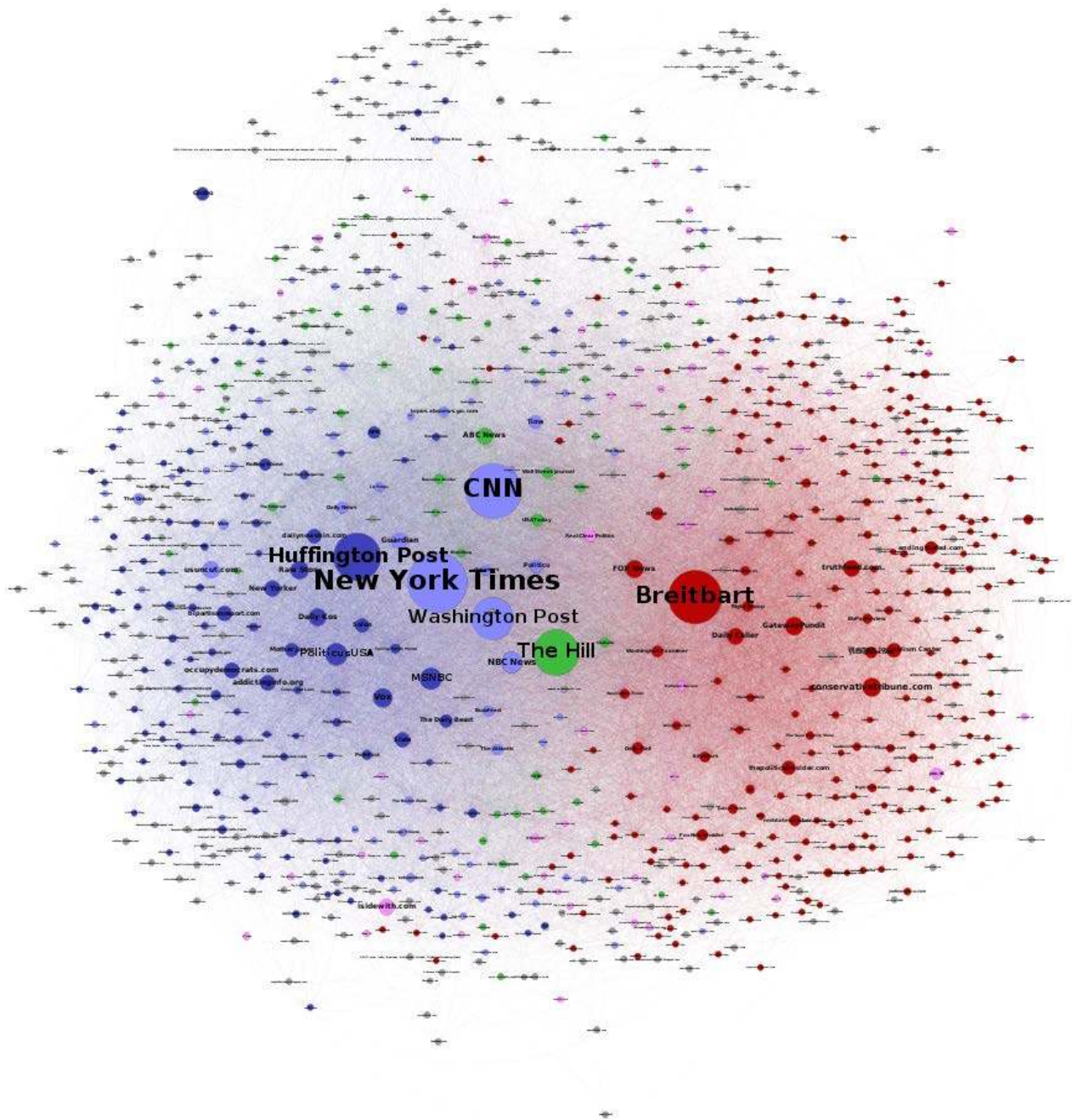
Figure 9: Network map based on Twitter media sharing from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016 with nodes sized by number of Facebook shares
(explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

On the partisan left and right, the popularity of media sources varies significantly across the different platforms.

On the left, the Huffington Post, MSNBC, and Vox are prominent on all platforms. On the right, Breitbart, Fox News, the Daily Caller, and the New York Post are popular across platforms.

	Inlinks	Twitter	Facebook
1	Breitbart	Breitbart	Breitbart
2	Fox News	Fox News	Conservative Tribune
3	donaldjtrump.com	Washington Examiner	Gateway Pundit
4	NY Post	Daily Caller	Fox News
5	Washington Times	Gateway Pundit	Daily Caller
6	Daily Caller	Right Scoop	Truthfeed
7	Daily Mail	Daily Mail	Western Journalism
8	Washington Examiner	InfoWars	Political Insider
9	WikiLeaks	NY Post	EndingtheFed
10	Free Beacon	Washington Times	NY Post

Table 1: Most popular media on the right from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016

	Inlinks	Twitter	Facebook
1	Huffington Post	Huffington Post	Huffington Post
2	MSNBC	PoliticusUSA	PoliticusUSA
3	Vox	Daily Kos	MSNBC
4	The Daily Beast	Raw Story	Vox
5	hillaryclinton.com	Salon	Raw Story
6	NPR	MSNBC	Daily Kos
7	PolitiFact	Mother Jones	New Yorker
8	Slate	Think Progress	Occupy Democrats
9	Salon	The Daily Beast	Addicting Info
10	berniesanders.com	Vox	Bipartisan Report

Table 2: Most popular media on the left from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016

On the most widely covered topic of the election, immigration, Breitbart was the most prominent site. On Twitter, Breitbart is far above the rest.
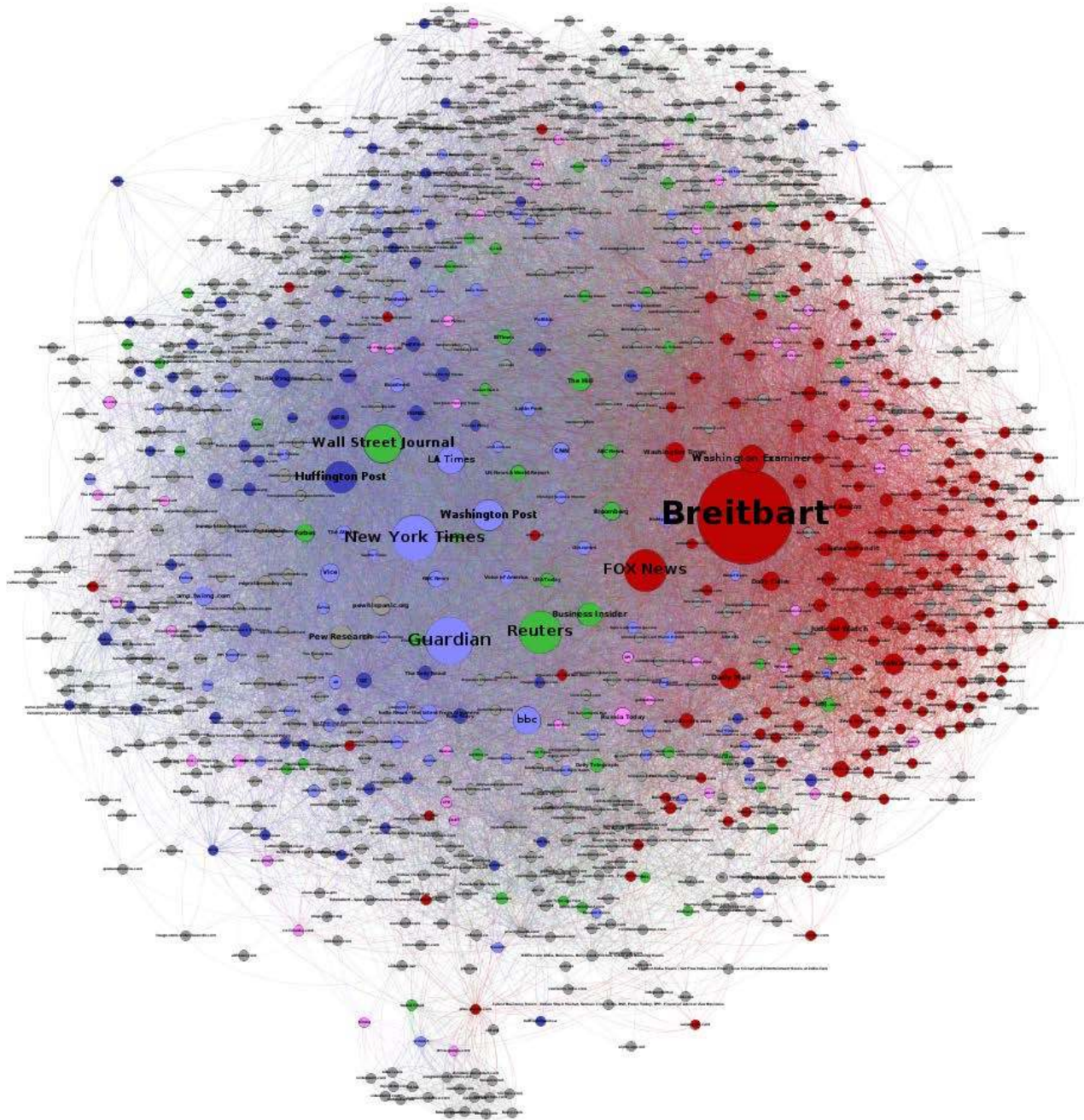
Figure 10: Network map based on Twitter sharing for the topic of immigration (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

Breitbart's key role in the media landscape during the election was particularly pronounced in coverage of immigration. On Twitter, Breitbart stories on immigration were shared more than twice as often as stories from the Guardian, which ranked second.

Disinformation and propaganda are rooted in partisanship and are more prevalent on social media.

The most obvious forms of disinformation are most prevalent on social media and in the most partisan fringes of the media landscape. Greater popularity on social media than attention from media peers is a strong indicator of reporting that is partisan and, in some cases, dubious.

Among the set of top 100 media sources by inlinks or social media shares,[1] seven sources, all from the partisan right or partisan left, receive substantially more attention on social media than links from other media outlets.

These sites do not necessarily all engage in misleading or false reporting, but they are clearly highly partisan. In this group, Gateway Pundit is in a class of its own, known for "publishing falsehoods and spreading hoaxes."[2]

BizPacReview
Breitbart
Daily Kos
Gateway Pundit
PoliticusUSA
Raw Story
Right Scoop

Table 3: Seven media sources that receive substantially more attention on social media than they receive inlinks from open web media

Disproportionate popularity on Facebook is a strong indicator of highly partisan and unreliable media.

A distinct set of websites receive a disproportionate amount of attention from Facebook compared with Twitter and media inlinks. From the list of the most prominent media,[3] 13 sites fall into this category. Many of these sites are cited by independent sources and media reporting as progenitors of inaccurate if not blatantly false reporting. Both in form and substance, the majority of these sites are aptly described as political clickbait. Again, this does not imply equivalence across these sites. Ending the Fed is often cited as the prototypical example of a media source that published false stories. The Onion is an outlier in this group, in that it is explicitly satirical and ironic, rather than, as is the case with the others, engaging in highly partisan and dubious reporting without explicit irony.

Addicting Info
Bipartisan Report
Conservative Tribune
Daily Newsbin
Ending the Fed
Occupy Democrats
Political Insider
Red State Watcher
The Onion
Truthfeed
US Uncut
Western Journalism
Young Cons

Table 4: 13 media sources that receive more attention from Facebook than on Twitter or through open web media inlinks

---

1 This list can be found in Appendix 3.
2 http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/02/fake-news-gateway-pundit-white-house-trump-briefing-room-214781
3 See Appendix 3.

Asymmetric vulnerabilities: The right and left were subject to media manipulation in different ways.

The more insulated right-wing media ecosystem was susceptible to sustained network propaganda and disinformation, particularly misleading negative claims about Hillary Clinton. Traditional media accountability mechanisms—for example, fact-checking sites, media watchdog groups, and cross-media criticism—appear to have wielded little influence on the insular conservative media sphere. Claims aimed for "internal" consumption within the right-wing media ecosystem were more extreme, less internally coherent, and appealed more to the "paranoid style" of American politics than claims intended to affect mainstream media reporting.

The institutional commitment to impartiality of media sources at the core of attention on the left meant that hyperpartisan, unreliable sources on the left did not receive the same amplification that equivalent sites on the right did.

These same standard journalistic practices were successfully manipulated by media and activists on the right to inject anti-Clinton narratives into the mainstream media narrative. A key example is the use of the leaked Democratic National Committee's emails and her campaign chairman John Podesta's emails, released through WikiLeaks, and the sustained series of stories written around email-based accusations of influence peddling. Another example is the book and movie release of *Clinton Cash* together with the sustained campaign that followed, making the Clinton Foundation the major post-convention story. By developing plausible narratives and documentation susceptible to negative coverage, parallel to the more paranoid narrative lines intended for internal consumption within the right-wing media ecosystem, and by "working the refs," demanding mainstream coverage of anti-Clinton stories, right-wing media played a key role in setting the agenda of mainstream, center-left media. We document these dynamics in the Clinton Foundation case study section of this report.

Both winners and losers of the 2016 presidential election describe it as a political earthquake. Donald Trump was the most explicitly populist candidate in modern history. He ran an overtly anti-elite and anti-media campaign and embraced positions on trade, immigration, and international alliances, among many other topics, that were outside elite consensus. Trump expressed these positions in starkly aggressive terms. His detractors perceived Trump's views and the manner in which he communicated them as alarming, and his supporters perceived them as refreshing and candid. He was outraised and outspent by his opponents in both the primary and the general election, and yet he prevailed—contrary to the conventional wisdom of the past several elections that winning, or at least staying close, in the money race is a precondition to winning both the nomination and the election.

In this report we explore the dynamics of the election by analyzing over two million stories related to the election, published online by approximately 70,000 media sources between May 1, 2015, and Election Day in 2016. We measure how often sources were linked to by other online sources and how often they were shared on Facebook or Twitter. Through these sharing patterns and analysis of the content of the stories, we identify both what was highly salient according to these different measures and the relationships among different media, stories, and Twitter users.

Our clearest and most significant observation is that the American political system has seen not a symmetrical polarization of the two sides of the political map, but rather the emergence of a discrete and relatively insular right-wing media ecosystem

The American political system has seen not a symmetrical polarization of the two sides of the political map, but rather the emergence of a discrete and relatively insular right-wing media ecosystem.

whose shape and communications practices differ sharply from the rest of the media ecosystem, ranging from the center-right to the left. Right-wing media were centered on Breitbart and Fox News, and they presented partisan-disciplined messaging, which was not the case for the traditional professional media that were the center of attention across the rest of the media sphere. The right-wing media ecosystem partly insulated its readers from nonconforming news reported elsewhere and moderated the effects of bad news for Donald Trump's candidacy. While we observe highly partisan and clickbait news sites on both sides of the partisan divide, especially on Facebook, on the right these sites received amplification and legitimation through an attention backbone that tied the most extreme conspiracy sites like Truthfeed, InfoWars, through the likes of Gateway Pundit and Conservative Treehouse, to bridging sites like the Daily Caller and Breitbart that legitimated and normalized the paranoid style that came to typify the right-wing ecosystem in the 2016 election. This attention backbone relied heavily on social media.

For the past 20 years there has been substantial literature decrying the polarization of American politics. The core claim has been that the right and the left are drawing farther apart, becoming more insular, and adopting more extreme versions of their own arguments. It is well established that political elites have become polarized over the past several decades,[4] while other research has shown that the electorate has also grown apart.[5] Other versions of the argument have focused on the Internet specifically, arguing that echo chambers

---

4 McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. "Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches (Vol. 5)." (2006).
Poole, Keith T., and Howard Rosenthal. "Ideology and Congress: A Political Economic History of Roll Call Voting." (2007).

5 Iyengar, Shanto, and Sean J. Westwood. "Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (2015): 690-707.

or filter bubbles have caused people of like political views to read only one another and to reinforce each other's views, leading to the adoption of more extreme views.[6] These various arguments have focused on general features of either the communications system or political psychology—homophily, confirmation bias, in-group/out-group dynamics, and so forth. Many commentators and scholars predicted and measured roughly symmetric polarization on the two sides of the political divide.

We have seen a radicalization of the right-wing of American politics: a hollowing out of the center-right and its displacement by a new, more extreme form of right-wing politics.

Our observations of the 2016 election are inconsistent with a symmetric polarization hypothesis. Instead, we see a distinctly asymmetric pattern with an inflection point in the center-right—the least populated and least influential portion of the media spectrum. In effect, we have seen a radicalization of the right-wing of American politics: a hollowing out of the center-right and its displacement by a new, more extreme form of right-wing politics. During this election cycle, media sources that attracted attention on the center-right, center, center-left, and left followed a more or less normal distribution of attention from the center-right to the left, when attention is measured by either links[7] or tweets, and a somewhat more left-tilted distribution when measured by Facebook shares. By contrast, the distribution of attention on the right was skewed to the far right. The number of media outlets that appeared in the center-right was relatively small; their influence was generally low, whether measured by inlinks or social media shares; and they tended to link out to the traditional media—such as the New York Times and the Washington Post—to the same extent as did outlets in the center, center-left, and left, and significantly more than did outlets on the right. The number of farther-right media outlets is very large, and the preponderance of attention to these sources, which include Fox News and Breitbart, came from media outlets and readers within the right. This asymmetry between the left and the right appears in the link ecosystem, and is even more pronounced when measured by social media sharing.

Media attention from readers on the left was directed at outlets with orientations ranging from distinctly partisan to relatively centrist. The outlets from the far left were fairly tightly interlinked with sources on the center-left and center and included a mix of stories that were center and left. By contrast, readers and outlets on the right had a more distinct focus and a more insular set of linking and social media sharing practices. These observed patterns are not easily explained by factors that are politically neutral, such as a general idea of homophily or Internet algorithms, because such factors should have similar impact on both sides of the political map. Rather, the asymmetry requires a historical, cultural, or social-norms analysis to explain the rightward shift on the right that is not paralleled by a similar leftward shift on the left.

The relative insularity and densely interconnected network of sites in the right-wing media ecosystem may explain why we observe asymmetrically high attention on the right to sites engaged in conspiracy theories, like Gateway Pundit or InfoWars, and successful political clickbait sites, like Ending the Fed. This network structure is more conducive to the echo-chamber, information-cascade, and filter bubble effects often discussed as risks of the online environment. Correspondingly, the less insular left-wing of the media ecosystem, which is more interconnected with the center-left and center of the media ecosystem, is less susceptible to such problems, which are associated with media spheres that have deliberately untethered from the systems of accountability and recourse built into the broader media ecosystem.

6 Sunstein, Cass R. Republic.com 2.0. Princeton University Press, 2009.

7 In this report we use the terms "links" and "cross-media links" interchangeably when referring to the hyperlinks between the stories and web pages associated with media sources. "Inlinks" refers to the incoming cross-media hyperlinks to stories and media sources.

This does not mean that there are no far left sites or left-oriented political clickbait sites; there are and we document them. But readers and media sources on the left paid more attention to traditional media organizations, which in turn moderated the coverage of the partisan

left. Media outlets on the right that might have helped to moderate conservative coverage were relegated to second-tier status, losing attention on the right. The Wall Street Journal is a notable example, but our comparison of the network structure of the 2016 election with that of October 2012 shows that even more traditional conservative sites like the National Review or the Weekly Standard lost significant ground to the more radical media outlets on the right between 2012 and 2016. The architectural features of the election media ecosystem facilitated the use of network propaganda and disinformation disproportionately by the right.[8] The last chapter of this report, "Dynamics of Network Propaganda: The Clinton Foundation," offers a detailed case study of these practices and how they were used both to influence mainstream media coverage and to rally the base on the right.

The abandonment of the Fairness Doctrine in the 1980s created a space on AM radio for extremist views from Rush Limbaugh, and by the mid-1990s gave Sean Hannity and Alex Jones their start. The expanding market for cable channels in the 1990s made a partisan cable news channel like Fox News, founded in 1996, a thriving business model. In the 2000s, the writable web, or Web 2.0, allowed for the emergence of partisan media outlets in the blogosphere on both sides of the political spectrum, from DailyKos and Talking Points Memo on the left, to Hot Air, PJ Media, and Townhall on the right, although asymmetry in organization, technology adoption, and content were already visible then.[9] Over the past decade, social media have emerged as effective pathways for more extreme views.

In this election cycle, media coverage on both sides of the spectrum was more partisan on social media than on the open web, and more partisan on Facebook than on Twitter. Moreover, these more partisan segments of the media ecosystem appear to have been more vulnerable to disinformation and false reporting. When objectivity and accuracy are at odds with partisanship, fealty to partisan messaging necessitates a loosening of standards regarding truth. The long-standing asymmetry visible in AM radio and cable news reappeared in the 2016 election cycle, both on the web and on social media. Although disinformation driven by political clickbait and partisan media appeared not only on the right, it played a more prominent part in conservative media—at least the portion to which Trump supporters paid the most attention—than on the liberal side of the spectrum. And just as the Al Franken Show or Jon Stewart's Daily Show took the technical affordances of radio and cable, respectively, and mirrored their partisan counterparts with explicit satire, so too in our data we see the Onion and the Borowitz Report occupying parallel spaces to the disinformation-rich sites on the social media right, but, of course, because of their explicitly satirical tone, playing a very different political role. Highly partisan media—the principal incubator and disseminator of disinformation—and Facebook-empowered hyperpartisan political clickbait sites played a much greater role on the right than on the left.

8 By "propaganda" we mean the intentional use of communications to influence attitudes and behavior in the target population. By "disinformation," borrowing from the legal definition of false advertising, we mean the communication of propaganda consisting of materially misleading information.

9 Shaw, Aaron and Benkler, Yochai. 2012. A Tale of Two Blogospheres: Discursive Practices on Left and Right. *American Behavioral Scientist*, (56)4: 459-487.

This is not evidence that media consumers on one side are savvier than the other. Research suggests that liberals and conservatives alike are saddled with behavioral biases that support a willingness to believe and disseminate misleading information that aligns with our group identities and worldviews, and to gravitate toward circles of like-minded individuals that reinforce shared values and group identity.[10] Our observations suggest that, given this baseline similarity, the network structure and practices of media on the right reinforced these basic dynamics, while network structure and media practices throughout the rest of the media ecosystem, particularly the greater interconnection of sources across the center, center-left, and left, moderated them.

The asymmetry in the degree of partisanship and message discipline between the right and the rest of the media ecosystem influenced the coverage and agenda of the campaign across the media spectrum. The center and left of the media sphere paid attention almost exclusively to negative articles focused on personal scandals or failings

> *Despite the clear separation between the two media spheres, the right-wing media succeeded in shaping the agenda across the political spectrum in a way that the Clinton campaign did not.*

of both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, although the level of attention to (and criticism of) Trump was several times higher. The Breitbart/Fox-centered media system focused on attacking Clinton's character and highlighting her negatives while touting Trump's positives or deflecting attention from his negatives. It also produced a steady flow of stories focused on Trump's substantive agenda, particularly his hardline stance on immigration with a strong Islamophobic inflection. As a result of right-wing media's successful framing of the election discourse around immigration and its more uniform and disciplined (or partisan) messaging, overall coverage of the two candidates was very different. Coverage of Clinton was dominated by her emails, Benghazi (early in the cycle), and the Clinton Foundation (after the convention). Over the course of the campaign, Trump's views on immigration received more coverage than any of his scandals, although the coverage was often critical. Specific scandals, most importantly the Access Hollywood tape, dominated his coverage at discrete moments in the campaign. Additional coverage of Trump focused on other negative stories, but even stories such as the Trump University scandal received no more attention than the candidate's views on trade. In short, attention to reports of Clinton scandals exceeded attention to her stance on issues, whereas attention to reports of Trump's scandals was balanced by attention to his stance on the issues and reinforced his focus on immigration, his campaign's primary substantive issue. Despite the clear separation between the two media spheres, the right-wing media succeeded in shaping the agenda across the political spectrum in a way that the Clinton campaign did not.

Breitbart's influence is clearest on the topic of immigration. A clear finding in our data is that the right-wing discussion of immigration was much more focused on Islam and terrorism, and the narratives gravitated more often to issues of identity threat than on economic insecurity or the loss of jobs. On this topic of immigration, Breitbart played a particularly influential role—one substantially greater than its significant role in the overall election discourse. In discussions on Twitter related to immigration, Breitbart was the most prominent node by a wide margin. By contrast, as measured by linking behavior and social media shares, alt-right and white nationalist sites such as VDARE, WND, and Daily Stormer played a small role in the immigration debate and do not appear to have been as central to the Trump sphere as some reports, including some of their own triumphal celebrations of the Trump victory, would suggest. As described in further detail in the immigration case study, less extreme right-wing media outlets, including Fox News and the Daily Caller,

---

10 For a recent review, see Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler, The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions, Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs about Politics, https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nature-origins-misperceptions.pdf.

alongside Breitbart, employed anti-immigrant narratives that echoed sentiments from the alt-right and white nationalists but without the explicitly racist and pro-segregation language.

Our data suggest that the "fake news" framing of what happened in the 2016 campaign, which received much post-election attention, is a distraction. Moreover, it appears to reinforce and buy into a major theme of the Trump campaign: that news cannot be trusted. The wave of attention to fake news is grounded in a real phenomenon, but at least in the 2016 election it seems to have played a relatively small role in the overall scheme of things. We do indeed find stories in our data set that come from sites, like Ending the Fed, intended as political clickbait to make a profit from Facebook, often with no real interest in the political outcome. But while individual stories may have succeeded in getting attention, these stories are usually of tertiary significance. In a scan of the 100 most shared stories in our Twitter and Facebook sets, the most widely shared fake news stories (in this sense of profit-driven Facebook clickbait) were ranked 66th and 55th by Twitter and Facebook shares, respectively, and on both Twitter and Facebook only two of the top 100 stories were from such sites. Out of two million stories, that may seem significant, but in the scheme of an election, it seems more likely to have yielded returns to its propagators than to have actually swayed opinions in significant measure. When we look at our data week by week, prominent fake news stories of this "Macedonian" type are rare and were almost never among the most significant 10 or 20 stories of the week, much less the election as a whole. Disinformation and propaganda from dedicated partisan sites on both sides of the political divide played a much greater role in the election. It was more rampant, though, on the right than on the left, as it took root in the dominant partisan media on the right, including Breitbart, The Daily Caller, and Fox News. Moreover, the most successful examples of these political clickbait stories are enmeshed in a network of sites that have already created, circulated, and validated a set of narrative lines and tropes familiar within their network. The clickbait sites merely repackage and retransmit these already widely shared stories. We document this dynamic for one of the most successful such political clickbait stories, published by Ending the Fed, in the last chapter of this report, and we put it in the context of the much more important role played by Breitbart, Fox News, and the Daily Caller in reorienting the public conversation after the Democratic convention around the asserted improprieties associated with the Clinton Foundation.

Our observations suggest that fixing the American public sphere may be much harder than we would like. One feature of the more widely circulated explanations of our "post-truth" moment—fake news sites seeking Facebook advertising, Russia engaging in a propaganda war, or information overload leading confused voters to fail to distinguish facts from false or misleading reporting—is that these are clearly inconsistent with democratic values, and the need for interventions to respond to them is more or less indisputable. If profit-driven fake news is the problem, solutions like urging Facebook or Google to use technical mechanisms to identify fake news sites and silence them by denying them advertising revenue or downgrading the visibility of their sites seem, on their face, not to conflict with any democratic values. Similarly, if a foreign power is seeking to influence our democratic process by propagandistic means, then having the intelligence community determine how this is being done and stop it is normatively unproblematic. If readers are simply confused, then developing tools that will feed them fact-checking metrics while they select and read stories might help. These approaches may contribute to solving the disorientation in the public sphere, but our observations suggest that they will be working on the margins of the core challenge.

The media structures we observe in this study have taken shape in conjunction with political dynamics that are informed by and intertwined with deep-seeded social and cultural value systems. The asymmetries in media structures and function are likewise grounded in society-wide processes that have evolved over several

decades. The production, dissemination, consumption, and processing of political information are inherently political acts tied to group identity. If the real challenges come from inside the political system and consist of intentional political communication within a major wing of the American political system, willingly received by a large segment of the American citizenry, then the solution is far from obvious and interventions must confront the political origins of the problem.

One point of optimism from this study is the continued central role of traditional media organizations across the political spectrum from center-right to left. Editorial boards and professional journalists must grapple with the pitfalls of operating in a disinformation-rich environment. Their ability to respond and adjust to this more challenging environment will benefit the majority of the American public that does not occupy the right-wing media ecosystem.

If the real challenges come from inside the political system and consist of intentional political communication within a major wing of the American political system, willingly received by a large segment of the American citizenry, then the solution is far from obvious and interventions must confront the political origins of the problem.

But the efforts to find a technological fix—through changes to the Facebook algorithm or a fact-checking app—are much less likely to be either effective or normatively justifiable if they mean intentional disruption of a class of political communication desired by its recipients and intended to forge a powerful political connection within a substantial wing of the American public. Where is the Archimedean point from which to look at the right-wing media ecosystem and say, "What is going on is so inimical to American democracy that we know that it is an attack on democracy, rather than its expression?" If readers on the right shun fact-checking sites because they read their media to reinforce their in-group identity and share in partisan folklore, then new fact-checking apps will simply be ignored, and imagining that installing them will solve the rise of disinformation is merely whistling past the graveyard. Perhaps the most important antidote is in the hands of American conservatives who do not recognize themselves in the racist, populist, anti-science, anti-rule-of-law, and anti-journalism worldviews that became so prominent in the right-wing media ecosystem. Such conservatives have the legitimacy on the edges of the new right-wing to speak from inside the tent, rather than throwing stones at it from outside. The marginalization of never-Trump voices within conservative circles in this election cycle suggests that such conservatives will face a steep uphill battle. Fundamentally, our observations suggest that the answers will not likely come from the technological or legal domains, but from the realm of political culture, norms, and power.

In this study we analyze online media coverage of the 2016 U.S. election over the 18 months from May 2015 until the election in November 2016. This study builds upon a methodology and approach developed in prior efforts to evaluate and describe the role of the networked public sphere in policy debates.[11] Drawing on a variety of analytical approaches and data sources, we track the role of media sources and actors that participate in the public debate; estimate the network structure of different media spheres with particular attention to the formation of political communities; and measure the evolution and prominence of different topics, agendas, and frames over time. We refer to this methodology as an "ecosystem approach" to understanding the relationship between media and political actors around a given topic.

We rely primarily upon data collected and analyzed using the Media Cloud platform.[12] From the open web we collect and analyze over two million stories from a broad range of media sites, campaign sites, government sites, private firms, blogs, and nonprofit organizations, such as think tanks and advocacy organizations. We analyze this corpus of stories using link analysis and content analysis, including the human coding of stories and topic detection using Boolean keyword queries.

	Content analysis	Network analysis and community detection	Audience and reach
Open web stories and media sources	Keyword and topic matching Human coding of stories Qualitative analysis of most highly linked stories and media sources	Link-based mapping of open web stories	Twitter and Facebook shares
Stories and media sources shared on Twitter and Facebook	Qualitative analysis of most frequently shared stories and media sources on Twitter	Mapping of co-linking patterns Generation of partisanship scores for media sources	Twitter and Facebook shares

Table 5: Analytical components of the study

We also collected and analyzed data from Twitter. Using Crimson Hexagon,[13] we drew a random sample of 4.5 million tweets related to the election. We extracted and resolved the nearly 900,000 URLs that were shared in these tweets and fed these stories into the Media Cloud platform for mapping and analysis. In addition, by accessing data through the API for Facebook we are able to tabulate estimates of the number of times stories

11 Benkler, Yochai, Hal Roberts, Robert Faris, Alicia Solow-Niederman, and Bruce Etling. "Social mobilization and the networked public sphere: Mapping the SOPA-PIPA debate." *Political Communication* 32, no. 4 (2015): 594-624. Faris, Robert, Hal Roberts, Bruce Etling, Dalia Othman, and Yochai Benkler. "Net Neutrality| The Role of the Networked Public Sphere in the U.S. Net Neutrality Policy Debate." *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 26. Graeff, Erhardt, Matt Stempeck, and Ethan Zuckerman. "The battle for 'Trayvon Martin': Mapping a media controversy online and off-line." *First Monday* 19, no. 2 (2014).

12 http://mediacloud.org

13 https://www.crimsonhexagon.com

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

23

are shared on Facebook.[14] The analysis of open web and social media offers complementary perspectives on the election and a much richer basis for analysis than focusing on a single platform or medium.

To study the interaction of partisanship and media, we created a candidate-focused partisanship attention score for media sources derived from the sharing patterns of Twitter users who retweeted Trump or Clinton. These partisanship scores allow us to identify and describe patterns of attention to different media sources from the Trump and Clinton camps.

The combination of these data sets give us three substantially different perspectives on the role of media in the election: the topics covered by online mass market media, the cross-media linking patterns of media sources on the open web, and social media interaction with media. Not only are these perspectives conceptually different but each measures different behaviors across distinct groups of participants.

Further details on the methods are included in the text of this report and a more detailed methodological appendix.

---

14 The media source and story discovery mechanisms employed for this study operate through the open web and Twitter. This discovery mechanism may not capture media sources with a significant presence on Facebook but not less visibility on the open web and Twitter.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

24

The 2016 United States presidential election was covered by tens of thousands of separate media entities that together compose a complex media landscape. Voters receive their political information and news from a diverse set of specialized sources, many of which are designed to serve niche audiences. A growing proportion of the U.S. population uses Facebook and other social media as primary sources of news, while a large portion still rely on broadcast television and cable news.[15] Talk radio still remains an important source of information and ideology for many Americans. Although the number of people who still read newspapers and news magazines is shrinking,[16] political news is brought into our consciousness by many other means, including face-to-face conversations, email, campaign advertising, and perhaps even holiday dinners with family.

There are enough options for news that many deliberately and consciously choose a news diet as if choosing entrées from a menu. For others, their exposure to election-related news is shaped by their online and offline social networks and the headlines and stories that come through their email accounts, Twitter feeds, and Facebook accounts. This has eroded to a certain degree the influence of editors and publishers of large broadcast media companies and forces us to consider the complex processes that contribute to shaping the media agenda, the menu of news stories and issues that gain prominence among media consumers.

Political communications scholars and media observers no longer have the convenience of simply looking at major news channels and newspapers to monitor the media agenda. In its place, we must understand the interplay of broadcast news and newspapers with digital news outlets, blogs, and any number of pundits, politicians, and personalities with large followings on social media, as well as the unpredictable rise of stories and memes that emerge from digital media. To understand media and politics, we must understand the entire ecosystem: networks, the structure of networks, and the flow of information in networks. In this section, we focus first on the network of election-related open web media.

---

15 http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/
16 http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/newspapers-fact-sheet/?mobiright-demo=anchor,anchor

The coverage of the 2016 election spans a vast number of media sources and stories that have a presence on the open web,[17] including large traditional newspapers, the online outlets of cable news, other mass media outlets, political blogs, campaign web sites, government sources, news agencies, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations. The more than two million stories the Media Cloud platform identified and collected is far more than any one person could read. To analyze this huge corpus of stories and reporting, we start by mapping the linking patterns between the stories and approximately 70,000 media sources. The structure of the link economy (who links to whom), as shown in Figure 11, is determined by the more than two million links between the more than two million stories related to the 2016 election.
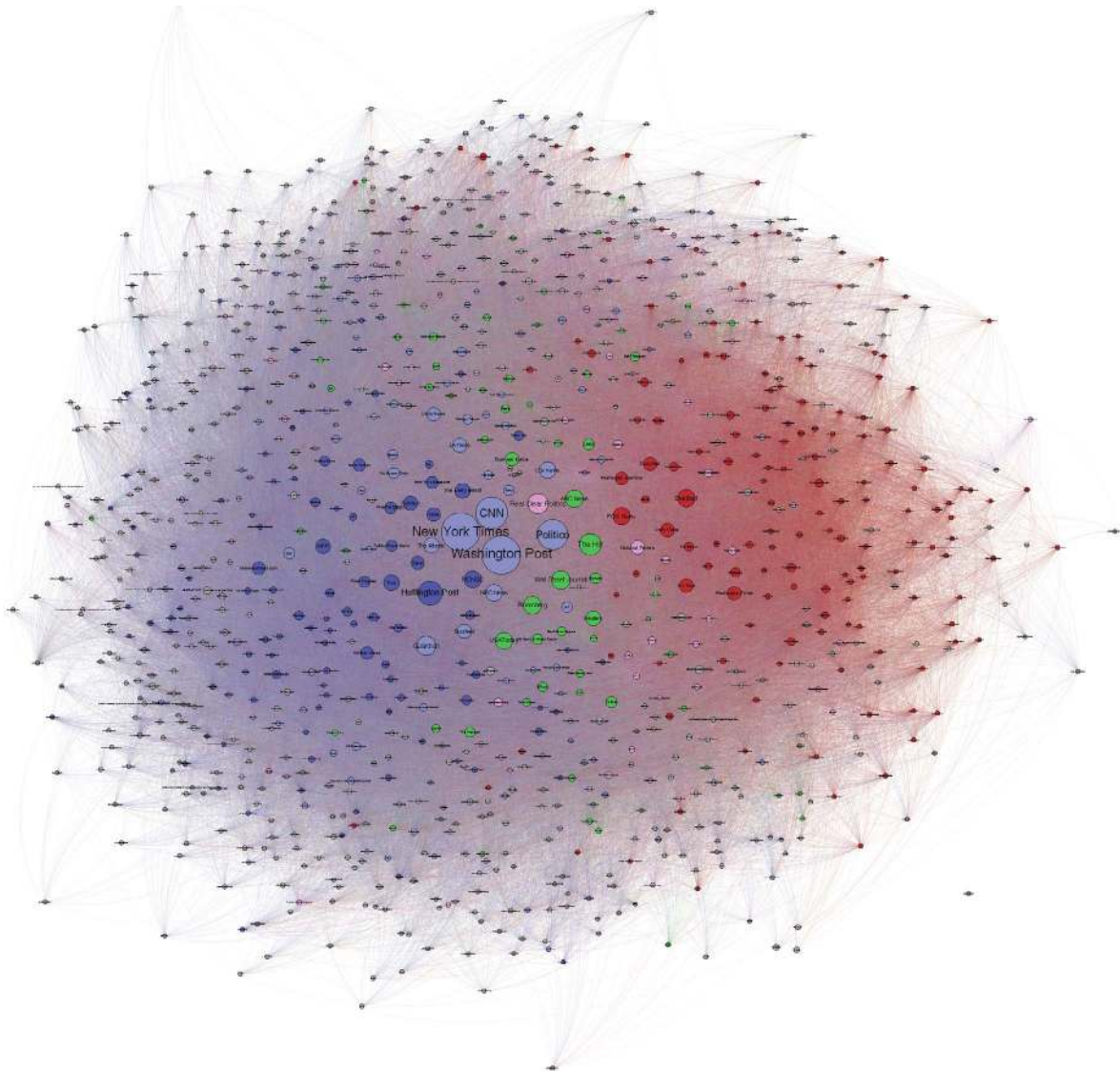
Figure 11: Link-based network map of election media sources
(explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

17 We use the term open web to refer to media sites and pages that maintain an independent presence on the Internet reachable by a URL. In this report, the term is often used to distinguish between the networks that emerge from the interactions of these independent media sources and the sharing of stories by users on social media platforms, in particular Twitter and Facebook.

Figure 11 is a network graph of media sources that discussed the election. Nodes are media sources and the connections between nodes are hyperlinks. The size of each media source node is in proportion to the number of other media sources that link to that source at least once; a media source that links to another media source multiple times is counted only once. The proximity of nodes to one another is influenced by the commonality of links among media sources. Media sources that link to one another and receive inlinks from common media sources appear closer to one another. This view of the election-focused media landscape is determined by the linking decisions of the tens of thousands of authors and editors. In this sense, it represents the collective perspective of the open web media participants, including professional journalists, bloggers, authors of reports, the candidates, and their campaigns.

The colors on the map reflect the partisan pattern of attention to the media sources based on the sharing behavior of Twitter users who have clear partisan allegiances. The partisanship measure is expressed in quintiles: red for the right, pink for the center-right, green for the center, light blue for the center-left, and dark blue for the left. The partisanship scores used to color the nodes reflect the share of that site's stories tweeted by users who also retweeted either Clinton or Trump during the election. These colors therefore reflect the attention patterns of audiences, not analysis of content of the sites. Dark blue sites draw attention in ratios of at least 4:1 from Clinton followers; red sites 4:1 Trump followers. Green sites were retweeted more or less equally by followers of each candidate. Light-blue sites draw 3:2 Clinton followers, and pink draw 3:2 Trump followers.

There are signs of a divided media sphere evident in this aggregate view of the open web link economy, which are more apparent once the map is colored by the affinity of each media source for Clinton and Trump. The visual representation of the link economy shows overlap between the left and left-center sites along with the media outlets occupying the center. The right side of the spectrum is less integrated with the rest of the map.

The Huffington Post, the Guardian, and MSNBC receive the largest number of media inlinks on the Clinton side. Followers of liberal media are unlikely to find many surprises in the composition of the Clinton-friendy end of the spectrum. A familiar set of media sources are found there, including Mother Jones, Slate, Vox, and Salon. The conservative side is anchored by Fox News and Breitbart, followed by the New York Post, the Washington Times, the Daily Caller, the Daily Mail, and the Washington Examiner.
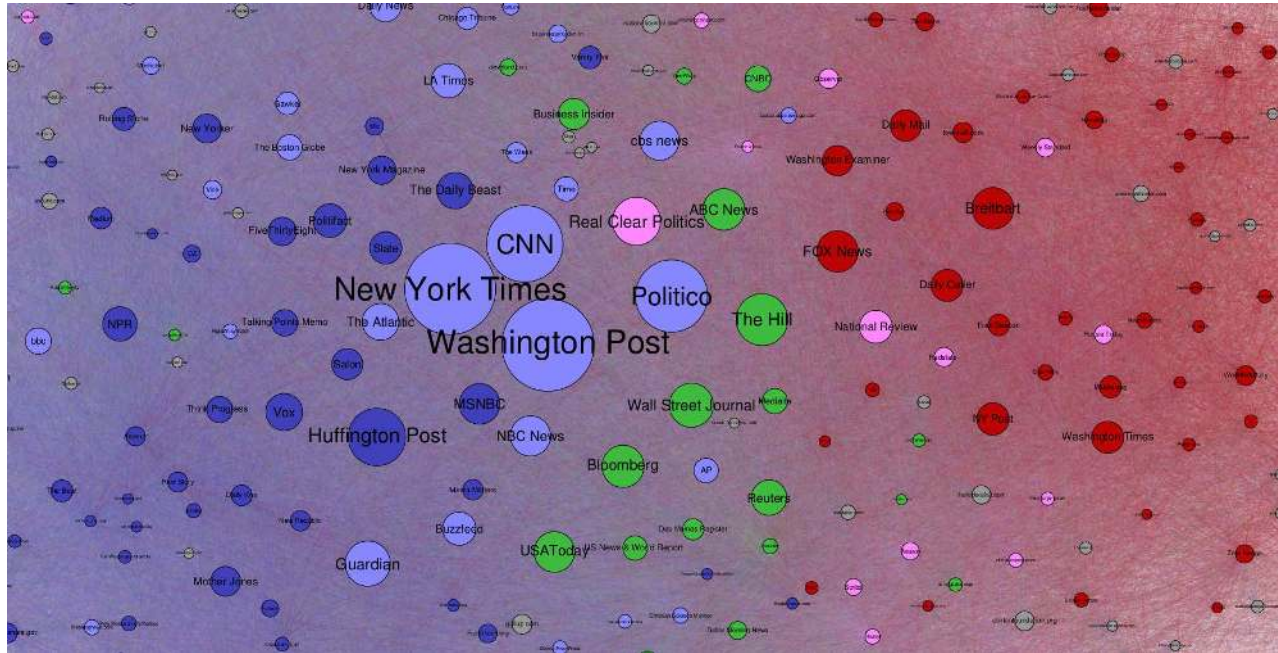
Figure 12: A closer look at the center of the open web media network map (Figure 11)

The Washington Post, the New York Times, CNN, Politico, and The Hill occupy the core of the map. The centrality of these sites is determined not only by the large number of media inlinks they receive from the other sources in the network but also by the links that come from across the network. The Washington Post, for example, is referenced by 5,100 unique media sources. The prominence of these large media sources can be explained in part by the reputation and authoritative voice of these longstanding institutions. The sheer volume of stories produced by each outlet is another factor in these patterns. The Washington Post produced more than 50,000 stories over the 18-month period, while the New York Times, CNN, and Huffington Post each published more than 30,000 stories.

Irrespective of the reasons for the distribution of links, the journalists and others producing these stories that create these linking patterns favored these large media organizations, and readers following links would more frequently be led to these sources and more likely to share with their friends, whether in conversation, by email, or social media.

Media Source	Media Inlinks	Media Source	Media Inlinks
Washington Post	5100	hillaryclinton.com	1561
New York Times	5026	NPR	1539
CNN	4131	LA Times	1536
Politico	3866	PolitiFact	1489
YouTube	3846	Buzzfeed	1476
Huffington Post	2963	Yahoo News	1462
The Hill	2605	National Review	1445
Wikipedia	2437	Slate	1410
Real Clear Politics	2381	NY Post	1407
Guardian	2206	Washington Times	1396
Wall Street Journal	2128	Daily Caller	1390
Facebook	2085	NY Daily News	1354
Bloomberg	2018	Daily Mail	1352
Breitbart	1990	Business Insider	1348
ABC News	1981	Salon	1340
Fox News	1967	berniesanders.com	1296
MSNBC	1925	Washington Examiner	1295
USA Today	1921	Mother Jones	1259
NBC News	1897	New Yorker	1210
donaldjtrump.com	1858	FiveThirtyEight	1177
CBS News	1829	New York Magazine	1173
Vox	1702	Amazon	1096
The Atlantic	1680	Talking Points Memo	1052
The Daily Beast	1666	BBC	1043
Reuters	1605	Forbes	1037

Table 6: Top 50 media sources by media inlinks

At first glance, a reasonable interpretation of this map might be that there is an integrated network public sphere that gravitates toward the largest and most prominent centrist media organizations. This perspective is likely to resonate with a good portion of the U.S. electorate who view the New York Times and similarly situated media sources as centrist, and it may ring true to the media sources at the center of this map.

	HuffPo	NYT	WaPo	Politico	WSJ	Fox	Breitbart	Daily Caller
HuffPo		0.32	0.38	0.20	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01
NYT	0.08		0.48	0.27	0.08	0.05	0.04	0.01
WaPo	0.11	0.40		0.32	0.09	0.05	0.03	0.01
Politico	0.08	0.38	0.36		0.12	0.03	0.03	0.01
WSJ	0.04	0.28	0.27	0.31		0.06	0.01	0.02
Fox	0.03	0.29	0.32	0.18	0.12		0.02	0.04
Breitbart	0.06	0.22	0.26	0.26	0.08	0.07		0.05
Daily Caller	0.06	0.23	0.26	0.26	0.07	0.07	0.05	

Table 7: Cross-media linking for a section of media outlets (proportion of links from each media source)

The linking patterns among a selection of media sources helps to explain the shape of the network. In Table 7, we see the linking patterns between eight prominent media sources from the left and right. Among this set, the New York Times, Washington Post, and Politico are most frequently cited by all of the media sources, even by the four conservative sites included in this set: Fox News, the Wall Street Journal, Breitbart, and the Daily Caller. Unsurprisingly, the conservative sites link less frequently to the Huffington Post. An interesting asymmetry appears: while right-wing sites like Breitbart and The Daily Caller link frequently to the New York Times and the Washington Post, links in the other direction are vanishingly rare. This suggests that the right-wing sites are reacting to a media agenda put forward by mainstream papers. As we will discuss later, the situation is not quite so simple and straightforward.

There is nothing unusual in the concentration of focus found in this network; it aligns with power law distributions that are familiar to observers of media systems and researchers in the field. In this election campaign, however, the media sources at the core of the network stood in opposition to the Trump candidacy. In turn, Trump viewed the New York Times, the Washington Post, and CNN as the opposition and cited them often as the principal representatives of the "dishonest" media he was running against. This open hostility to the mainstream press was a touchstone for the Trump campaign, and condemnation of the "dishonest" media was a mantra of his campaign at rallies and a frequent feature in his talking points to the press.

The configuration of the link-based map shown in Figure 11 highlights the fact that there are conflicting notions of centrality. Conventional depictions of the media spectrum, in which the New York Times occupies the center-left and the Wall Street Journal the center-right of a generally symmetric pattern have been disrupted in this election cycle, along with many other political and media conventions. Several media sources that are conventionally considered right of center, including The Hill and the Wall Street Journal, fall into the center by this designation (the green nodes on Figure 11) based on the proportion of Trump and Clinton supporter retweets of a media source. The center-left designation (light blue in Figure 11), by contrast, expands to include not only the New York Times and Washington Post but also some of the traditional broadcast networks. From a network perspective, ignoring both the conventional wisdom about the political inclination of media sources and the partisan designations reflected in the node colors, the New York Times and Washington Post are the center of the map. While there is no single definition of centrality, the leftward shift in the designation relative to conventional understanding is driven by the attention patterns of an asymmetrically polarized public during the election.

The far right of the media landscape manifests even greater changes. The largest nodes among the media sites most cited by Trump supporters are Breitbart and Fox News. This highlights the remarkable shifts in the alignment of conservative media in the 2016 election. The most notable development is the emergence of Breitbart at the center of the media sphere that aligned with the Trump campaign. These two elements—the reshaping of conservative media and the leftward orientation of traditional media—are fundamentally linked and are key to understanding the dynamics of the 2016 election.

Campaign reporting and sharing of stories via social media occupied a critical role in this election. Facebook served as a channel for conspicuously partisan news as well as a primary vehicle for disinformation and political clickbait.[18] Twitter acted as a mechanism for debate and information sharing for political groups ranging from the alt-right and Bernie bros to supporters of independent candidates. According to several studies, it also hosted a large number of bots designed to manipulate public opinion.[19] Twitter played a central role for Trump, as it allowed him to engage directly with his many millions of followers and to shape the media and public agendas around the election by tweeting out statements and opinions. For the analysis of the election, the sharing of stories on Twitter and Facebook offers us a distinct and crucial perspective on the role of media in the election. The media coverage and cross-media web links presented earlier offer a view of media that gravitates toward an elite authoritative view. Social media sharing behaviors open up a window onto a much broader swath of the public. Although not necessarily representative of the media exposure patterns and sharing behaviors of the overall electorate, social media provides a powerful view of the most highly politically engaged.

By collecting, resolving, and tabulating URLs shared in tweets related to the election, we are able to draw a comparative view from social media. While some aspects of the landscape are similar to that of links on the open web, the picture is notably different. In looking at Twitter, we focus our attention on the sharing of stories among those that cite the presidential candidates in their tweets. We draw upon a large sample of 4.5 million tweets identified by Crimson Hexagon as mentioning at least one major candidate name. From this sample, we generate estimates of the popularity of election-related stories and media sources. These data also enable us to infer the network structure of the media landscape based on the propensity of Twitter users to cite different sets of media sources. Those who cite Vox are more likely than others to also cite Slate, and those who share links to Breitbart or Fox News are more likely to share links to the Daily Caller than their liberal counterparts. This co-occurrence of media source linking is used to generate network maps that are analogous to the link-based map shown earlier—sources cited by the same Twitter user draw closer to each other in this visualization.

---

18 http://graphics.wsj.com/blue-feed-red-feed/

19 http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2016/11/Data-Memo-US-Election.pdf; http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-USA.pdf

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

32
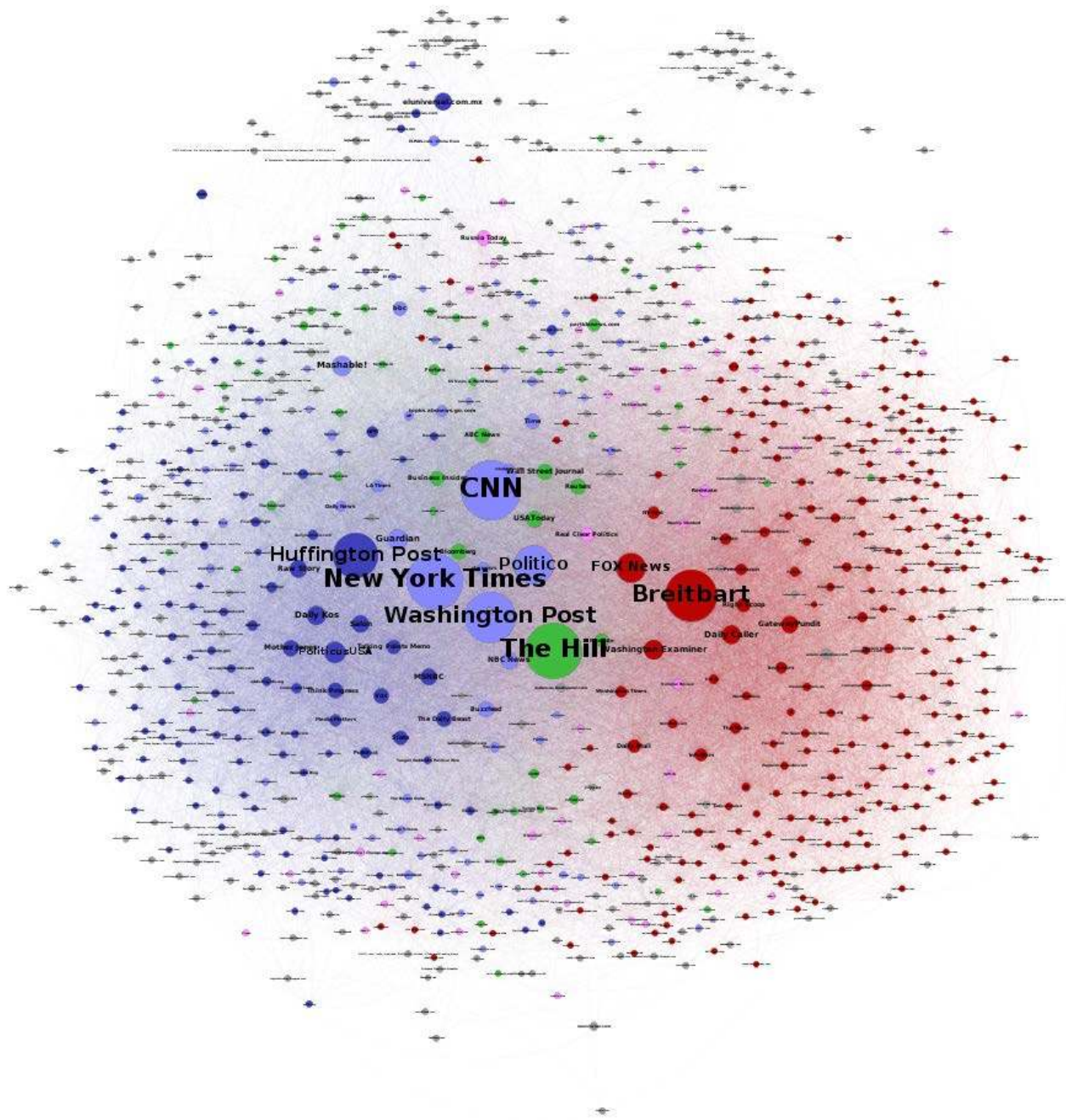
Figure 13: Network map based on Twitter media sharing from May 1, 2015, to November 7, 2016 with nodes sized by number of Twitter shares (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

The Twitter-based media network map displays many parallels with the open web network map. The separation of the right-wing media sphere, and the central role played by Breitbart, are even more clearly visible. On Twitter, the left appears to be less integrated with the center-left.

The New York Times, CNN, Washington Post, and Politico remain as important nodes in the center-left along with The Hill in the center. The Huffington Post is still the most important media source on the left. On the right, Breitbart overshadows Fox News as the central node of conservative discourse on Twitter, but both rise in the overall hierarchy of sites across the ideological divide, Breitbart to fourth place and Fox to eighth.

There are a number of sites on both sides of the spectrum that have a faint presence in the link economy but that are influential on Twitter. On the left, PoliticusUSA, Daily Kos, Raw Story, and Salon are popular. The Gateway Pundit, which is of minor significance in the link economy, is the fifth most popular conservative site on Twitter.

1	CNN	16	Raw Story
2	The Hill	17	Salon
3	New York Times	18	Gateway Pundit
4	Breitbart	19	MSNBC
5	Washington Post	20	NBC News
6	Huffington Post	21	Wall Street Journal
7	Politico	22	USA Today
8	Fox News	23	Mother Jones
9	PoliticusUSA	24	Bloomberg
10	Washington Examiner	25	Buzzfeed
11	Guardian	26	Think Progress
12	Mashable	27	The Daily Beast
13	Daily Kos	28	Reuters
14	Daily Caller	29	Vox
15	Yahoo! News	30	ABC News

Table 8: Media sources most frequently shared on Twitter

Drawing upon data that tracks the number of times each of the stories is shared on Facebook makes it possible to visualize the same set of media sources. In this case, the popularity of each source on Facebook is used to size their node on the graph. (Figure 14). The principal nodes that anchor the center and center-left are the same. On Facebook, Breitbart takes on an even larger role compared with Twitter.
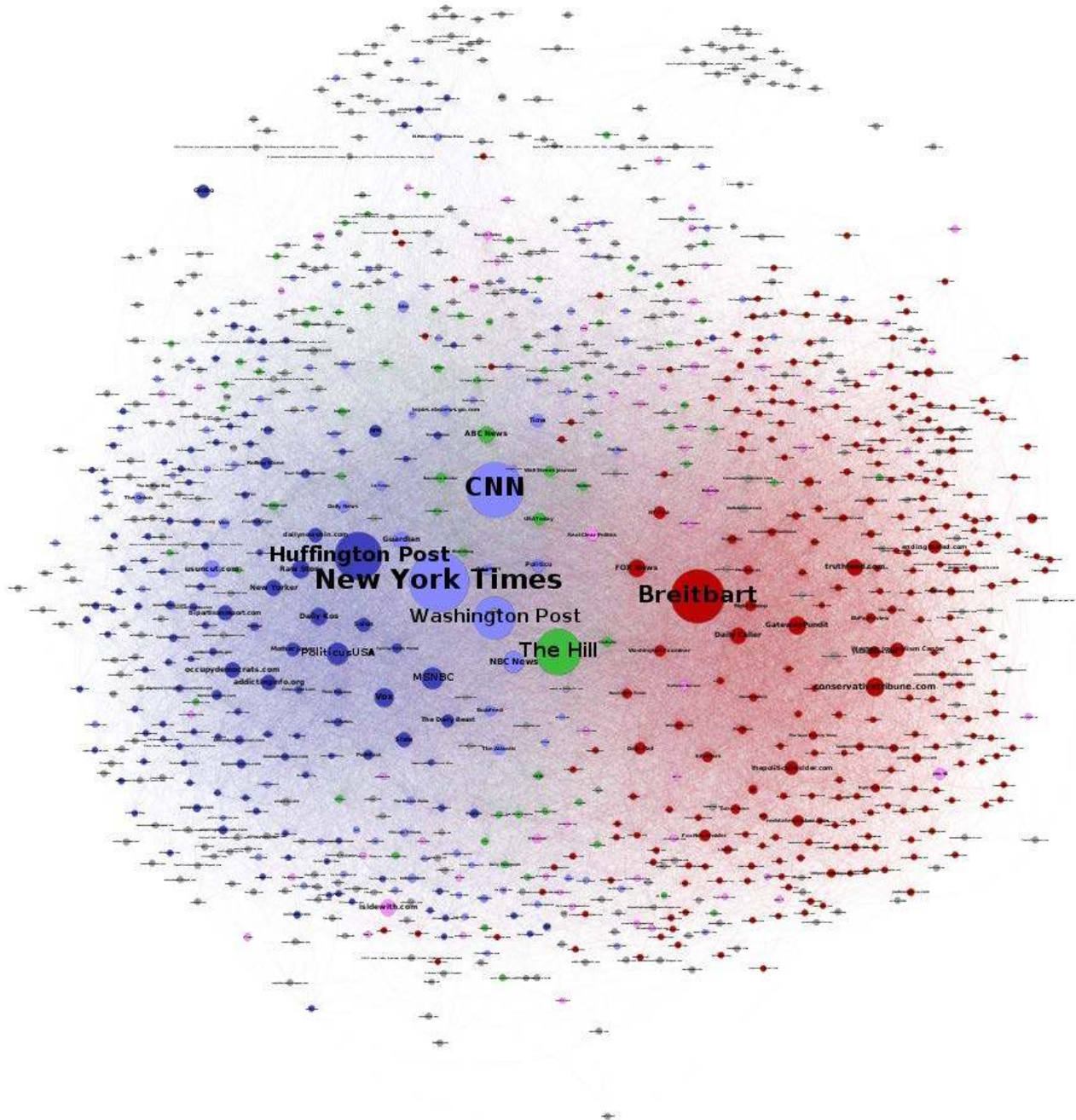
Figure 14: Network map of media sources shared on Twitter with nodes sized according to shares on Facebook
(explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

The roster of top sites on Facebook retains some overlap with Twitter, while diverging even further from the popular sites on the open web. On the left, many of the mainstays of liberal media are popular on Facebook, including the Huffington Post, Vox, Slate, Salon, Daily Kos, and Mother Jones. PoliticusUSA is still important and is joined by a set of newer highly partisan sites farther left on the spectrum: Occupy Democrats, Addicting Info, Daily Newsbin, and Bipartisan Report. The most popular sites on Facebook from the right also include a number of more recent highly partisan entrants: Conservative Tribune, Truthfeed, Western Journalism, and Political Insider.

1	New York Times	16	Daily Kos
2	CNN	17	Daily Caller
3	Breitbart	18	Truthfeed
4	Huffington Post	19	Guardian
5	The Hill	20	ABC News
6	Washington Post	21	New Yorker
7	PoliticusUSA	22	Occupy Democrats
8	MSNBC	23	Addicting Info
9	NBC News	24	Bipartisan Report
10	Vox	25	Slate
11	Conservative Tribune	26	Western Journalism
12	Gateway Pundit	27	Daily Newsbin
13	Raw Story	28	Political Insider
14	Fox News	29	Salon
15	US Uncut	30	Mother Jones

Table 9: Media sources most frequently shared on Facebook

There are fundamental differences between the left and the right. The coverage of these media sources popular on the left was frequently highly critical of Clinton, and many sources strongly favored Sanders. The most popular media sites on the right were strongly pro-Trump. Another key difference is that on the liberal side of the media spectrum the reporting and coverage on the far left was far less influential than the center-left. In conservative media, the far right was the epicenter of political coverage. These alternative media sites on the right, along with Breitbart, served the Trump campaign and his supporters in a manner that was not paralleled on the left. This media sphere, separated in large part from the traditional media structures, is both a cause and a symptom of the remarkable ascendancy of Donald Trump, and serves as a chronicle and sounding board for the frustrations and perspectives of a significant portion of the U.S. electorate. For those who are not part of this extraordinary political movement, its digital footprints offer a window onto the beliefs and narratives that fueled the movement.

The media landscape seen during the 2016 presidential campaign is the product of many factors that have developed over several decades. Many of the large media organizations of the center and center-left, including the NBC, ABC, CBS, the Washington Post and the New York Times, have been on the scene for many decades. CNN was founded in 1980. The Hill launched in 1994 and Politico in 2007. On the right, the New York Post has been in operation for over two centuries, and has been a reliably right-leaning paper since Rupert Murdoch purchased it in 1976. The Washington Times started up in 1994 and Fox News was founded in 1996. The Washington Examiner took its current form in 2005, Breitbart in 2007, and the Daily Caller in 2010.
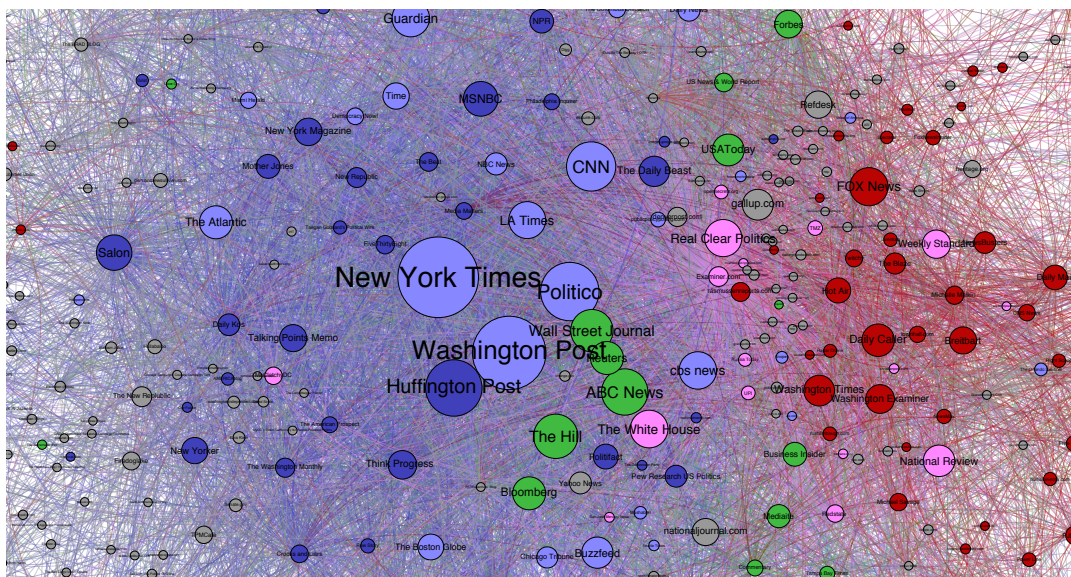
Figure 15: Link-based network map of election media sources, October 2012. Partisan node coloring based on 2016 data.

Using data from October 2012, we can tentatively identify changes in the open web linking practices between the 2012 election and the 2016 election. First, perhaps the most notable change is the location and prominence of the National Review and the Weekly Standard. In 2012, they were key nodes and well integrated into the right-wing media sphere. Four years later, they were positioned on the center-right and relatively less popular. Second, the first generation of Web 2.0 sites, like Hot Air, PJ Media, or Townhall on the right, or Talking Points Memo on the left, were more highly-linked in 2012 than in 2016. Third, the right-wing media ecosystem was already less integrated into the overall media landscape than left-leaning media. The asymmetric polarization we describe in this report pre-dated the rise of Trump and evidently has considerably deeper roots. Indeed, it is likely that Trump benefited from existing asymmetric polarization as much as his candidacy was a cause of it. Finally, Breitbart emerged in 2016 as far more influential than it had been in 2012, and alongside it the New York Post, InfoWars, and WikiLeaks were more central

≡ Q NATIONAL REVIEW ⤴ 👤

Conservatives against Trump

(Tom Penington/Getty)

by NR SYMPOSIUM
January 21, 2016 10:00 PM

National Review

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

37

to the conservative sphere in 2016 than 2012. We do not have data comparable to our Twitter and Facebook data for 2012, but the prominence of sites like Truthfeed in 2016, together with the increased visibility of InfoWars, suggests that the 2016 election saw a radicalization, or heightened influence of the paranoid style in the right-wing ecosystem relative to 2012.

Media Source	Inlinks	Media Source	Inlinks
New York Times	294	Washington Times	92
Washington Post	265	Gallup	92
Politico	204	The Daily Beast	90
Huffington Post	196	Slate	85
CNN	167	Washington Examiner	84
ABC News	155	Think Progress	83
The Hill	147	Weekly Standard	82
Wall Street Journal	139	Foreign Policy	81
Fox News	122	New York Magazine	79
The White House	120	Forbes	79
CBS News	119	Refdesk.com	78
Guardian	119	Breitbart	77
Real Clear Politics	118	National Journal	77
LA Times	117	Talking Points Memo	77
Salon	111	Time	74
MSNBC	108	New Yorker	74
barackobama.com	105	The Boston Globe	72
Reuters	101	Hot Air	69
The Atlantic	101	Des Moines Register	69
Bloomberg	101	PolitiFact	68
mittromney.com	100	Daily Mail	67
Daily Caller	99	Mother Jones	64
USA Today	96	Business Insider	64
National Review	95	NPR	63
Buzzfeed	94	Mediaite	61

Table 10: Top 50 media sources by media inlinks from 2012 presidential election

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

38

In this video from 2005, Donald Trump prepares for an appearance on 'Days of Our Lives' with Access Hollywood ho Billy Bush and actress Arianne Zucker. (Obtained by The Washington Post)

By David A. Fahrenthold ✉
October 8, 2016

Washington Post

In the middle of October 2016, with several weeks left in the presidential campaign, most political pundits and pollsters were predicting that Clinton would win the election by a comfortable margin, while others touted the possibility of a landslide victory. The Trump campaign was reeling after the October 7 release of video tapes by the Washington Post that depicted Trump making lewd comments about women. Over the next few days, several women came forward to recount stories of being sexually assaulted by Trump. The Trump campaign appeared to be in deep trouble, and many from both sides of the aisle were calling for Trump to step aside. The Wall Street Journal reported: "A divided Republican Party descended into turmoil, as a startling chorus of GOP candidates and officials repudiated their own presidential candidate and scrambled to find personal paths to political survival just a month before Election Day."[20]

For many in conservative media, however, this event was neither a watershed nor a Waterloo, but rather one more in a long series of controversies in the campaign cycle to be countered. Breitbart News joined the Trump campaign in hitting back at the Clintons. It offered an exclusive interview with three women who accused Bill Clinton of sexual crimes and described Hillary as an "enabler" of these alleged actions.[21] Fox News provided a television platform for Rudy Giuliani to defend Donald Trump while the Fox web site reported, "Flight logs show Bill Clinton flew on sex offender's jet much more than previously known."[22] InfoWars, meanwhile, reported that Bill Clinton's "son" called Hillary Clinton to ask her to pull out of the election.[23] Truthfeed, a website popular with core Trump supporters, reported that the sexual assault allegations against Trump were fabricated.[24] In addition, the first trove of emails obtained by the hacking of Clinton campaign chair John Podesta's email account, apparently by

Truthfeed

Russian intelligence services,[25] were released hours after the tapes of Trump's lewd conversation broke in the Washington Post.. WikiLeaks continued to release emails over the next month, giving reporters a rich set of politically hot materials to dig further into, pursuing allegations of improper influence peddling by Hillary Clinton mediated through the Clinton Foundation. Left-leaning media continued to document a mind-

20 https://www.wsj.com/articles/gop-scrambles-to-salvage-election-after-donald-trumps-latest-imbroglio-1475969203

21 http://www.breitbart.com/2016-presidential-race/2016/10/09/juanita-broaddrick-kathleen-willey-paula-jones-bill-clinton-sexual-assault/

22 http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2016/10/09/giuliani-addresses-trump-treatment-women-john-podesta-speaks-out-after-his.html
http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/05/13/flight-logs-show-bill-clinton-flew-on-sex-offenders-jet-much-more-than-previously-known.html

23 https://www.infowars.com/bill-clinton-son-tells-hillary-step-aside/

24 http://truthfeed.com/busted-fake-trump-accuser-tied-to-clinton-foundation-and-caught-in-lie/29309/

25 http://thehill.com/policy/national-security/312132-fbi-dhs-release-report-on-russia-hacking
https://www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/JAR_16-20296A_GRIZZLY%20STEPPE-2016-1229.pdf; https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/how-hackers-broke-into-john-podesta-and-colin-powells-gmail-accounts

boggling array of actions by Trump that called into question his fitness to serve as president.[26] For Trump loyalists and other readers, right-wing media offered a steady supply of stories that provided evidence that Trump, despite his many flaws, was a far better choice than Clinton… and portrayed the center-left media's focus on Trump's imperfections as evidence that those sources were unfairly biased against Trump.

The results of the 2016 election are a testament to the enduring and extraordinary power of partisanship. The increasing influence of partisanship on U.S. politics is well established. Political partisan affiliation has become a core element of identity that has a pull on attitudes and behavior on par with gender or race.[27] Julia Azari offered a succinct summary of the election: "parties are weak while partisanship is strong."

Innumerable factors shaped the course and outcome of this election, particularly given the razor-thin margin of victory for Trump: 70,000 voters in three states were enough to turn the tide. The intersecting roles of media and partisanship undoubtedly played a central role in voter choice and turnout. While media scholars have long debated the extent of media's impact on politics and elections, one need not subscribe to the massive-effects school to believe that media had an important role in this election. Minimal effects are more than enough to have shifted the election's outcome.

26 http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/cover_story/2016/07/donald_trump_is_unfit_to_be_president_here_are_141_reasons_why.html
27 https://pcl.stanford.edu/research/2015/iyengar-ajps-group-polarization.pdf

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

40

Polarization Rising

The increase in polarization among political elites over the past several decades is well established. The increasing ideological and political divide in government has been under way since the 1940s (Figure 16). The polarization in government has not been symmetric, though. Analysis of the voting patterns of Congress shows that Republican legislators have more consistently taken conservative positions over time to a greater extent than their Democratic counterparts have taken liberal positions. In essence, conservatives have moved farther to the right than their Democratic counterparts have moved to the left.[28]
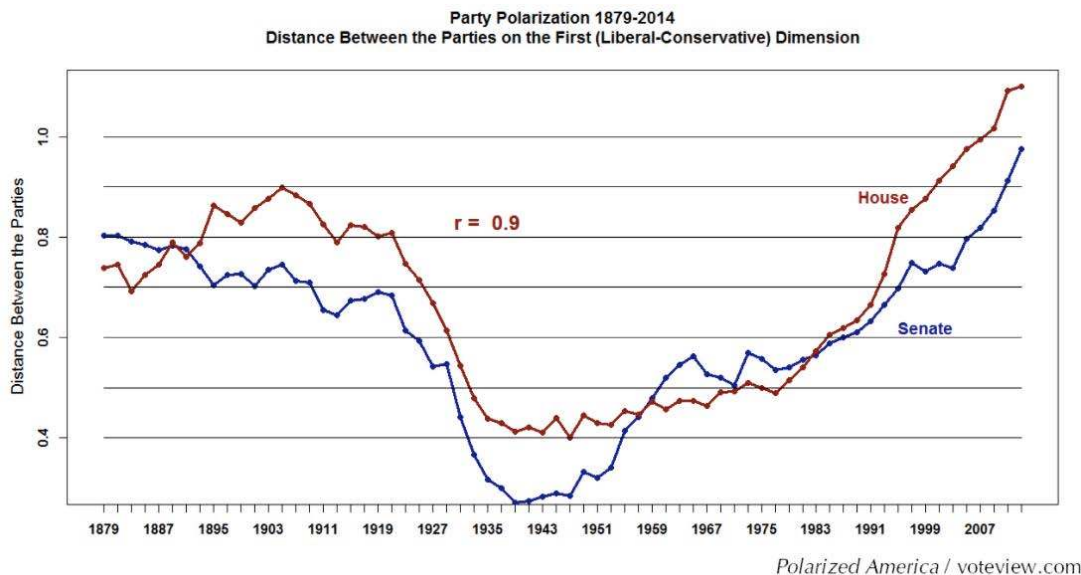
Figure 16: Party polarization (Source: http://voteview.com/political_polarization_2014.htm)

There is less consensus among scholars whether the electorate is as highly polarized as the political elite. While the link between party identification and voter choices has grown stronger,[29] this trend may not necessarily translate to greater polarization in the electorate.[30] It may instead be a reflection of a trend over time toward greater alignment of party affiliation with the political interests and opinions of party members: fewer people in the Democratic Party now hold conservative views, and fewer people in the Republican Party hold liberal views. This sorting process results in less overlap in the political orientation and attitudes of the parties and greater homogeneity within parties. Alternatively, as the differences in party candidates grow over time, centrist voters are left with more extreme options that do not reflect their moderate views. Another factor at play is that moderate voters are less likely to be engaged in politics; the more highly engaged are also the more highly polarized.[31] Whether or not this is fed by a growing underlying polarization of the electorate, mistrust and dislike of the opposing party appears to be on the rise. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of Republicans that view Democrats unfavorably has risen from 74% in 1994 to 91% in 2016. Democrats that view Republicans unfavorably has increased from 59% to 86% over the same time period.[32]

---

28 http://themonkeycage.org/2012/05/polarization-is-real-and-asymmetric/;
http://www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Task%20Force%20Reports/Chapter2Mansbridge.pdf

29 Bartels, Larry M. "Partisanship and voting behavior, 1952-1996." *American Journal of Political Science* (2000): 35-50.

30 Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy Pope. *Culture war?: The myth of a polarized America*. Longman Publishing Group, 2006.

31 Prior, Markus. "Media and political polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 101-127.

32 http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/1-feelings-about-partisans-and-the-parties/

The relationship between partisan media and polarization has been a focus of considerable academic interest in recent years. The rise of partisan media in the United States over the past several decades is well documented, raising concerns that partisan media has acted to fuel growing polarization.[33] There is, however, no consensus about the impact of partisan media on polarization. At issue is causality. Recognizing that the audience chooses what to watch or read: does partisan media polarize audiences or are polarized audiences drawn to partisan media? Two recent books devoted to this topic came to somewhat different conclusions. Levendusky finds evidence for the polarizing impact of partisan media, particularly among those who already have strong partisan views.[34] Arceneaux and Johnson conclude that the impact is small but is likely higher on those who have less entrenched opinions—the same people who are less likely to consume partisan media.[35] What is clear is that the mechanisms in play are complex, involving short-term and long-term effects, selective exposure, and effects that vary across different segments of the population. Even if the effects are isolated to the most engaged and partisan segments of the electorate, there are compelling arguments that they have an outsized influence on politics and electoral outcomes.

Concerns over political polarization and the impact of partisan media have grown more intense in the wake of the 2016 election, heightened by media attention to fake news and media manipulation by outsiders. A core challenge for researchers is unraveling the complex interrelationships between political identity, partisanship, and the dissemination of false and misleading reporting. In a world of numerous media options and selective exposure, several interrelated factors contribute to the spread and consumption of propaganda and disinformation. These include the individual preferences that shape media and story consumption choices; the incentives and practices of media outlets; the role of intermediaries such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google; and the interrelationship of media sources in the public sphere that help to increase or diminish the currency of misleading and false stories. This work bears primarily on the fourth element. We evaluate the media systems related to the 2016 election in an effort to identify the factors that make media systems more vulnerable or resilient to intentional media manipulation.[36]

---

33 Jamieson, Kathleen Hall and Joseph N. Cappella. *Echo Chamber*. Oxford University Press, USA (July 22, 2008).

34 Levendusky, Matthew. *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. University of Chicago Press, USA (2013).

35 Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels?* University of Chicago Press, USA (2013).

36 For a recent review of media manipulation see: Marwick, Alice, and Rebecca Lewis. "Media manipulation and disinformation online." Data & Society (2017).

The deep partisan divide in the 2016 presidential election is clearly evident in the media landscape and among the distinct structures revealed by the network maps, which serve different segments of the population. Another manifestation of this divide is the wildly different coverage of the same events and issues that different media sources often offer.

Clinton's Twitter account on
November 7, 2016

The cross-media linking and broader social-media-derived views of the media landscape presented earlier reveal structural patterns that reflect partisan media behavior both in media linking behavior and the sharing of stories and media sources on Twitter. Building on these two perspectives, we delve deeper into partisanship in media using a measure of the partisan valence of media sources based on the behavior of partisan Twitter users. From the set of 4.5 million tweets, we separately analyzed the tweets of the approximately 45,000 users in the sample who retweeted either Trump (@realDonaldTrump) or Clinton (@HillaryClinton) and extracted the URLs shared by each of these groups.

The stark differences between Twitter users who retweeted Trump and Clinton is shown in Table 11, which indicates the media sites most frequently shared by these two groups. The popular sites in the pro-Trump camp start again with Breitbart and include many of the larger conservative media sources, several prominent sources from the center and center-left, and a selection of media sources from the fringe—e.g., InfoWars, Truthfeed, and Conservative Treehouse. Notably absent are the historical mainstays of the American conservative movement—the Wall Street Journal and business publications like Forbes and Fortune; the National Review; and online-only sites that would have been central to

Trump's Twitter account on
November 7, 2016

right-wing media a decade ago, like RedState and Townhall. The most popular media sources on the Clinton side overlap to a great extent with the same media sources that are prominent in the center, center-left, and left portions of the link economy. Again, PoliticusUSA and the Raw Story are exceptions.

	@realDonaldTrump retweeters	@HillaryClinton retweeters
1	Breitbart	Washington Post
2	The Hill	Huffington Post
3	Fox News	New York Times
4	Gateway Pundit	The Hill
5	Politico	CNN
6	Washington Examiner	Politico
7	Daily Caller	Politicus USA
8	CNN	Daily Kos
9	Washington Post	Raw Story
10	New York Times	hillaryclinton.com
11	donaldjtrump.com	MSNBC
12	Conservative Treehouse	Salon
13	InfoWars	Think Progress
14	Daily Mail	Daily Newsbin
15	Truthfeed	Mother Jones
16	New York Post	Talking Points Memo
17	Investors	The Daily Beast
18	The Right Scoop	Media Matters
19	statespoll.com	NBC News
20	Conservative Tribune	Vox

Table 11: Media sources most frequently shared on Twitter by those who retweeted Trump and Clinton

The media sources most shared by Trump followers speak volumes about the types and range of sources that shape the media consumption patterns of Trump supporters. The position of Breitbart at the top of the pyramid supports the theory that it occupies a central role in the pro-Trump media sphere and as such would have been a good reflection of the worldview and political beliefs of core Trump supporters. It is impossible to say how much of this is a result of Trump following the agenda and framing of Steve Bannon and Breitbart or the consistent and staunch defense of Trump adopted by Breitbart. One explanation is that Trump and Breitbart found each other and saw their interests and ideologies converge.

Trump supporters also reach into more traditional conservative media, including Fox News, the New York Post, and the Washington Examiner, and into center and center-left media as well: CNN, Politico, The Hill, and the Washington Post. As described later in greater detail, the interest in center and center-left media is restricted to coverage there that reinforces the narratives in the Trump-centric media sphere: either stories that are supportive of Trump or critical of his opponents. The popularity of far-right media sources is notable and presents an unambiguous challenge to democratic public debate. Influential sites like InfoWars, the Gateway Pundit, and Truthfeed, key touchstones in the Trump media sphere, offer up a range of conspiracy theories, thinly veiled racism and xenophobia, and rampant misinformation.

GP

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS DEATH=> Activist and Sanders Supporter Who Served Papers to DNC on Fraud Case Found Dead

Jim Hoft Aug 4th, 2016 10:26 pm — 997 Comments

Gateway Pundit

Trump Says "The Hispanics Love Me", But New Poll Shows They Can't Stand Him

By Keith Brekhus on Wed, Jul 15th, 2015 at 9:19 pm

An article from PoliticusUSA, one of the sites most-shared by Clinton supporters on social media

While Clinton supporters also showed some divergence between the link-based and social-media-based perspectives on media, the differences are significantly less stark. The more liberal elements of the link economy were well integrated with the center-left and center core of the media structures. The focus of social media attention, at least on Twitter, centered on this same set of media sources, with a small number of outliers that gained significantly greater purchase on Twitter than they did in the link economy. The media sources most cited by the supporters of Clinton on Twitter were largely the same as those cited in the open web link economy: the perspective of the media landscape shaped more by journalists and elite actors, which reflects a more authoritative, informed view of media coverage. When sharing content with one another, Clinton supporters tended to cite the same sources found in the media-centric link economy, with a few additions among the most popular sites: PoliticusUSA, Raw Story, and Daily Newsbin.

The Trump media sphere manifests a fundamentally different structure. There is a clear distinction between the conservative viewpoints expressed through the link economy and through social media. The central conduit for attention among Trump supporters in digital media appears to be much more heavily weighted toward social media, and this social media content diverges in several fundamental ways from mainstream media content. This is not only expressed in a focus on alternative media sources, as demonstrated here, but also translated into a different framing of topics and a profoundly different type of reporting in both style and substance, a feature we will describe in the next section.

Given the mutual hostility between mainstream media and the Trump campaign, it is not surprising that Trump followers would seek out friendlier waters. That, in conjunction with the fact that many in the conservative press were strongly opposed to Trump, left Trump supporters with fewer media options that would provide sympathetic coverage, and created opportunities for media entrepreneurs to serve this market. This raises many important questions. What prompted these shifts in the media landscape, and were the changes initiated by media on the right or the left, by the electorate, or by the campaigns and candidates? And what does this realignment of media spheres mean for democracy and governance? We will return to these questions in subsequent sections.

Based on this co-citation data, we calculated candidate-centric partisanship scores for each of the approximately 6,000 media sources that were shared by Twitter users who retweeted either Trump and Clinton. This metric draws upon approximately 30,000 users who retweeted Trump and close to 15,000 who retweeted Clinton. Among these Twitter users, a remarkably low number of users (297) retweeted both Trump and Clinton. Using the normalized proportion of citations coming from these two groups, and expressed on a -1.0 to 1.0 scale, we are able to describe the media sources most favored by one side or the other and the overlap between them. When divided into quintiles, sources in the left and right quintiles are shared at a ratio of 4:1 or greater from one side versus the other. The threshold for the center-right and center-left is a ratio of 3:2. The center quintile has approximately equal number of shares from Trump and Clinton supporters.

This follows the approach of Bakshy et al. 2015,[37] who developed media alignment scores based on the sharing of media sources by Facebook users who had self-reported their political affiliation. The resulting partisanship scores offer a measure of the partisan slant of individual stories and media sources.

---

37 Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic. "Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook." *Science* 348 (2015).

The distribution of media sources across the five quintiles shows an asymmetric pattern (Figure 17). The right quintile is the most populated and accounts for 45 percent of the media sources and has significantly more media sources than the left. In stark contrast, the right-center is smallest with just four percent—and has far fewer sources than the center-left. The profusion of small media sites at both ends of the political spectrum is a significant shift in the media landscape enabled in part by social media and powered by partisanship. There are relatively fewer sites in the center-left, center, and center-right, and manual review reveals that a much higher proportion of sources at the extremes are recent additions. Recent media sources that are centrist are rare. Our data show a much greater number of partisan sites on the right than the left. This finding is corroborated in a study by BuzzFeed that focused on partisan news sites. The authors of the study identified 677 partisan news sites, 490 of which were right-wing and 177 left-wing.[38]
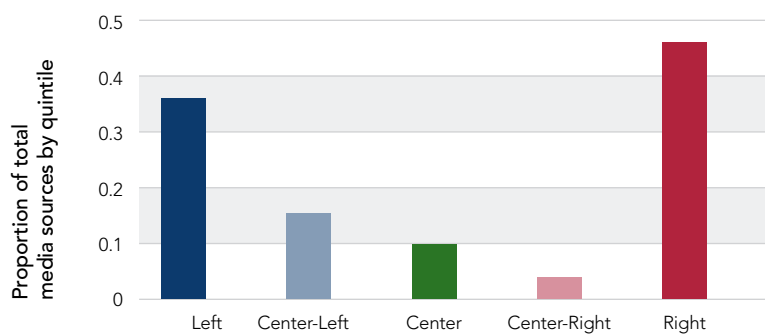
Figure 17: Proportion of the number of media sources by candidate-centric partisanship score (not weighted for attention)

At the root of partisanship in media are outlets that publish stories that offer a decidedly one-sided view of news and current events. One-sidedness may include the selection of topics that are covered and the proportion of coverage devoted these topics, as well as extending into the slant and framing of coverage and the extent to which editorial and reporting decisions lead readers to conclusions, whether implicitly or explicitly. We do not seek to directly measure media slant.[39] Instead, we base our analysis on the decisions of Clinton and Trump supporters to share media stories. This audience-centric perspective of media partisanship uses the behavior of partisan Twitter users to identify which stories and media sources are treated as partisan media without relying on qualitative human judgments. This measure combines supply-side and demand-side elements: the editorial choices and content of media stories combine with the interests expressed by social media users.

---

38 https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/inside-the-partisan-fight-for-your-news-feed?utm_term=.nvbrw5OLA#.ceGk50J2B

39 For studies that measure bias in media, see for example: Groseclose, Tim, and Jeffrey Milyo. "A measure of media bias." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (2005): 1191-1237. Gasper, John T. "Research Note Shifting Ideologies? Re-examining Media Bias." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6 (2011): 85-102.Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M. Shapiro. "What drives media slant? Evidence from U.S. daily newspapers." *Econometrica* 78, no. 1 (2010): 35-71.Ho, Daniel E., and Kevin M. Quinn. "Measuring explicit political positions of media." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 4 (2008): 353-377.

Plotting the partisanship scores for the 75 most popular media sources in the link economy shows that the most frequently cited sources are all in the center-left (Figure 18). The asymmetry extends to the second-tier media sources as well. There are few media sources in the center-right compared with a well-populated center-left, and there are significantly more sites on the left than the right.
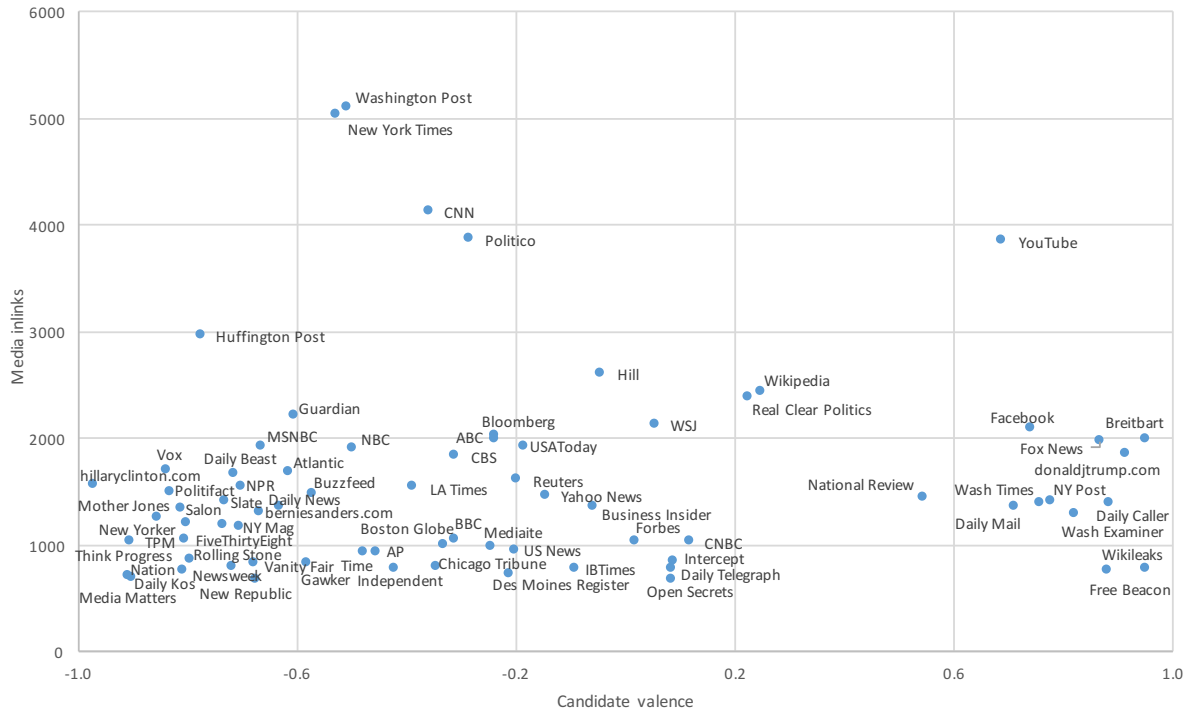
Figure 18: Media inlinks and partisan scores for media sources

A handful of conservative sites are found at the right edge, including Fox News, Breitbart, the Daily Caller, the Washington Examiner, and the Washington Times, along with donaldjtrump.com. In this election cycle, YouTube appears to have been more popular among Trump followers on Twitter, and Wikipedia was center-right, as was Real Clear Politics. The National Review is the sole other occupant of the center-right among this set of media sources. The Wall Street Journal is treated as a centrist media source, receiving almost equal attention from the right and the left.

The left side of the field, by comparison, includes the most highly cited media sources, includes a much larger number of media sources, and fills out the partisan spectrum on the left, ranging from CNN and Time toward the center to the Nation, Salon, and Mother Jones on the far left. In contrast to the right, the center-left and left are populated by sources that fill the partisan spectrum.
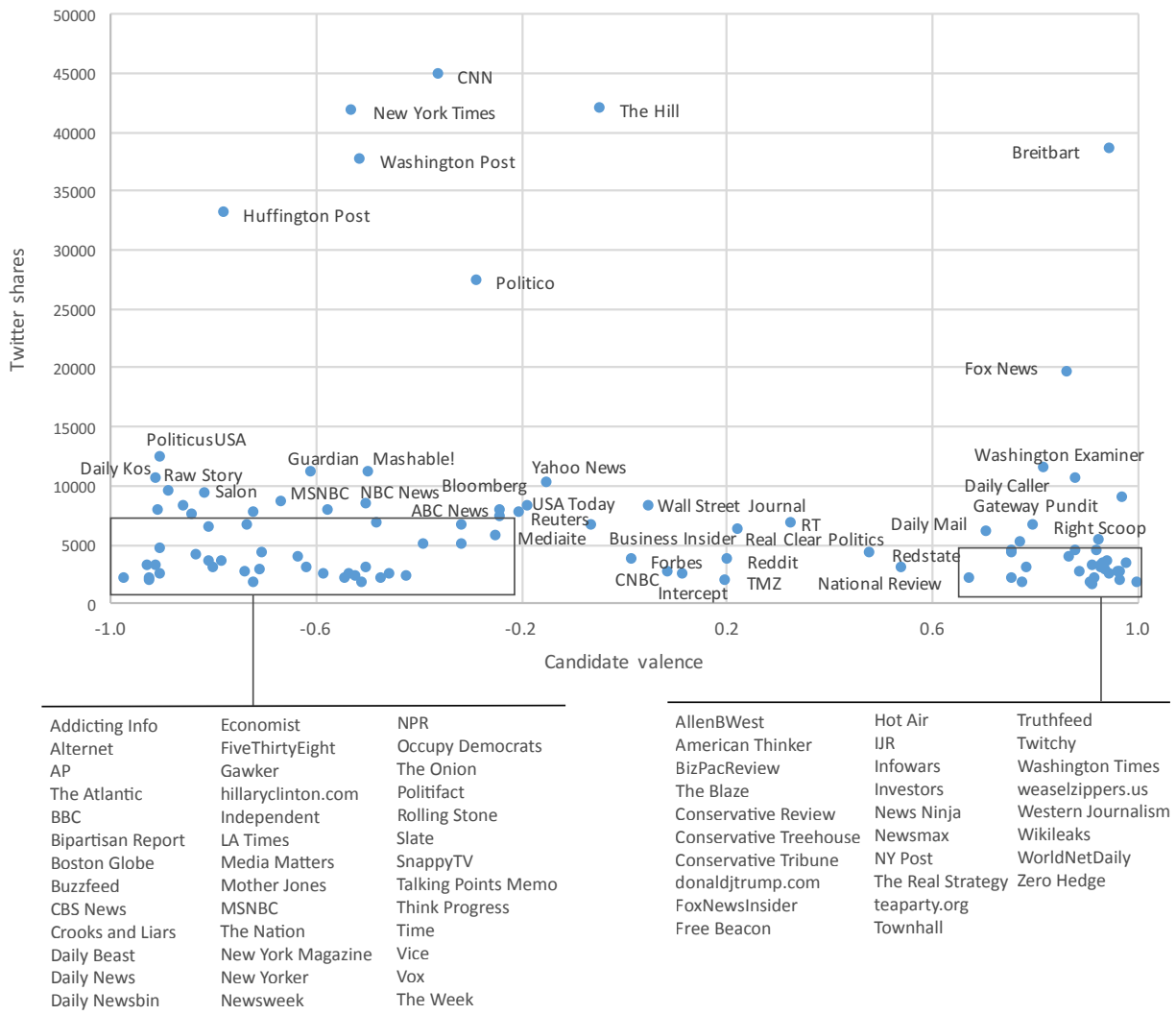
Figure 19: Twitter shares for media sources by candidate valence

The top six sites in the open web link economy are also among the most shared sites on Twitter (Figure 19). On Twitter, however, they are joined by Breitbart as the foremost conservative source, and Fox News. As in other depictions of this data, the distribution from the center to the left is continuous. This continuity is denser among the less shared sites but is also present among the most popular sites, from the Huffington Post to The Hill. There is a paucity of center-right sites, and those that exist are not among the most shared, leaving a large gap between The Hill in the center and Fox News and Breitbart on the right. On the conservative side, the greatest concentration of sites consists of those of moderate popularity in the far right. The shape of the graph suggests two distinct spheres in the media ecosystem.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

48
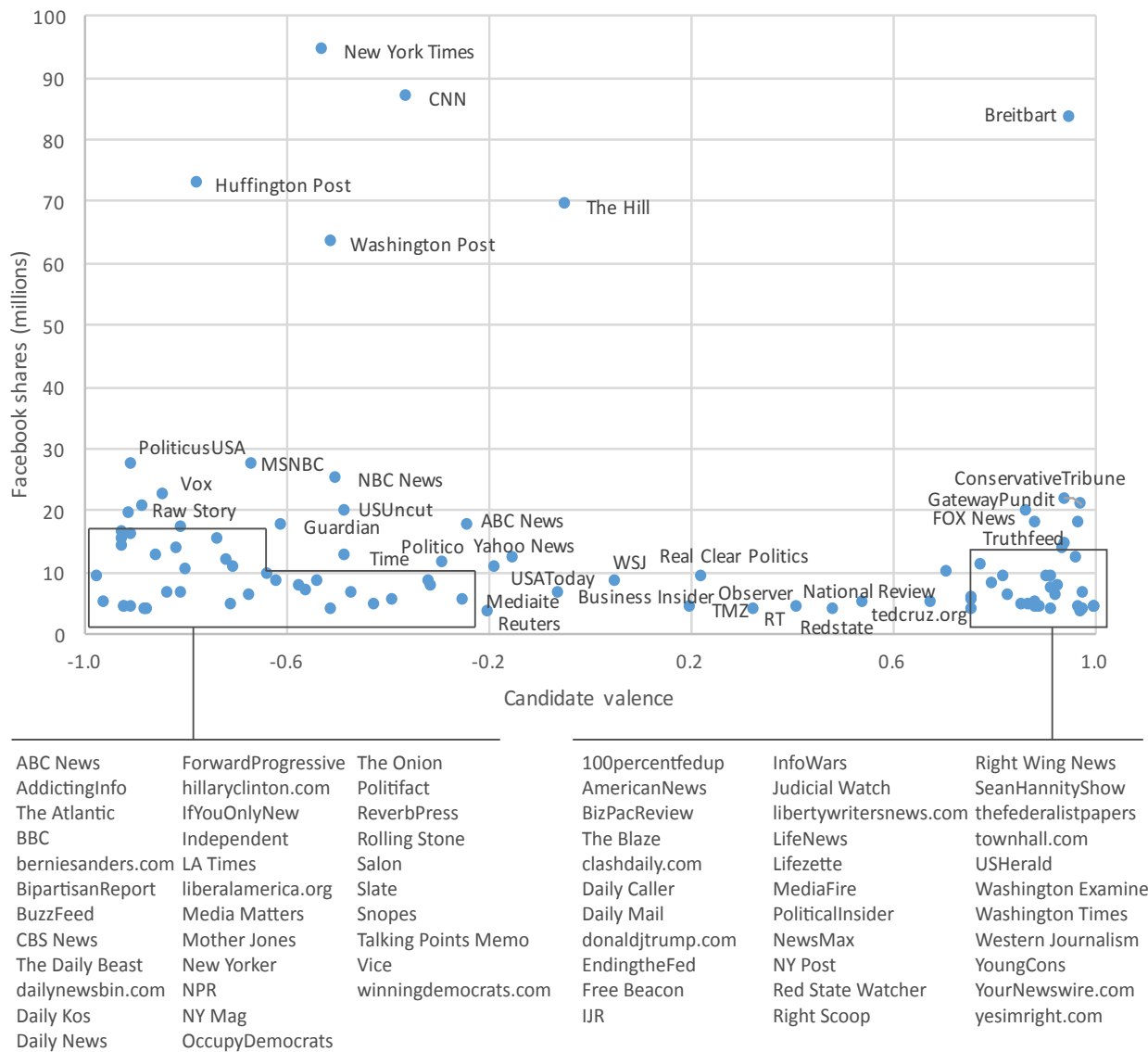
Figure 20: Facebook shares for media sources by candidate valence

ABC News	ForwardProgressive	The Onion	100percentfedup	InfoWars	Right Wing News
AddictingInfo	hillaryclinton.com	Politifact	AmericanNews	Judicial Watch	SeanHannityShow
The Atlantic	IfYouOnlyNew	ReverbPress	BizPacReview	libertywritersnews.com	thefederalistpapers
BBC	Independent	Rolling Stone	The Blaze	LifeNews	townhall.com
berniesanders.com	LA Times	Salon	clashdaily.com	Lifezette	USHerald
BipartisanReport	liberalamerica.org	Slate	Daily Caller	MediaFire	Washington Examiner
BuzzFeed	Media Matters	Snopes	Daily Mail	PoliticalInsider	Washington Times
CBS News	Mother Jones	Talking Points Memo	donaldjtrump.com	NewsMax	Western Journalism
The Daily Beast	New Yorker	Vice	EndingtheFed	NY Post	YoungCons
dailynewsbin.com	NPR	winningdemocrats.com	Free Beacon	Red State Watcher	YourNewswire.com
Daily Kos	NY Mag		IJR	Right Scoop	yesimright.com
Daily News	OccupyDemocrats				

From the Facebook perspective, Fox News and Politico rank with more moderately shared sources, whereas Breitbart and the remaining top five sites in the open web link economy sources continue to be most frequently shared. The large gap in center-right media sources persists between The Hill and Breitbart, whereas the center-left is heavily populated with moderately shared media sources.

As suggested by the scatter plots above, the distribution of media sources across the partisan spectrum varies according to the perspective and associated choice of media sets. Figures 21, 22, and 23 show the top 250 sites by three different measures: media inlinks, Twitter shares, and Facebook shares. When viewed by media inlinks, there is a relatively flat distribution across the center-left with a drop off on the left and center. On the other side of the graph, however, the distribution of sites increases as we move to the right. On the right, the most polarized sources are most heavily represented. This general pattern is consistent across all three measures.
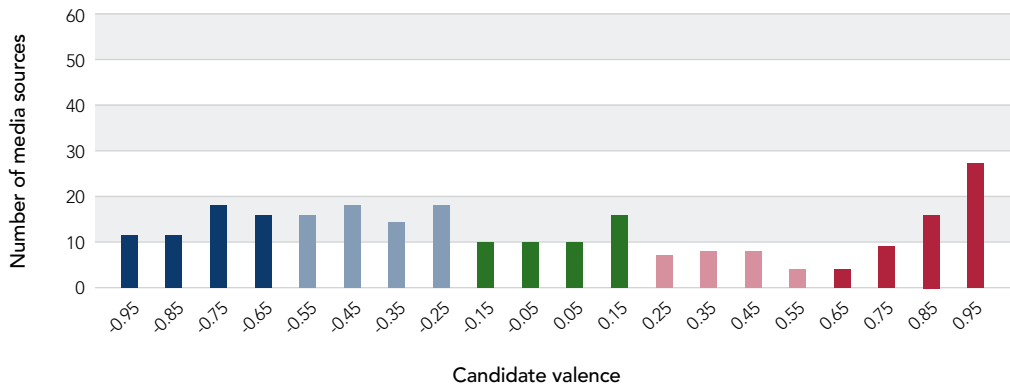
Figure 21: Partisan distribution of top 250 most-linked-to media sources by inlinks
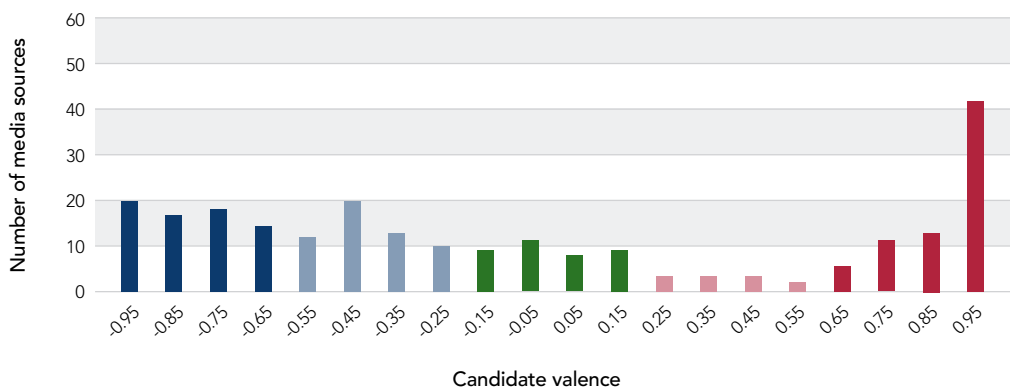
Figure 22: Partisan distribution of top 250 most Twitter-shared media sources
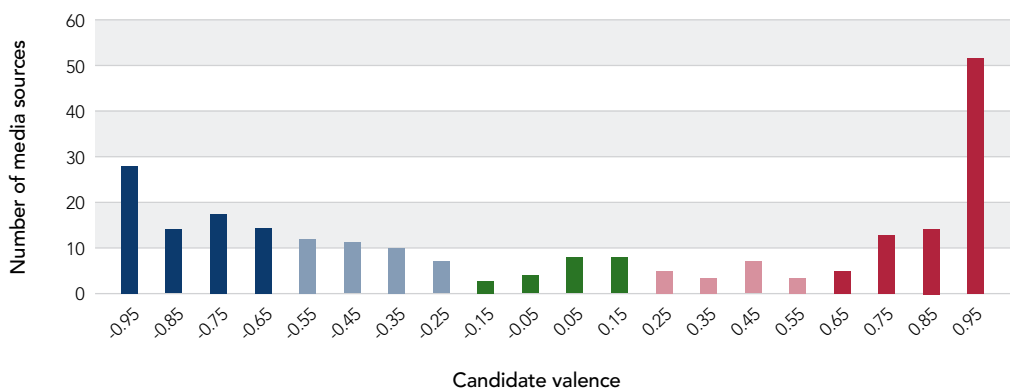
Figure 23: Partisan distribution of top 250 most Facebook-shared media sources

The latter two distributions, which are based on media sources frequently shared on Twitter and Facebook, are weighted more toward the extremes. This pattern is more pronounced on Facebook than on Twitter. On Twitter, the center-right is the least represented, mirroring the scatterplots shown above. On Facebook, both the center and center-right garner relatively little attention. This suggests that social media sharing patterns are more partisan than the linking behavior of media, and sharing patterns on Facebook are more partisan than on Twitter. This is consistent with prior studies that indicate that citizens who are more engaged in politics are also more partisan, as those sharing political content on Twitter and Facebook are likely those who are politically engaged.[40]

40 Converse, Philip E. "The nature of belief systems in mass publics (1964)." Critical review 18, no. 1-3 (2006): 1-74. Zaller, John. The nature and origins of mass opinion. Cambridge university press, 1992. Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. "Is polarization a myth?." The Journal of Politics 70, no. 2 (2008): 542-555.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

50

When measured by overall attention—total inlinks, Twitter shares, and Facebook shares—a similar pattern emerges but with greater attention directed at the center-left and left (Figures 24, 25, 26). On the left side of the spectrum, attention peaks in the center-left and declines toward the far left. On the right, attention grows toward the extreme.

Compared with inlinks, the proportion of attention on Twitter is much higher on the far right. On Facebook, attention to far right sites is further accentuated significantly beyond the pattern on Twitter.
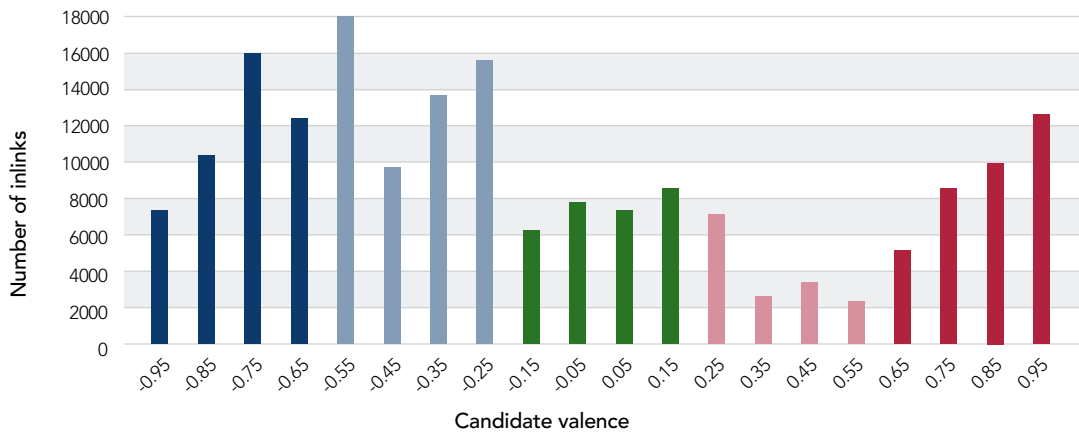
Figure 24: Partisan distribution of top 250 media sites by media inlinks
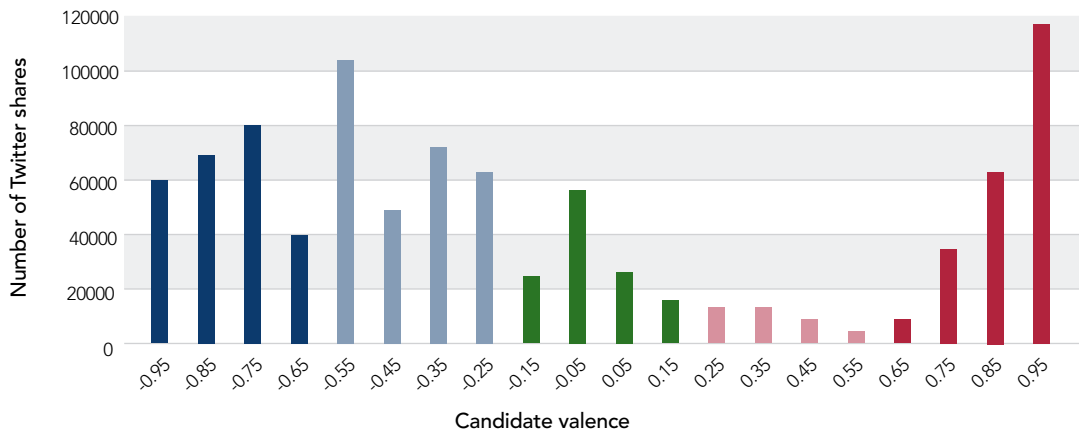
Figure 25: Partisan distribution of top 250 media sites by Twitter shares
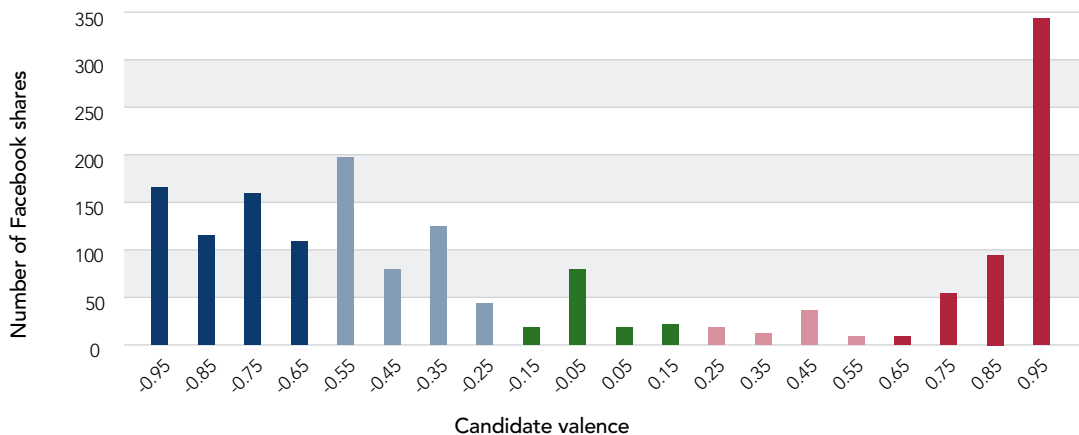
Figure 26: Partisan distribution of top 250 media sites by Facebook shares

Our primary focus has been on the partisan behavior of Trump and Clinton supporters. As a point of comparison, and to test the robustness of our findings, we expand the inquiry here to the partisan proclivities of the supporters of other GOP candidates and the supporters of Bernie Sanders. As a starting point, we compare the media sites most commonly shared by those who retweeted Trump with sites shared by those who retweeted one of the other major Republican candidates (Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, John Kasich, Marco Rubio, or Scott Walker). Breitbart was by far the most popular for both sets of Twitter users (Figure 27). Gateway Pundit, Conservative Treehouse, InfoWars, and donaldjtrump.com were significantly more popular among the Trump set. The alternative GOP set more heavily favored the major media sources from the center-left as well as mainstream conservative sites such as Fox News, the Washington Examiner, and the Daily Caller. The conservative sites Right Scoop, RedState, and the Blaze were also more popular among supporters of other GOP candidates.
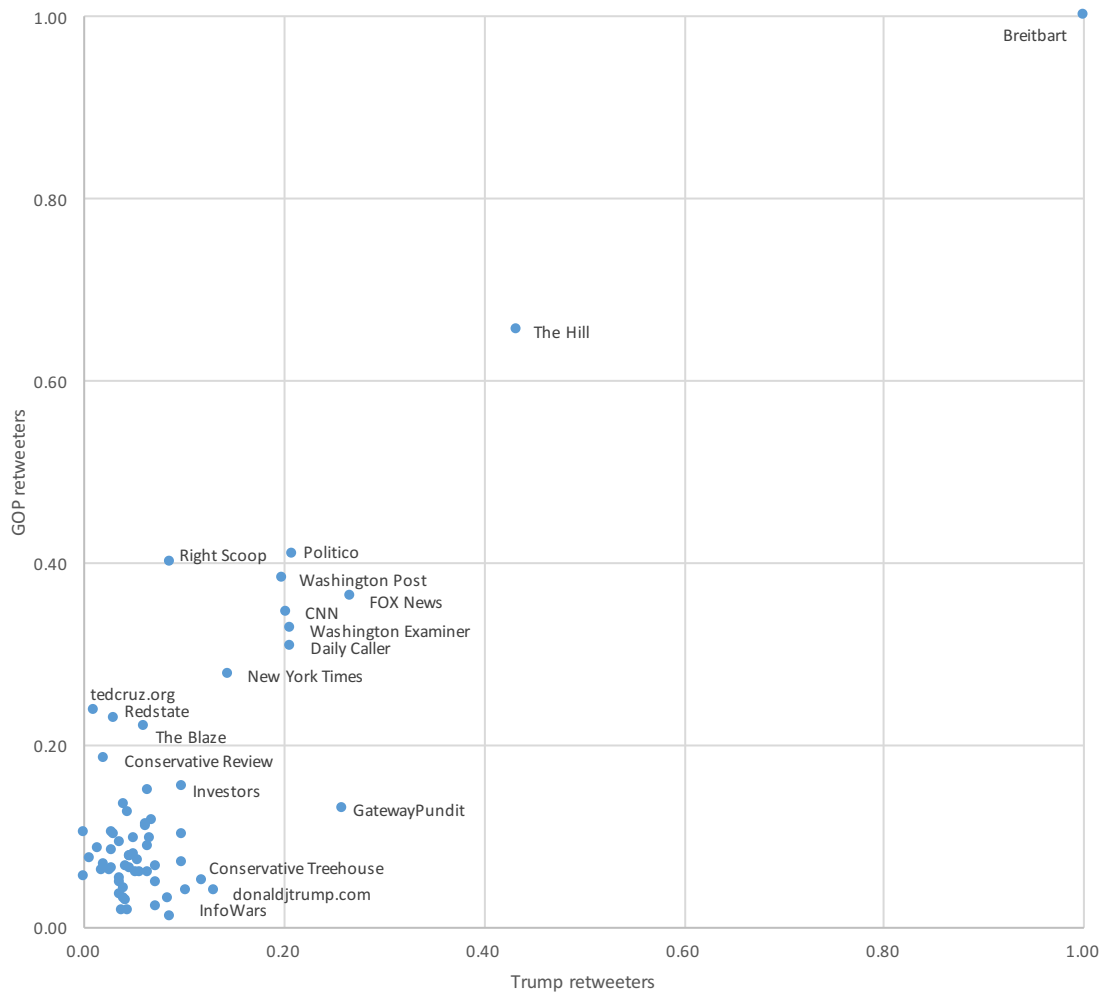
Figure 27: Media source sharing among Trump retweeters and GOP-field retweeters
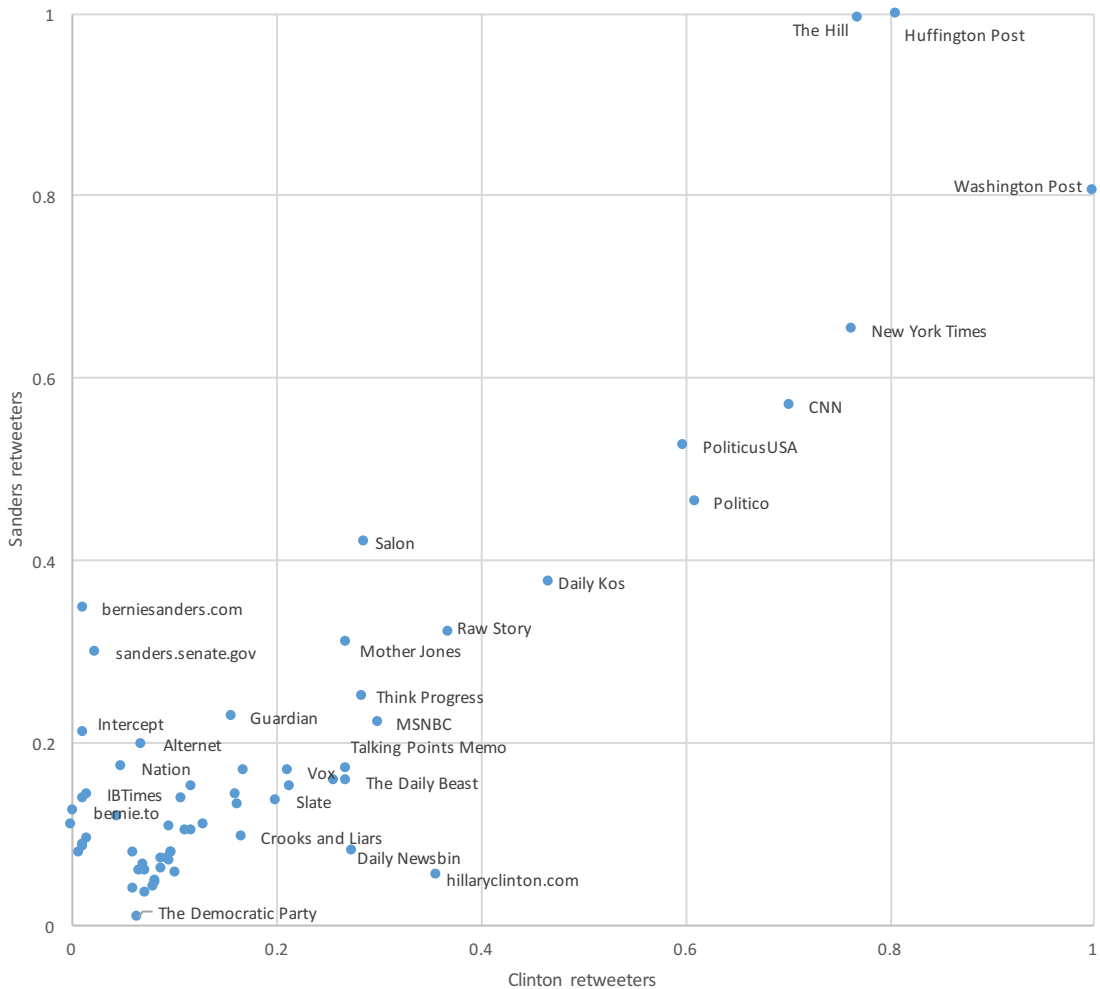
Figure 28: Media source sharing among Clinton retweeters and Sanders retweeters

The comparison of Clinton and Sanders retweeters reveals similarities and differences. The top sites on the left and center-left were popular for both sets of users. The Huffington Post and The Hill were more commonly shared by the Sanders set and the Washington Post, the New York Times, CNN, and Politico are more popular among the Clinton set. Farther down the scale, many of the publications on the left were more popular with the Sanders set, including Salon, Alternet, the Nation, and the Intercept. The Daily Newsbin and Democratic Party site were more favored by the Clinton side. These patterns line up with the political orientation of the two campaigns and the widely recognized view that Clinton was the more mainstream of the two candidates, with Sanders campaign positioned to the left.

The Intercept was more popular with Bernie Sanders supporters

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

53

The partisanship scores described in earlier sections were derived by using the media source sharing patterns of those who retweeted Trump or Clinton. We describe here an alternative version of the partisanship scores based on Clinton retweeters and those who retweeted GOP candidates other than Trump. The two scores are highly correlated (ρ = 0.97), indicating that the overall pattern is not highly sensitive to choosing a different conservative reference point.
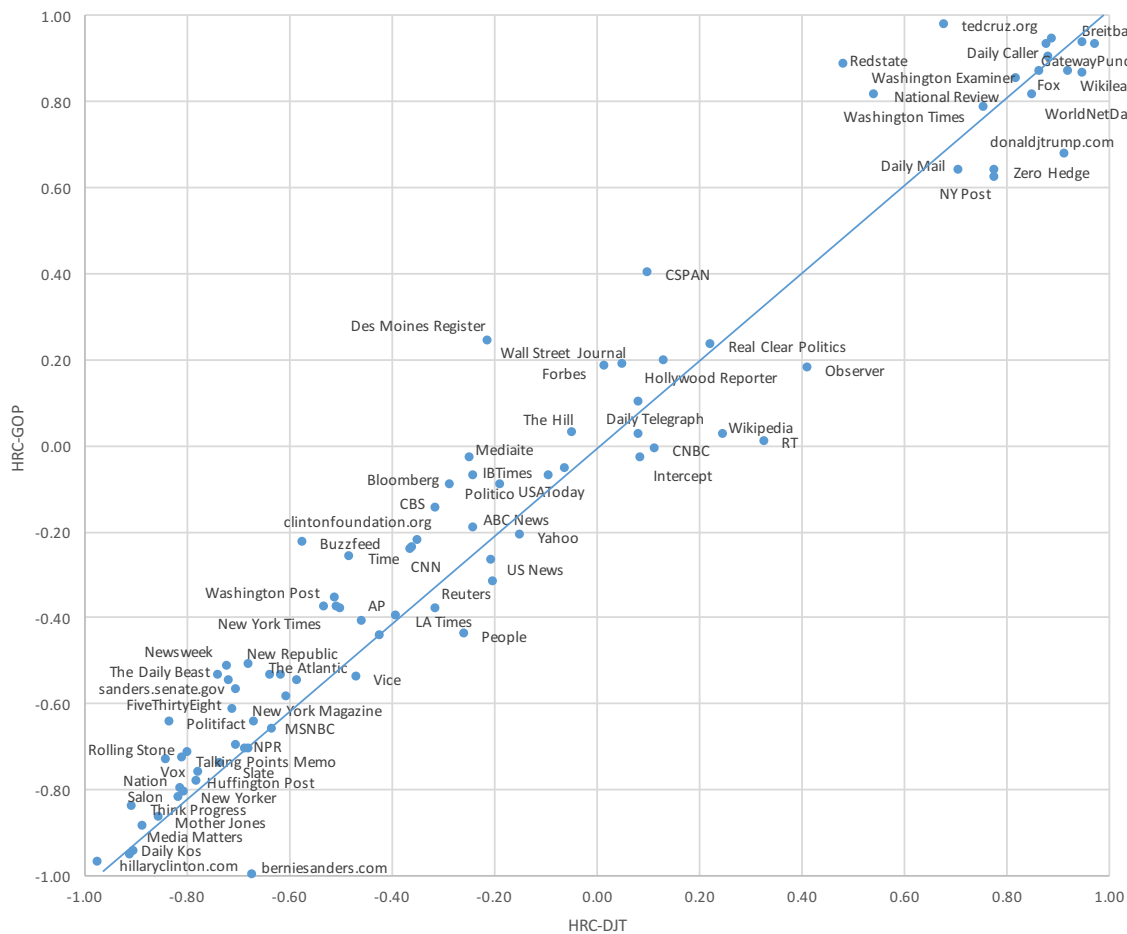
Figure 29: Comparing partisan valence

The media sources that show the highest variation between the two scores reflect their general stance on Trump versus the rest of the GOP field. For example, RedState and the National Review were seen as more conservative from the perspective of the GOP field, because their opposition to Trump made them less popular with Trump supporters than with GOP supporters as a whole. Similarly, the Wall Street Journal is less centrist and closer to the center-right by the measure of the broader GOP. Many of the large center-left media sources, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, and CNN are positioned more to the center in the Clinton-GOP field spectrum. The largest change is in the Des Moines Register, which is described as a center-left position when the right is defined as Trump followers but center-right when measured by broader GOP attention. The Des Moines Register endorsed Marco Rubio in the Republican primaries and Clinton in the general election. Other notable differences include RT, the Observer, and the Intercept, each of which is aligned more closely with Trump than with the rest of the GOP field.

Drawing on the work of Bakshy et al., we are able to compare the 2016 partisanship scores with scores independently derived from Facebook users in 2014. This alternative data set offers a rich point of comparison for several reasons. First, it is based on data collection that occurred two years before the start of the election campaign. Second, it is based not on affiliation with particular candidates but with self-identification on the political spectrum; the data was gathered from Facebook accounts that included explicit mention of conservative or liberal affiliation. The correlation between the two data sets is high (ρ = 0.94).[41] These measures are evidently robust to different social media contexts and measurement approaches. Another useful point of comparison is with the trust in media surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014.[42] The level of trust that respondents from different political orientations place in different media outlets lines up closely with the partisanship scores developed here.[43] This suggests that attitudes among social media users towards media sources, and the manner in which they vary across the political spectrum, are consistent with the attitudes of the wider public.
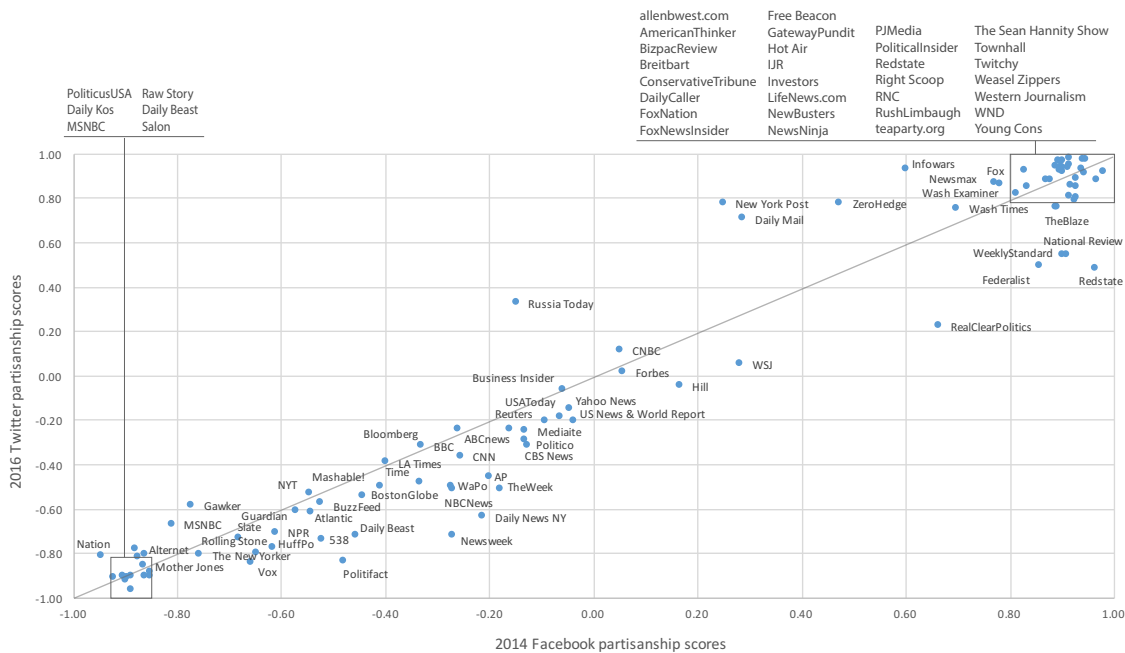
Figure 30: Comparison of Twitter-based 2016 and Facebook-based 2014 partisan scores

In Figure 30, we plot the scores from the 2014 Facebook and 2016 Twitter data for the 100 most cited media sources on Twitter. The hole in the center-right portion of the spectrum is evident, as is the dense cluster of sites in the far right. There is also a cluster in the far left, although this is less dense than the one in the right.

Focusing attention on the media outlets that diverge the most between the two scores is illuminating. The vertical distance of each point from the trend line shows the difference between the 2014 Facebook score and the 2016 Twitter score. Real Clear Politics, for example, appears as more centrist than it was two years earlier, which might be explained by the frequency of linking from both sides to the polling data published

---

41 This is based on the 282 observations found in both data sets.

42 http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits-pj_14-10-21_mediapolarization-01/

43 One outlier is BuzzFeed, which in 2014 had similar levels of distrust across the spectrum. BuzzFeed is currently viewed as a left-leaning media outlet.

there. The editorial stance of Real Clear Politics, apart from its polling aggregate work, is generally considered to lean toward the right, which might explain its more conservative position in an off-election year.

Several other sites popular with conservatives in 2014 appear less aligned with Trump's brand of conservatism. This set includes the Wall Street Journal, The Federalist, the Weekly Standard, the National Review, and Redstate. These media sources were, in fact, among the leaders of the "Never Trump" movement on the conservative side. This stance would attract a combination of more attention from the left and fewer citations from Trump loyalists and explain the a leftward shift on the partisanship scale from two years earlier. RT, formerly Russia Today, has a more pro-Trump stance than its more centrist position in 2014, in line with the notably pro-Trump position taken by the Russian government publication. Among the other sources that are pulled closer to the Republican candidate from their prior position are the New York Post, the Daily Mail, InfoWars, and Zero Hedge. InfoWars in particular took a strong pro-Trump stance during the election campaign. The New York Post endorsed Trump in the GOP primaries while stridently opposing Clinton and giving her negative coverage. These observed shifts on the right between the Bakshy et. al. 2014 and our 2016 measurements align well with the shifts between our present data and our October 2012 data, as we described earlier.

"Donald Trump Is Crazy, and So Is the GOP for Embracing Him" published by the Weekly Standard on July 22, 2016

RT has a more pro-Trump stance compared to its more centrist position in 2014

On the liberal side of the spectrum, a majority of the sites are drawn away from the center, appearing as more partisan than they had appeared in 2014. When compared with the conservative-liberal valence in a non-election year, the Trump-Clinton spectrum during the election is distinctly more partisan. Some of the sites that are further left by our measure include sites strictly committed to nonpartisan fact checking, like PolitiFact, and moderately conservative sites in the Facebook set that were not supportive of Trump, like The Hill or the Wall Street Journal, and whose leftward shift in attention likely reflects simply the abandonment by some of the more right-leaning audience in favor of more explicitly partisan sites. This is entirely consistent with the growing sense of division in the U.S. that was featured so commonly in qualitative reports of the election and survey results that suggest a gradual ratcheting up of partisanship.

Despite this overall trend, we see several sites whose audiences pulled away from the Clinton campaign, relative to their 2014 position on the spectrum. This movement parallels the movement toward the center of "Never Trump" conservative media outlets. On the liberal side, this set includes the Nation, Salon, and Alternet. These outlets are each among the most liberal of media sources and strongly supported Bernie Sanders, in part by publishing coverage critical of Clinton. The sites that moved

"The Clinton dynasty's horrific legacy: How 'tough-on-crime' politics built the world's largest prison system" published by Salon on April 13, 2015

the farthest from the middle toward Clinton are Newsweek and PolitiFact. Newsweek was unsparing in its criticism of Trump during the campaign. PolitiFact would have offered an uncomfortable perspective for Trump supporters who did not want to be reminded how often Trump strayed from the truth.

The movement in the partisanship scores from 2014 to 2016 is well explained by the attitude of media outlets toward Trump and Clinton and as such offers a view of the changes in the political landscape from a traditional conservative-liberal orientation to the newer Trump-Clinton polarity. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this shift is how little changed once Donald Trump—an outsider with heterodox views and campaign—became the new conservative standard-bearer. Rather than prompting a large-scale realignment of the orientation of conservative media, the majority of media outlets appear to have fallen into line with the new political reality. The changes that occurred are less in the partisan orientation and more in the outlook and framing necessary to keep the partisan ordering in place. In contrast, those outlets that elected to hold their ground and defend long-standing conservative philosophy and principles—like the Weekly Standard—saw their position in the partisan ordering change the most. This interpretation is consistent with the earlier comparison of 2012 and 2016 link-based networks. The arguably most significant shift in those two networks was in the placement and prominence of two conservative media sites generally opposed to Trump's candidacy: the Weekly Standard and National Review.

The position of a media source on the partisan spectrum is linked to several elements. When a media source is pulled closer to Trump (e.g., InfoWars), this could occur because more Trump supporters are sharing that site and/or because Clinton supporters are sharing it less, and the shift may be precipitated by changes in editorial and content policy. The evidence, which we describe in the next section, supports the notion that such movement is driven primarily by the amount of coverage that serves partisan audiences on the other side of the aisle.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

57

As we have shown using perspectives of the media landscape based on cross-media links and the sharing of media outlets on Twitter and Facebook, the prominence of different media sources and the worldviews and perspectives they promote vary considerably across different platforms. Here we explore in further detail the niches that media outlets occupy and how they vary by platform.

We start by comparing the most popular media sources on Twitter and Facebook that fall into the five partisan segments of the media landscape. At the center of spectrum, the differences between Twitter and Facebook results are small (Table 12). The top sites in the center are predominantly large media organizations. The roster of top sites from the center is almost identical on Twitter and Facebook: nine of 10 sites are found on both top media lists. The Intercept, which is ninth by Facebook shares is 11th by Twitter shares. Bloomberg, ranked fifth by Twitter shares, is 12th on Facebook.

Center			
Twitter shares		**Facebook shares**	
The Hill	41919	The Hill	69242
Yahoo! News	10219	ABC News	17490
Wall Street Journal	8244	Yahoo! News	12221
USA Today	8204	USA Today	10815
Bloomberg	7825	Wall Street Journal	8473
Reuters	7641	Business Insider	6301
ABC News	7283	Mediaite	5513
Business Insider	6553	Reuters	3541
Mediaite	5670	The Intercept	3428
Forbes	3601	Forbes	3158

Table 12: Media sources from the center most frequently shared on Twitter and Facebook

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

58

The most popular on the center-left are also large media organizations and include many of the outlets that are most popular overall on social media, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN, and Politico (Table 13). A handful of more recent entrants to the media world are also among the most shared on both Twitter and Facebook. There are modest differences in the Twitter and Facebook top media lists for the center-left. Mashable and Buzzfeed are included in Twitter, and US Uncut is in the Facebook list. Mashable and Buzzfeed are also in the top 20 on Facebook. US Uncut is ranked fifth on the Facebook list but 25th on the Twitter list.

Center-Left			
Twitter shares		**Facebook shares**	
CNN	44776	New York Times	94502
New York Times	41781	CNN	86916
Washington Post	37567	Washington Post	63340
Politico	27358	NBC News	25210
Guardian	11151	US Uncut	19711
Mashable	11106	Guardian	17567
NBC News	8316	Time	12479
Buzzfeed	7766	Politico	11509
Time	6672	Daily News	9551
BBC	6533	The Atlantic	8482

Table 13: Media sources from the center-left most frequently shared on Twitter and Facebook

The center-right lists also show consistency, with eight of the 10 most popular sites on social media appearing on both lists (Table 14). The center-right is notably less prominent than the other four quintiles whether measured by cross-media links or social media shares. The center-right includes many of the never-Trump voices from the conservative side. The disdain for Trump generally did not translate into support for Clinton in the coverage of the media sources on the center-right.

Center-Right			
Twitter shares		**Facebook shares**	
Russia Today	6792	Real Clear Politics	9116
Real Clear Politics	6129	National Review	4959
Redstate	4212	Observer	4339
National Review	2895	TMZ	4045
TMZ	1857	Russia Today	3776
Weekly Standard	1565	Red State	3666
Observer	1529	Federalist	2218
Federalist	1407	Free Thought Project	1498
The Resurgent	1011	Patheos	1486
Reason	886	The Resurgent	1481

Table 14: Media sources from the center-right most frequently shared on Twitter and Facebook

The differences between Twitter and Facebook are much more pronounced in the media segments on the extremes of left and right. On the left, both lists include several of the mainstay liberal sites (Huffington Post, MSNBC, and Daily Kos) in addition to newer entities such as PoliticusUSA and Raw Story (Table 15). Three sites with a high rank based on Facebook shares are ranked far lower on Twitter: Occupy Democrats, Addicting Info, and Bipartisan Report.

There is a similar pattern on the right (Table 16), which includes the most influential sites among Trump supporters such as Fox News, Breitbart, the Daily Caller, and the New York Post. They are accompanied by conspiracy sites; the Gateway Pundit is on both lists, and InfoWars is on the Twitter list. Among the most popular media sources from the right on Facebook are the Conservative Tribune, Truthfeed, Western Journalism, Political Insider, and Ending the Fed. Political Insider and Ending the Fed were two of the definitive examples cited in the Buzzfeed story that ignited the debate over fake news just after the election.[44]

Left				
Twitter shares			**Facebook shares**	
Huffington Post	33009		Huffington Post	72872
Politicus USA	12396		Politicus USA	27477
Daily Kos	10511		MSNBC	27307
Raw Story	9402		Vox	22413
Salon	9266		Raw Story	20669
MSNBC	8578		Daily Kos	19275
Mother Jones	8094		New Yorker	17009
Think Progress	7749		Occupy Democrats	16384
The Daily Beast	7698		Addicting Info	15877
Vox	7497		Bipartisan Report	15625

Table 15: Media sources from the left most frequently shared on Twitter and Facebook

Right				
Twitter shares			**Facebook shares**	
Breitbart	38467		Breitbart	83529
Fox News	19532		Conservative Tribune	21750
Washington Examiner	11462		Gateway Pundit	20980
Daily Caller	10498		Fox News	19862
Gateway Pundit	8930		Daily Caller	17775
Right Scoop	6572		Truthfeed	17709
Daily Mail	5984		Western Journalism	14340
InfoWars	5342		Political Insider	13548
NY Post	5072		EndingtheFed	12234
Washington Times	4366		NY Post	11037

Table 16: Media sources from the right most frequently shared on Twitter and Facebook

44 https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook?utm_term=.kgb3ObXJ5#.ffkk9qKGQ

The same patterns are shown from a different perspective in Figures 31 and 32. On social media, Breitbart is one of the six most prominent media outlets on both Twitter and Facebook. Fox News and Politico are second-tier outlets on social media roughly on par with PoliticusUSA, a distinctly partisan site on the Democratic side.
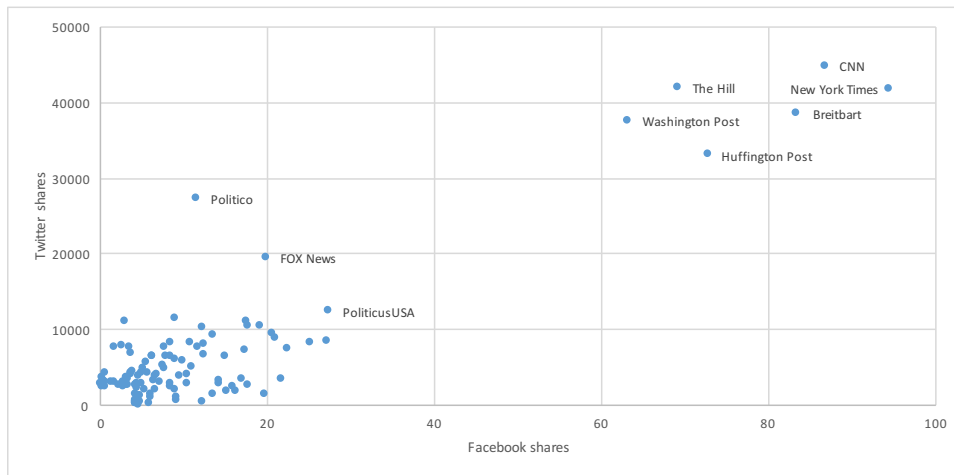
Figure 31: Media sources by Twitter shares and Facebook shares

100percentfedup.com	Forbes	Observer
Alternet	Hot Air	Reddit
American Thinker	ifyouonlynews.com	reverbpress.com
americannews.com	IJR	Right Wing News
AP	Independent	tedcruz.org
berniesanders.com	Intercept	Townhall
BizPacReview	Judicial Watch	Twitchy
CNBC	libertywritersnews.com	Vice
Conservative Treehouse	National Review	Wikileaks
Crooks and Liars	NewsMax	winningdemocracy.com
donaldjtrump.com	newsninja2012.com	yesimright.com
FiveThirtyEight	NY Mag	

Figure 32: Media sources by Twitter shares and Facebook shares (top-tier sites removed)

Another cluster of sites in the second tier includes media outlets from both the right and left that are popular on both Twitter and Facebook. This group includes the Daily Caller, Daily Kos, Guardian, Raw Story, and Gateway Pundit. For these sites, prominence on one platform tends to translate to prominence on the other.

There are also a significant number of sites for which popularity on one platform does not extend to popularity on the other, signaling big differences in the way these platforms intermediate the patterns of sharing between user communities and media outlets. Among the sites that are popular on Twitter but have considerably less traction on Facebook are Mashable, Bloomberg, Reuters, and RT. There are many possible explanations for this difference involving platform architecture, algorithms, and participants. It could reflect differences in the social media promotion efforts of the media outlets themselves. The contribution of bots on Twitter is a possible factor.[45]

‹ Back   CT CONSERVATIVE TRIBUNE   ≡

POLITICS

RED ALERT: Hillary's Plan to Steal the 2016 Election Just Got Exposed

BY **MARTIN LIOLL**

A story from Conservative Tribune, one of the most popular right sites on Facebook.

A majority of media sources that are popular on Facebook with lower prominence on Twitter fall into a recognizable media genre characterized by a similar tone, format, and substance. This applies to media sites from opposite sides of the political spectrum. The group that is very popular on Facebook but has less traction on Twitter includes media from the left (Addicting Info, Bipartisan Report, Daily Newsbin, Occupy Democrats, and US Uncut) and from the right (Conservative Tribune, Political Insider, Truthfeed, and Western Journalism). These are only the most popular of such sites; there are many others that are less prominent.

These sites all offer short articles based primarily on content repackaged from other media sources with sensationalist headlines, all designed to promote sharing and viewing on social media, earning them the labels "clickbait" and "vulture sites."[46] They engage in little or no original reporting and freely borrow from other sources, producing short posts or articles with catchy titles intended to drive social media traffic. The most Facebook-centric clickbait sites are not only highly partisan but also feature the most questionable reporting. These sites are frequently cited in discussions of fake news and have been covered by fact-checking sites.[47] The clickbait sites on the left and right have strong similarities. Sites on both sides have been called out for inaccuracies and false stories. Their popularity suggests that their readers do not penalize them for publishing untruths.

Within this group of sites popular on social media that outperform on Facebook relative to Twitter is one outlier: the New Yorker. A large portion of the highly shared New Yorker stories on Facebook are from the Borowitz Report, a satirical take on current events and news. The most popular story was titled "Stephen Hawking Angers Trump Supporters with Baffling Array of Long Words."

BREAKING: Stunning Audio Leaked PROVING Trump's Campaign Was A Pre-Planned Con Job (DETAILS)

Sampson Brotman ▪ October 24, 2016

This is a quote from Donald Trump:

"'I'm going to walk away with it and win it outright,' a long-time New York political consultant recalled. "Trump told us, 'I'm going to get in and all the polls are going to go crazy.

A story from Bipartisan Report, one of the most popular left sites on Facebook

Exploring the similarities and differences in the composition of media sources that are most popular on Twitter and Facebook is deserving of

further research. On Twitter, fewer conspiracy and clickbait sites are among the most popular on the right and the left. The differences are most pronounced on the extremes of the political spectrum. Partisan Facebook users appear to be more susceptible to passing on dubious news and reporting.

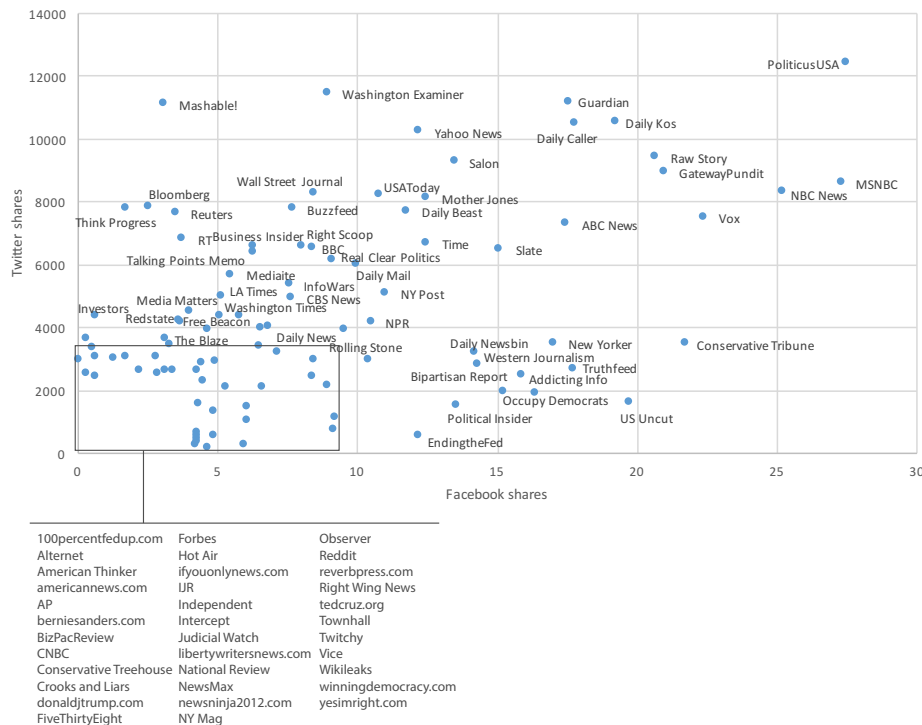45 http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2016/11/Data-Memo-US-Election.pdf; http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-USA.pdf

46 Analysts and reporters at BuzzFeed provide an in-depth look at the growing number of partisan news sites on the web and Facebook: https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/inside-the-partisan-fight-for-your-news-feed?utm_term=.ufpXO9rOo Also see: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/magazine/inside-facebooks-totally-insane-unintentionally-gigantic-hyperpartisan-political-media-machine.html

47 See, for example, an analysis carried out by Buzzfeed that concluded that a substantial proportion of posts on six hyperpartisan media sources contained either false or misleading information. https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/partisan-fb-pages-analysis?utm_term=.ac4KR9LM7#.ab1gnL82e

Salience, Credibility, & Authority

One point of symmetry in the media landscape is the level of distrust. This builds upon a narrative several decades in the making that mainstream media is biased and not to be trusted. The conversation around fake news that came to the fore in 2016 has exacerbated this mutual distrust. Partisans on the right have eagerly embraced the fake news trope and lumped the New York Times and the Washington Post into the same realm as the overtly partisan and sometimes dubious reporting of Occupy Democrats, Bipartisan Report, and Addicting Info. When partisans from the left call out the conspiracies and unsubstantiated claims coming from the Gateway Pundit and InfoWars, their counterparts on the right appear to hold the same levels of distrust when looking left. The painstaking and resource-intensive work of fact checking sites are quickly dismissed when branded as just another source of disinformation.

Inlinks from other media offers a useful perspective on credibility and salience. Citations from other media sources is a generally well accepted measure of authority and relevance. In contrast to shares on social media, citations from media sources reflect the decisions of journalists and media producers to highlight the reporting and analysis of media outlets. Interpreting inlinks is complicated, however, by the fact that a link can mean many things. A link could signal endorsement or disagreement and may combine elements of trust, novelty, or newsworthiness, among many other factors.[48] A low number of links to a media source by itself is not a useful measure of credibility; it could simply reflect obscurity. Yet combining several metrics offers a stronger signal. Some media sources are highly popular on social media with relatively few links from other media organizations. For this class of sites, obscurity is a less compelling explanation for the paucity of cross-media links.

Focusing again on the media sources that are most frequently shared in the five segments on the media landscape, we see that there is wide variation in the number of links between these media sources. For the large majority of media sources in the center-left, center, and center-right that are popular on Twitter and Facebook (Tables 12, 13, and 14 above), prominence on social media is matched by a high number of inlinks from other media sources.

In the center-left, nine of the top 10 sites on Twitter are also prominent in the link economy. The one exception is Mashable, which is very popular on Twitter while gaining relatively few citations in the link economy (499). The pattern is similar for the top center-left sources on Facebook: nine of the top 10 also rank highly by inlinks. The exception is US Uncut; it is ranked fifth on the center-left Facebook list but receives only 271 inlinks. One third of these links come from the Huffington Post alone. For the center-left, the authority and salience of the most influential media sources holds among their peers in media and among politically engaged social media users.

The differences between the open web link economy and social media are much greater on the partisan extremes. Among the 10 media sources from the left most cited on Twitter and Facebook, Tables 17 and 18 show the links between these outlets.

---

48 For a critical review of the use of hyperlinks in scholarly work, see Deen Freelon (2014) On the Interpretation of Digital Trace Data in Communication and Social Computing Research, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 58:1, 59-75. Also available at: http://dfreelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/dfreelon_tracedata_preprint_JOBEM.pdf

Left on Facebook									
	HuffPo	Politicus USA	MSNBC	Vox	Raw Story	Daily Kos	New Yorker	Occupy Democrats	Addicting Info	Bipartisan Report
HuffPo		59	934	783	138	203	346	12	4	5
Politicus USA	55		21	24	16	8	6	0	3	0
MSNBC	459	6		238	6	26	32	0	0	0
Vox	571	14	229		13	13	185	0	1	0
Raw Story	93	3	112	33		7	21	1	7	0
Daily Kos	528	49	159	133	69		31	2	6	1
New Yorker	82	3	48	42	2	2		0	1	1
Occupy Democrats	55	3	11	10	16	10	4		8	2
Addicting Info	98	10	66	7	135	9	9	3		3
Bipartisan Report	69	18	27	8	44	15	10	11	13	

Table 17: Cross-media links among left media sites most popular on Facebook

Left on Twitter									
	HuffPo	Politicus USA	Daily Kos	Raw Story	Salon	MSNBC	Mother Jones	Think Progress	The Daily Beast	Vox
HuffPo		59	203	138	642	934	476	461	531	783
Politicus USA	55		8	16	23	21	17	39	23	24
Daily Kos	528	49		69	106	159	120	139	93	133
Raw Story	93	3	7		44	112	57	44	105	33
Salon	673	26	34	76		455	246	238	209	345
MSNBC	459	6	26	6	84		131	85	108	238
Mother Jones	146	4	5	6	13	64		45	67	76
Think Progress	306	4	7	10	69	175	75		93	98
The Daily Beast	266	12	10	27	56	171	104	61		71
Vox	571	14	13	13	59	229	151	132	136	

Table 18: Cross-media links among left media sites most popular on Twitter

Several of the sources in the left that are popular in social media occupy a stronger presence in the media landscape with inlinks from this sample numbering in the thousands. The Huffington Post, MSNBC, and Vox are among the 10 most popular sites on the left on both Twitter and Facebook while also earning the attention of their peers. Salon, Mother Jones, Think Progress, and the Daily Beast are in the top 10 on Twitter. Each of these sites receives a strong degree of citations by its peers.

POLITICS

BUSTED: Former Trump Models Admit They Worked As Illegals, "Like Modern-Day Slavery"

BY MARISA MANFREDO

PUBLISHED ON AUGUST 30, 2016

Occupy Democrats

Among the 10 most popular sites on Facebook on the left are three media sources that are nearly invisible in the link economy: Addicting Info, Bipartisan Report, and Occupy Democrats. These sites received 53, 37, and 25 inlinks respectively out of the 235,000 inlinks of this sample. More than a third of these links came from within these three sources. Even among their peers on the left, they receive scant attention.

PoliticusUSA is another popular site on both Facebook and Twitter with a very small footprint in the link economy. Raw Story has a moderately higher presence with 544 in the Twitter-based sample and 653 in the Facebook-based selection of media, somewhat higher than the Daily Kos (474 and 477 respectively).

The pattern on the right is similar though even more pronounced. Breitbart, Fox News, The Daily Caller, and the New York Post are among the most popular 10 sites on the right on both Twitter and Facebook. These four media sources also hold a prominent position in the link economy. The Washington Examiner, Washington Times, and Daily Mail are in the top 10 among sites on the right on Twitter and 16th, 21st, and 11th on Facebook respectively.

Right on Facebook									
	Breitbart	Conservative Tribune	Gateway Pundit	Fox News	Truthfeed	Daily Caller	Western Journalism	Political Insider	Ending the Fed	NY Post
Breitbart		2	63	266	1	205	6	2	0	204
Conservative Tribune	417		191	71	1	249	66	3	0	41
Gateway Pundit	207	0		81	40	96	4	7	1	30
Fox News	25	0	4		0	57	0	0	0	130
Truthfeed	73	7	26	21		38	1	3	0	19
Daily Caller	146	2	10	190	0		4	3	0	136
Western Journalism	242	4	75	176	0	141		7	0	55
Political Insider	36	1	10	25	0	37	2		0	13
Ending the Fed	29	22	7	9	0	9	6	4		3
NY Post	8	1	0	128	0	13	0	0	0	

Table 19: Cross-media links among right media sites most popular on Facebook

Right on Twitter									
	Breitbart	Fox News	Washington Examiner	Daily Caller	Gateway Pundit	Right Scoop	Daily Mail	Washington Times	InfoWars	NY Post
Breitbart		266	225	205	63	38	175	124	4	204
Fox News	25		252	57	4	3	16	28	0	130
Washington Examiner	33	50		30	1	2	10	15	1	15
Daily Caller	146	190	143		10	8	78	77	8	136
Gateway Pundit	207	81	62	96		6	59	40	32	30
Right Scoop	14	41	29	12	1		16	13	0	11
Daily Mail	77	203	43	73	9	1		27	12	274
Washington Times	18	21	5	11	1	0	6		1	3
InfoWars	111	36	20	61	32	1	32	22		28
NY Post	8	128	14	13	0	0	23	8	2	

Table 20: Cross-media links among right media sites most popular on Twitter

On Facebook, there are five sites among the top 10 on the right that have a vanishingly small footprint in the link economy. The Conservative Tribune receives just 45 inlinks from this sample, half of which come from Ending the Fed. The inlinks to Western Journalism number 130, half of which come from the Conservative Tribune. The Political Insider is the recipient of 66 links. Truthfeed receives 46 inlinks, 40 of which come from the Gateway Pundit, and Ending the Fed has four inlinks.

The Gateway Pundit ranks third on Facebook and fifth on Twitter but is cited infrequently with only several hundred inlinks. InfoWars is ranked ninth on Twitter and 18th on Facebook. InfoWars receives a very small number of

Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS... Then Drops Another BOMBSHELL! Breaking News

Kosar
Featured Contributor

Political Insider

citations in the link economy, garnering just under 250 links in the Twitter-based sample. Another media source popular on social media but with very low traction in the link economy is the Right Scoop. It ranked seventh on Twitter and 17th on Facebook, and it has 221 links from the Twitter-based sample.

Addicting Info
Bipartisan Report
Conservative Tribune
Daily Newsbin
Ending the Fed
Occupy Democrats
Political Insider
Red State Watcher
The Onion
Truthfeed
US Uncut
Western Journalism
Young Cons

Table 21: 13 media sources that receive a disproportionate amount of attention from Facebook compared with Twitter and media inlinks

By combining relative attention on Twitter, Facebook and within the link economy, we are able to place media sources in groups that are highly suggestive of their position in the larger media sphere. A distinct set of web sites receive a disproportionate amount of attention from Facebook compared with Twitter and media inlinks. From the set of media sources that are in the top 100 by inlinks or social media shares,[49] there are 13 sites that fall into this category. Many of these sites are identified by independent sources and media reporting as examples of inaccurate if not blatantly false reporting. Both in form and substance, the majority of this group of sites are aptly described as political clickbait. Again, this does not imply equivalence across these sites. The satirical site The Onion is an outlier in this group, in that it is explicitly satirical and ironic, rather than, as is the case with the others, engaging in highly partisan and dubious reporting without explicit irony.

Another seven media sources, all from the partisan right or partisan left, receive substantially more attention on social media compared to links from other media outlets.

BizPacReview
Breitbart
Daily Kos
Gateway Pundit
PoliticusUSA
Raw Story
Right Scoop

Table 22: Seven media sources that receive substantially more attention on social media compared to media inlinks from other outlets

Combining cross-media linking patterns within and across media segments with social media metrics offers an intriguing source of quantitative data that may help us to understand credibility and salience within the media sphere, and to differentiate the various niches occupied by media sources. An attractive feature of these metrics is that they are not reliant upon and entangled in easily dismissed qualitative evaluations. These metrics are not by themselves dispositive. A media source that fits this profile does not necessarily engage in misleading or false reporting. In the group of seven sites mentioned above, some provide solid reporting for partisan audiences. Others engage in highly partisan reporting which at times is misleading while grounding their framing in facts. The ability to identify these sources without analyzing their content is a strength of a media ecosystem approach to understanding the current news landscape.

Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement

POLITICS · September 26, 2016

Ending the Fed falsely reports Pope Francis' endorsement of Trump

We do not attempt to validate the accuracy of reporting in this study but instead offer these quantitative measures as a means to delineate the niches occupied by different media sources in the broader ecosystem. Many of the sites that occupy these social-media niches are cited by independent sources and media reporting as disseminators of inaccurate if not blatantly false reporting. Ending the Fed, the source of the infamous and false claim that Pope Francis had endorsed Trump, is reportedly run by a 24-year-old Romanian with a flair for generating catchy story lines.[50] Conservative

---

49 This list can be found in Appendix 3.
50 https://www.inc.com/tess-townsend/ending-fed-trump-facebook.html

Tribune and Western Journalism are part of the media enterprise dubbed a "clickbait factory" by a writer for Red State.[51] Newsweek describes the content they produce as "at best, misleading."[52] A columnist for the Seattle Times described the content of Bipartisan Report as follows: "All of these stories are tethered to something true, but exaggerate it or misconstrue it to the point of unrecognizability."[53] Writers for Alternet describe Occupy Democrats, Addicting Info, and US Uncut as part a class of "new media vampires" that thrive on Facebook.[54]

The specific media-to-media patterns of interlinking practices on the right and left offer further evidence of the varying degrees of authority and salience among partisan media sources. On Twitter, the Daily Kos and PoliticusUSA are most likely to link to the Raw Story, and the Daily Kos links more to PoliticusUSA compared to other sites on the left. Among the Facebook group, Occupy Democrats, AddictingInfo, and Bipartisan Report frequently cite one another, and often link to Raw Story and PoliticusUSA. MSNBC and Vox rarely link to any of these sites.

This pattern of cross-citation seen among some of the "vulture" sites may help to boost the influence and perceived legitimacy of these sites; cross-linking is a tide that raises all boats. Our co-citation maps suggest that the same readers circulate between Conservative Tribune and Western Journalism or Occupy Democrats and Addicting Info. Cross-linking among these sites will help to increase their traffic. This practice may also make it harder to debunk questionable information, as a falsehood published on Bipartisan Report will likely be echoed on other vulture sites.

Generally, though, cross-media links offer a more discerning measure of credibility than social media shares. Apart from links associated with debating the veracity or framing of another media story, citations to other media sources typically denote endorsement of the story. Links generally signals that a particular story is worthy of attention and debate. We see that many of the sources that are popular in social media are not worthy of time and attention by the estimation of their peers. Where we see marginal sites that engage in cross-linking, it may be a strategy to avoid this pattern.

The most dubious of the sites on the right that are popular on Facebook are Ending the Fed and Truthfeed. When not fabricating stories, they serve primarily as repackagers and amplifiers of reporting from other outlets, and hence link to other media sources that offer reporting that they believe will resonate with their social media audience. Ending the Fed and Truthfeed link frequently to all of the other sites in the right—except each other. Ending the Fed is almost entirely invisible in the link economy with just four inlinks from this sample. Of the media sources shown in Table 19, Truthfeed has just one fan; the Gateway Pundit provides 40 of Truthfeed's total of 42 inlinks. The Conservative Tribune, Western Journalism, and Political Insider also occupy this same niche: lots of attention on Facebook, little to no attention from other media organizations. The Gateway Pundit occupies a slightly elevated role. It not only trades links with the social media players but also draws 63 links from Breitbart stories and 17 from RedState, and 33 from the Washington Post.

Within the right, Fox News and the New York Post occupy more discerning positions. They link most frequently to one another, significantly fewer links are to the Daily Caller, and fewer yet to Breitbart. They rarely if ever link to the six fringe sites in the top ten of the right. Breitbart, however, cites the Daily Caller as often as the

51 http://www.redstate.com/diary/southernconstitutionalist/2016/03/15/mike-huckabee-herman-cain-sell-out-to-clickbait-factory-liftable-media-inc./
52 http://www.newsweek.com/2016/12/16/floyd-brown-maestro-media-manipulation-528591.html
53 http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattles-own-click-bait-news-site-serves-up-red-meat-for-liberals/
54 http://www.alternet.org/media/vampire-webpages-suck-content-legitimate-progressive-news-sites

Post, just behind Fox News. Breitbart also links to the Gateway Pundit 63 times. There are clear hierarchies in conservative media and strong signals that a majority of the most popular conservative media sites on Facebook provide little value to more established conservative media. This conclusion can be reached solely by looking at their lack of traction within conservative media.

As a function of the hierarchies in conservative media, the connectivity between the more established and less reputable sources runs in both directions, but the connections from the mainstream to the fringe sites are indirect and entail several hops. Fox News links to the Washington Examiner and the Daily Caller, which link to Breitbart. Breitbart links to the Gateway Pundit, which links to the Conservative Tribune and Truthfeed.

There are strong parallels in the clickbait sites from the right and left. The format, sensationalism, partisan tilt, creativity, and proclivity to mislead readers appear to come from the same playbook. The economic logic that sustains such practices applies equally to both sides. The fact that there are examples of media sites that mix highly partisan content with misleading and false reporting has been used to support a narrative that disinformation is endemic on both sides of the political spectrum. Although there is a degree of truth to this narrative, it also misleading.

While there are clear similarities between the clickbait sites on the right and the left, the reception of these sites by other media outlets in their camp and their relative prominence in their respective media spheres rejects the proposition that disinformation is equally endemic on both sides of the political spectrum. There are significantly more marginal sites on the right than on the left that have little credibility within their own media systems, yet are highly popular on Facebook. Six out of the top 10 sites on the right fall into the clickbait profile, compared to three out of ten on the left. Moreover, the highly-visible sites on the left did not link to the clickbait sites on the left in the same way, or to the same extent, that the highly visible sites on the right linked directly or indirectly through to the political clickbait on the right. Breitbart linked frequently to the Gateway Pundit with 63 links compared with 266 links to Fox News—its most popular target among conservative sites. Breitbart cited Gateway Pundit stories such as "Users Claim Google Is Putting Trump Emails in Their Spam Box" and "Social Media Patterns Show Trump Is Looking at a Landslide Victory," the Gateway Pundit in turn linked many times to InfoWars and Truthfeed.

On the left, the Huffington Post cited MSNBC 934 times compared with 203 links to Daily Kos, 138 to Raw Story, 59 to PoliticusUSA, and 12 to Occupy Democrats. There is no comparable multiple step linking chains on the left as evident on the right with Breitbart, the Gateway Pundit, and more marginal sites. Online media outlets such as Occupy Democrats did not have highly prominent friends of friends to amplify their messages and legitimate their position in the media ecosystem.

TRUMP 100% VINDICATED: CBS REPORTS 'SWARM' ON ROOFTOPS CELEBRATING 9/11

Ty Wright/Getty Images

by JOHN NOLTE
2 Dec 2015

9,536

The DC Media has spent the last two weeks attempting to destroy Donald Trump with lies. Outright lies, and

December 2015 story in Breitbart

The differences between the right and left do not end there. The pro-Trump media sphere is rooted almost entirely in the far right of the media system that took shape over the 18 months leading up the election. The decidedly partisan media sources in the right that supported Trump included, and were buoyed by, the election coverage of Breitbart, Fox News, and the Daily Caller. The broad consensus among media critics—their supporters notwithstanding—is that these media sources have been willing to sacrifice

objective reporting to better serve a decidedly partisan audience. The center-right played a very small role in the Trump media sphere. Not only was the center-right much less prominent than any of the other four segments, but it was also largely opposed to the Trump candidacy. The opposition to Trump spanned from the left through the center-left and center to the center-right.

The composition of the left is markedly different. The left also includes highly partisan sites such as the Huffington Post and Daily Kos. However, the most partisan sites of the left were not exclusively Clinton territory. The media sources on the left were also the home of the strongest Sanders supporters. By a variety of measures—social media sharing, inlinking patterns from all corners of the media landscape, and the anti-media narrative of the Trump campaign—the center-left served as the center of gravity for Clinton supporters. Trump supporters helped to create a highly partisan media system that served their purposes. Clinton supporters frequented media enterprises that adhered to the long standing tradition of journalistic independence that was separable and often at odds with the Clinton campaign. The media system most trafficked by the Democratic side was both deeper and broader and led by large professional media organizations that have been in business for many decades in addition to abiding by the objectivity standards ingrained deep with the culture and practices of these media organizations.

The endorsements from the editorial offices of the newspaper from the center and center-left offered full-throated endorsements for Clinton in the general election. However, the reporting from the center and center-left was demonstrably not so Clinton-friendly. A major critique of the media's coverage was that it erred on the side of offering critical coverage of both candidates and ultimately misled the public by creating a sense of equivalence in the weaknesses and fitness for office of the two candidates. The explicitly partisan sites on the left and social media-targeted clickbait sites occupied a very small role in the media coverage favored by supporters of Clinton compared to the right, in part because strong criticisms of the Trump camp were coming from mainstream center-left media.

Example of CNN coverage of Clinton

The newer, more insulated media sphere that backed Trump meant that stridently partisan outlets and fringe media sources played a significantly more prominent role on the right than the left. These sites did not reach audiences outside their relatively insulated sphere, but were dominant within it. These pro-Trump segments of the media landscape then took on as their mission to reframe and deflect media coverage that might be damaging to the political prospects of the right.

Establishment conservative media were marginalized among Trump supporters as they leaned toward the politically neutral ground of opposing both candidates. The Wall Street Journal, rather than serving as a center-right touchstone for conservative audiences of the GOP presidential campaign, ended up removing itself from the partisanship-fueled action on the right. One plausible explanation for this is that the anti-establishment attraction of the Trump campaign encompassed both mainstream Republican candidates and media. Fox News, which was caught in limbo up until it became clear that Trump would be the GOP candidate, deftly migrated over to join the staunchly pro-Trump media world, a position they maintain today.

Claims of equivalence or symmetry are not supported by the evidence. Any description of the role of media in the 2016 presidential campaign that does not factor in the multifaceted asymmetry in the media spectrum is likely to be incomplete if not entirely off track. Similarly, any diagnoses of media dysfunction that do not acknowledge and account for the profound asymmetry in United States media world will be incomplete at best.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

70

Many debates about the digital public sphere center on whether readers choose to read widely or to isolate themselves in partisan echo chambers. Our data allows us to address questions of how frequently partisan audiences seek out reporting and opinions from the other side, and how often media sources offer coverage that is supportive or critical of both sides. We explore these questions first by evaluating the propensity for partisan Twitter users to share content from different segments of the political spectrum.

Figure 33 shows the distribution of media sources when divided into those Twitter users who chose to retweet Trump or Clinton and placing the media sources into quintiles: left, center-left, center, center-right, right. The stark affinity of Twitter users on each side for content on the right and the left is clearly evident. More than half of the media sources shared by the Clinton side fell into the left. For Trump supporters on Twitter, two-thirds of the media sources they shared were on the right. For media sources at either of the extremes, more than four-fifths of the stories shared on Twitter came from one side, though for many of the media sources in this category, the proportion of citations coming from one side was greater than 95 percent. Although this is partially by construction—the sharing of media sources at opposite ends of the spectrum was expected to be low—cross-spectrum sharing gravitates toward the far ends of the scale, accounting for 5 percent of the media sources for both groups. The center, those sources that received similar number of shares from both sides, amounts to about one in 10 of the media sources for both. Reminiscent of the network maps shown earlier, here the center-left received substantial attention from the right along with a third of the attention coming from the left. Media sources that fell into the center-right category are very few, accounting for less than 5 percent of the media sources. There is a distinct asymmetry in these media spheres as manifest primarily in three areas: 1) the scarcity of center-right media sources, 2) the relative prominence of the center-left, and 3) the greater preference by the right for highly partisan media sources.
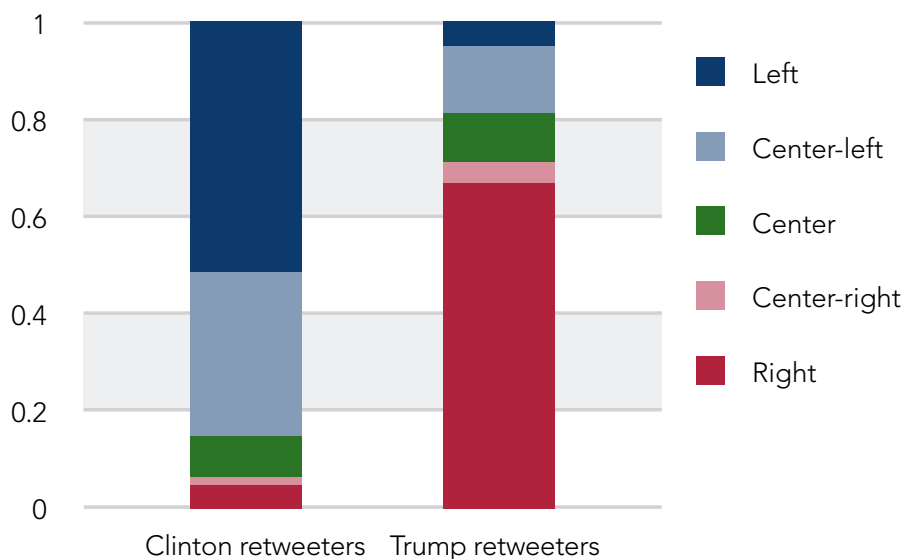

Figure 33: Proportion of stories retweeted by Clinton and Trump followers by quintile

An alternate view of this pattern is shown in Tables 23 and 24, which lists the 50 most shared media sources among these sets of Clinton and Trump supporters.

Rank	Media Source	Partisan Score	Quintile	Rank	Media Source	Partisan Score	Quintile
1	Washington Post	-0.51		26	Guardian	-0.56	
2	Huffington Post	-0.78		27	Mediaite	-0.25	
3	New York Times	-0.53		28	ABC News	-0.24	
4	The Hill	-0.05		29	USA Today	-0.19	
5	CNN	-0.36		30	Yahoo! News	-0.15	
6	Politico	-0.29		31	New York Daily News	-0.63	
7	PoliticusUSA	-0.90		32	Bipartisan Report	-0.92	
8	Daily Kos	-0.91		33	Wall Street Journal	0.05	
9	Raw Story	-0.88		34	Reuters	-0.20	
10	hillaryclinton.com	-0.97		35	Time	-0.48	
11	MSNBC	-0.67		36	Addicting Info	-0.90	
12	Salon	-0.82		37	CBS News	-0.31	
13	Think Progress	-0.91		38	LA Times	-0.39	
14	Daily Newsbin	-0.93		39	New York Magazine	-0.71	
15	Mother Jones	-0.86		40	FiveThirtyEight	-0.74	
16	Talking Points	-0.81		41	National Memo	-0.92	
17	The Daily Beast	-0.72		42	Occupy Democrats	-0.92	
18	Media Matters	-0.90		43	New Yorker	-0.81	
19	NBC News	-0.50		44	Alternet	-0.78	
20	Vox	-0.84		45	Business Insider	-0.06	
21	Slate	-0.73		46	The Democratic Party	-0.98	
22	Politifact	-0.83		47	iwillvote.com	-1.00	
23	Crooks and Liars	-0.91		48	The Atlantic	-0.62	
24	Buzzfeed	-0.57		49	Blue Nation Review	-0.96	
25	Bloomberg	-0.24		50	NPR	-0.70	

■ Left   ■ Center-left   ■ Center   ■ Center-right   ■ Right

Table 23: Most shared media sources by Clinton supporters on Twitter

None of the top 50 media sources on the Clinton side extend beyond the center. For Clinton supporters, the most shared sources from the right were Breitbart, the Washington Examiner, and Fox, ranked 60th, 66th, and 71st, respectively, among the users in the pro-Clinton set. Among Trump supporters, the top 50 media sources are heavily weighted to media sources on the right, but also include five in the center, nine in the center-left, and two on the left; many of these are large mainstream media organizations, and the sharing of stories from these outlets reflects distinctly different cross-partisan interactions, in some cases amplifying stories that support their views and in other cases rebutting unfavorable reporting. By this measure, Trump supporters more often venture to the other side of the political spectrum. The overlap between the Trump and Clinton lists consists of 14 media sources and includes four media sources from the center, eight from the center-left, and two from the left. Three-quarters of the media source are unique to one side or the other.

Rank	Media Source	Partisan Score	Quintile	Rank	Media Source	Partisan Score	Quintile
1	Breitbart	0.95		26	Biz Pac Review	0.98	
2	The Hill	-0.05		27	Facebook Blog	0.67	
3	Fox News	0.87		28	Bloomberg	-0.24	
4	Gateway Pundit	0.97		29	Huffington Post	-0.78	
5	Politico	-0.29		30	American Thinker	0.94	
6	Washington Examiner	0.82		31	Real Clear Politics	0.22	
7	Daily Caller	0.88		32	Newsmax	0.87	
8	CNN	-0.36		33	Yahoo! News	-0.15	
9	Washington Post	-0.51		34	Mediaite	-0.25	
10	New York Times	-0.53		35	USA Today	-0.19	
11	donaldjtrump.com	0.91		36	Western Journalism Center	0.94	
12	Conservative Treehouse	0.93		37	teaparty.org	0.91	
13	InfoWars	0.93		38	ABC News	-0.24	
14	Daily Mail	0.71		39	NBC News	-0.50	
15	Truthfeed	0.97		40	The Sean Hannity Show	0.98	
16	New York Post	0.78		41	twitchy.com	0.93	
17	Investors	0.94		42	allenbwest.com	0.97	
18	The Right Scoop	0.80		43	worldnetdaily.com	0.92	
19	States Poll	0.98		44	Reuters	-0.20	
20	Conservative Review	0.94		45	WikiLeaks	0.95	
21	rsbn.tv	0.97		46	rickwells.us	0.98	
22	newsninja2012.com	0.96		47	Fox News Insider	0.85	
23	Wall Street Journal	0.05		48	Townhall	0.89	
24	Washington Times	0.76		49	MSNBC	-0.67	
25	Free Beacon	0.88		50	Business Insider	-0.06	

■ Left　　■ Center-left　　■ Center　　■ Center-right　　■ Right

Table 24: Most shared media sources by Trump supporters on Twitter

Partisan Media Sources & Partisan Audiences

There are competing explanations for the patterns shown here. One interpretation is that liberal social media users were more insular than their conservative counterparts and less willing to venture out of the friendly environs of liberal media. A vastly different interpretation is that the coverage of the campaign by center-right and far-right media is more faithful to conservative perspectives, and so includes not only coverage that supports conservative positions and the Trump candidacy but also coverage critical of Clinton. In essence, the coverage by the right may offer significantly less reporting that the opposite side would want to share. These explanations need not be mutually exclusive.

To evaluate these two explanations of partisan patterns, we reviewed the top 100 cross-partisan stories: stories from left and center-left media sources shared by Trump supporters, and stories from right and center-right sources shared by Clinton supporters.

Twitter users who retweeted Trump displayed an unambiguous behavioral pattern. Of the top 100 stories from the center-left cited by this cohort, 69 were favorable to Trump, 16 were critical of Clinton, and 12 were critical of Trump's GOP primary contenders. When the pro-Trump set shared stories on Twitter from the center-left

and left, it was not to engage with unfavorable coverage of Trump and the campaign; it was amplify any good news that came from the left and center-left. Among the many examples of center-left stories that were shared by pro-Trump users that could be seen as favorable to Trump were the following stories:

Trump is right about violent crime: It's on the rise in major cities
Washington Post

Over A Year Before 9/11, Trump Wrote Of Terror Threat With Remarkable Clarity
Buzzfeed

On campuses across the country, students are standing up for Donald Trump
Los Angeles Times

Another set of stories shared by Trump supporters were critical of Clinton:

Cash Flowed to Clinton Foundation Amid Russian Uranium Deal
New York Times

State Dept. official accused of offering 'quid pro quo' in Clinton email scandal
Politico

Negative coverage of Rubio, Bush, and Cruz were also popular:

Jeb Bush: Immigration is 'not a felony' but 'an act of love'
CNN

Ted Cruz is not eligible to be president
Washington Post

Billionaire Lifts Marco Rubio, Politically and Personally
New York Times

While Trump supporters found more to like in center-left coverage, there was ample fodder in far-left media as well:

Ted Cruz Last Year: We Should Welcome Syrian Refugees, And We Can Do It Safely
The Huffington Post

Jeb Bush Has Become The Least Liked GOP Presidential Candidate
The Huffington Post

GOP Voters Trust Donald Trump to Keep Our Country Safe. That's Not Changing
Slate

Corrupt FIFA Has Clinton Foundation Ties; World Cup Host Qatar Gave Millions
The Daily Beast

Hillary Clinton oversaw U.S. arms deals to Clinton Foundation donors
Mother Jones

There were no examples of stories in clear opposition to the Trump campaign among the 100 stories most shared by Trump supporters, even if only to cite in a rebuttal or as an example of the types of arguments that the Trump team would need to overcome. The stories most retweeted by Trump followers from left and center-left media sources were distinctly partisan, though in an interesting way: they were predominantly retweeted by the Trump side and rarely tweeted by the Clinton side. Trump supporters crossed the aisle in search of coverage favorable to their side and found quite a lot of it. And in doing so, they also passed over much reporting that was not favorable to the Trump campaign.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the other direction, with Clinton supporters finding favorable material in right-center and right media:

I Know Trump's New Campaign Chairman, Steve Bannon. Here's What You Need To Know
Daily Wire

Barbara Bush: I don't know how women can vote for Donald Trump
Washington Times

Sanders' pro-gun views could cost him votes in New York City
New York Post

Trump adviser accused of making anti-Semitic remarks
The McClatchyDC

The Price I've Paid for Opposing Donald Trump
National Review

Because Clinton supporters were generally less active on Twitter, and did not often tweet stories from the right, we cannot draw firm conclusions about their cross-partisan behavior from the set we have. Tentatively, it appears that Clinton retweeters, like Trump retweeters, sought confirming stories outside their own media sphere but to some extent also shared stories that could be interpreted as pro-Trump or anti-Trump, depending on the use and context. One such example is a campaign statement on terrorism, immigration, and national security from Trump's campaign web site, donaldjtrump.com. This suggests a greater willingness to cite stories that highlight the political positions of the opponent, in this case Trump, presumably to rebut these positions or to sound the alarm. It also consistent with the view that narratives put out by the Trump campaign were used to rally supporters on both sides. The overall frequency of sharing cross-partisan sources by Clinton supporters in our data sets (fewer than 10 shares for each of the examples) is low enough that we caution against drawing firm conclusions without further data analysis.

Another perspective on cross-partisan citations can be found by looking at the stories from the small number of center-right sources. Recall that being located in the center-right means that a majority of citations came from the right but a significant number of citations came from the left. An interesting picture emerges by zooming in on those conservative media outlets that included explicit opposition to Trump. Among the most cited stories on Twitter from the National Review, one can find stories in open opposition to Trump along with the critical coverage of Clinton and more favorable reporting on Trump (Table 25). Among the top 20 stories, eight were critical of Clinton and six critical of Trump.

NATIONAL REVIEW

George Stephanopoulos's Clinton Foundation Hypocrisy Is Staggering
How the Clinton Foundation Got Rich off Poor Haitians
The Right Stuff
The Price I've Paid for Opposing Donald Trump
Bernie Sanders's Dark Age Economics
Rubio: 'There Is No Right to Illegally Immigrate'
Judge Expands Investigation into Hillary Clinton's Dealings with Foundation Donors
Yes, Trump University Was a Massive Scam
On Islam, Ben Carson Is Right and Charles Krauthammer Is Wrong
The Clinton E-mails Are Critical to the Clinton Foundation Investigation
FBI Rewrites Federal Law to Let Hillary Off the Hook
Carly Fiorina Has Taken 314 More Questions Than Hillary Clinton
Conservatives against Trump
Not a Single Republican Delegate Is 'Bound' to Donald Trump
The Clinton Foundation Took Money from Saudi Propagandists
Cruz Delegates Waver as Trump Gains Momentum
The Clinton Foundation Reeks of Crooks, Thieves, and Hoods
Trump Praises His Sister, a Pro-Abortion Extremist Judge
The Establishment Thinks the Unthinkable: Trump Could Win the Nomination
Obama's Conflict Tanked the Clinton E-mail Investigation As Predicted

Table 25: Most shared stories on Twitter from the National Review

This same pattern is true of the Weekly Standard, which offered blistering criticism of Clinton and Trump alike. Nine of the top 20 stories are critical of Clinton and seven are critical of Trump.

CNN Debate Moderator Was Member of Clinton Global Initiative
The Worst Day of Hillary Clinton's Campaign
Carly Fiorina Sets High Bar With Most Detailed Financial Disclosure
Bill Clinton: 'Black Lives Matter' Protesters Are Defending Murders [sic] And Drug Dealers
Clinton Foundation Meeting in Morocco Last Month Cost Taxpayers $21K
Donald Trump Is Crazy, and So Is the GOP for Embracing Him
Debate Without Trump Gets Better Ratings Than Last Debate with Trump
Trump Lumps Hillary With Monica, Weiner, and Cosby in New Ad
After 9/11, Trump Took Money Marked for Small Businesses
Polls: Cruz Would Fare 5 Points Better Versus Clinton Than Trump Would
Nine Tales of Trump at His Trumpiest
Trump: I 'Like' Obamacare's Individual Mandate
Trump's Primary Lead Is Bigger Than Hillary's
Trump GOP Candidacy Blows Up
Sykes: If You Embrace Trump, You Embrace Every Slur, Insult, Outrage, Falsehood
Hillary's Brother: I Used the Clinton Foundation for Deals
Republicans Forced to Turn Shirts Inside Out at Clinton Launch
For Years, Trump's Charity Gave Veterans Little More Than Peanuts
What Was a Member of Clinton's 'Secret Spy Network' Doing While Working for CBS News?
Bill Clinton's Secret 'Pass-Through' Company Exposed

Table 26: Most shared stories on Twitter from the Weekly Standard

RedState is another conservative media source that featured open resistance to Trump while also offering coverage in favor of another candidate, Ted Cruz. Of its top 20 stories, 17 were either in support of Cruz or in opposition to Trump. Only two stories were critical of the Clinton candidacy.

It Is Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, Not Donald Trump, In An ISIS Recruiting Video
Donald Trump is OWNED by Every Bank on Wall Street
I Have Disinvited Donald Trump to the RedState Gathering
Ted Cruz Has Earned a Second Look From Us All
5 Reasons Ted Cruz Is The Best Choice For President
Donald Trump Financed The Gang of 8
Eric Trump: My dad's immigration plan includes amnesty after deportation
Know Who Else Has Received Loans from Citibank and Goldman Sachs? Donald Trump.
Scott Walker: the new Thad Cochran
New Gallup Poll Shows Ted Cruz With Highest GOP Favorable Rating
Cruz Easily Won the New Hampshire GOP Debate
Sources Say Trump Wants to Nominate a Democrat for His VP
Trump's National Field Director Quits, Just Before Key Primaries
Ted Cruz Was Fearless Yesterday
New Wisconsin Poll is Big News for Ted Cruz
Report that Delegates Have Enough Votes to Nominate Cruz on 1st Ballot
How Hillary Clinton And Barack Obama Created ISIS
The Houston Chronicle's Dylan Baddour (@DylanBaddour) Lied About Ted Cruz
Donald Trump Took $150,000 After 9/11 Because He Was A "Small Business" Owner
Senator Ted Cruz Delivers the Awesome About Gun Control on the Senate Floor

Table 27: Most shared stories on Twitter from RedState

There are parallels between this center-right portion of the political spectrum and center-left. Among the most popular stories were those that leveled sharp criticism against Clinton as well as Trump, although these were different in prevalence and tone. There was a greater proportion of anti-Clinton stories on the center-right, and the criticisms appear to have been significantly stronger. Key differences include that the center-right is home to the never-Clinton and never-Trump camp, and that in comparison to the center-left, the center-right is much less influential whether measured by audience, links in the open web, or shares on social media.

The weight of evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that partisan sharing patterns on Twitter are based primarily in media outlet editorial policies and less in the differences between liberals and conservatives in their willingness to engage with opposing views. Partisans on both sides share stories from the other side that confirm their existing beliefs, not in order to engage these other stories or refute them. Liberal media produced more content that partisans on the right found to their liking than conservative media produced that partisans on the left liked. Clinton supporters found very little coverage deemed worthy of sharing in the media sources most popular among Trump supporters. On the other hand, Trump supporters frequently found stories to share that aligned with their narrative.

Partisans on both sides share stories from the other side that confirm their existing beliefs, not in order to engage these other stories or refute them.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

78

If Twitter sharing offers us a window into partisanship of audiences, linking among media sites on the web offers a view of how media sources engage, or refuse to engage, with one another. Generally speaking, online media entities linked across the partisan divide more than audiences shared content across the partisan divide, although there certainly remained a significant share of within-partisan affinity linking.

Figure 34 shows the proportionate source of media links between media sources on the open web. Here again we rely on the partisanship scores derived from the behavior of Trump and Clinton supporters on Twitter.

In contrast to the Twitter data, an important difference is the larger number of cross-partisan citations. Only 29 percent of the media links coming from the left were to sources within that quintile. On the right, the proportion of intra-quintile linking is higher at 37 percent. In both cases though, there is considerably more linking to sources from different portions of the spectrum. For both the right and left, just over ten percent of links were to sources at the opposite end of the spectrum. Linking behavior among partisan media sources was substantially less insular than the sharing behavior of partisan Twitter users.
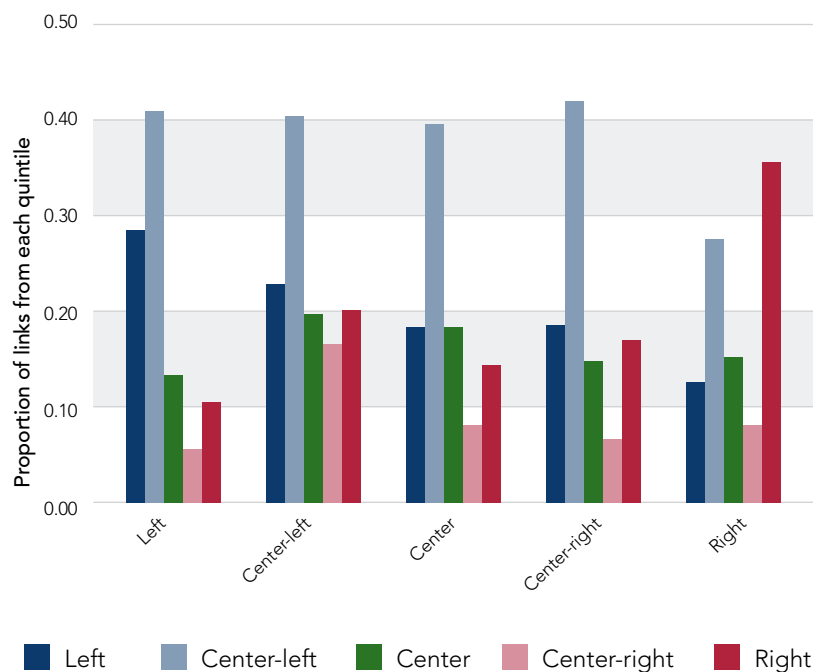
Figure 34: Proportion of total media-to-media links across quintiles, showing sharp discontinuity between the linking practices of the right and those of all other parts of the media ecosystem

A qualitative review of cross-partisan linking patterns reveals that there was a much greater proclivity to engage with opposing points of view in the link economy than there was in the sharing of stories among partisan Twitter users. Breitbart and the Daily Caller, among others, regularly linked to stories in the center-left and left to dispute their reporting of current events and their framing of issues. Media sources from the left also showed a willingness to highlight perspectives and views from the right with which they disagreed.

The proportion of links to sources from the center and center-right shows the least variation across the five quintiles. As reported earlier, the center-right receives the least attention.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

79

Despite the greater inclination of media producers to link across the partisan divide than politically active Twitter users, the difference between the right and the rest remains clear. For four of the five quintiles, from the left through the center-right, the center-left is the most common destination for outlinks. This quintile is where mainstream media sources including CNN, the New York Times and the Washington Post are located. Media sources on the center-left receive approximately 40 percent of the links from these four quintiles. This linking behavior suggests the power these outlets have in setting media agendas, at least as measured by the link economy. The proportion of links from the right quintile to the center-left is significantly lower. This data confirms the asymmetry of the structural relationships across different segments of the media spectrum and relatively higher level of insularity on the right, albeit less so than on social media.

In Table 27, we show the total number of links from each quintile to a selection of eight media sources. Comparisons in the allocation of links within a given quintile show the relative attention to each of the sources. For example, the Wall Street Journal and Fox News received similar levels of attention from sources in the center.[55]

The New York Times and CNN received the largest number of inlinks from media sources in each of the segments, with far more inlinks than the Wall Street Journal or Fox News, even among sources on the right.

The Huffington Post was very popular among sites on the left. Breitbart stands out on the right. It received as many links from other right-wing media sources as did the Wall Street Journal and Fox News combined. These numbers are particularly notable when compared with those of the Huffington Post, which occupies a less important position in the left media segment. Overall, the sources from the left appear to have produced significantly more outlinks.[56]

	Daily Kos	HuffPo	NYT	CNN	WSJ	Fox	Breitbart	Gateway Pundit
Left	997	11764	38183	25389	5988	3459	2484	144
Center-left	211	5308	20891	14580	4570	2405	1521	94
Center	105	2148	8475	7994	1752	1634	990	69
Center-right	111	1385	6423	4732	1064	1024	671	47
Right	224	3713	13543	10824	3667	5157	9111	2158
Left	-0.78	0.06	2.11	1.12	-0.39	-0.59	-0.67	-0.85
Center-left	-0.85	-0.13	2.08	1.19	-0.23	-0.54	-0.66	-0.86
Center	-0.88	-0.24	1.76	1.61	-0.36	-0.40	-0.60	-0.89
Center-right	-0.83	-0.25	2.05	1.28	-0.40	-0.41	-0.58	-0.86
Right	-1.35	-0.54	1.73	1.11	-0.55	-0.21	0.71	-0.90

Table 27: Total inlinks for selected media (raw scores and normalized across each quintile)

55 Comparison of the number of media sources or links directed at a given media source from different segments may not be representative of the overall media landscape because they are 'selected' by the Twitter users who retweeted Trump and Clinton. Of the more than 40k media sources with stories relevant to the election, we have sufficient sharing data to calculate a partisan score for approximately 6k. We do not know if the distribution of the 6k sources is representative of the full set of media sources. It is likely to be biased toward the right given the higher level of activity on Twitter following Trump.

56 Media sources from the left generated an average of 76 outlinks to these 8 media sources while media sources from the right generated an average of 20 outlinks.

The Drudge Report

The Drudge Report is a conservative news aggregation website run by Matt Drudge since 1995. Drudge Report rarely publishes original material; instead, it creates a curated feed of links to news stories from a variety of media sources that is updated throughout the day. When a user clicks on a headline, they are taken directly to the media source that hosts the article. The strategy Drudge uses make the site uniquely underrepresented in our data, since it draws few links, tweets, or FB shares. Nonetheless, Internet traffic monitoring sites like Alexa and Similar Web estimate that the Drudge Report has several million unique visitors every month, well ahead of Breitbart and on par with Fox News.[57] With its regular readership and volume of traffic, the Drudge Report was described earlier in the decade a key influencer of media coverage with the ability to bring national attention to a media source or story by adding a link to his site.[58] Drudge was instrumental in the launch of Breitbart. Andrew Breitbart worked for Drudge and the Drudge Report provided early support for Breitbart.com by driving traffic to Breitbart in its early days.[59] In the past election, some have asserted that Drudge's implicit support for Trump helped him win the election.[60] However, in contrast to Breitbart, Drudge did not fully back the Trump campaign until 2016,[61] while Breitbart's support for Trump was evident in August 2015.

The degree of Drudge's influence on the political agenda remains unclear. One 2011 academic study found that Drudge does not have the impact on the mainstream agenda that some have claimed.[62] A 2009 article suggested that Drudge's role was on the decline.[63] The Drudge Report has maintained its relevance over two decades despite a decidedly 1990s approach to running a digital media outlet.

We do not include the Drudge Report in our observations largely because its traffic pattern is unusual—over 80% of its traffic comes from people who go to Drudge directly—rather than from inlinks from other media sources or sharing on social media. As a result, the measure and methods we used in this report fail to capture its role. Given its apparent prominence in right-wing media by guiding attention to other media sources, we collected and tabulated the links to media sources included on the Drudge Report during the study period from May 2015 until election day (Table 28).[64] The data in Table 28 are based on all links from the Drudge Report and are not restricted to election-related stories.

---

57 https://www.similarweb.com/website/drudgereport.com; http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/drudgereport.com

58 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/16/business/media/16carr.html

59 https://www.cnet.com/news/breitbart-com-has-drudge-to-thank-for-its-success/

60 http://www.businessinsider.com/drudge-report-trump-2016-7

61 http://www.politico.com/story/2016/04/drudge-report-donald-trump-221857

62 Wallsten, Kevin. "Drudge's World? The Drudge Report's Influence on Media Coverage." In annual meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association. Las Vegas, NV. 2011.

63 http://archives.cjr.org/feature/drudge_has_lost_his_touch.php

64 Links were collected from http://www.drudgereportarchives.com.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

81

Rank	Media Source	Links	Quintile	Rank	Media Source	Links	Quintile
1	Yahoo! News	5573	Center	26	Independent	644	Center-left
2	AP	3522	Center-left	27	Daily Caller	588	Right
3	Daily Mail	2489	Right	28	Financial Times	579	Center
4	New York Times	2182	Center-left	29	Free Beacon	513	Right
5	Bloomberg	2077	Center-left	30	NBC News	474	Center-left
6	Washington Post	1980	Center-left	31	Express	416	Right
7	Telegraph	1625	Center	32	Weekly Standard	405	Center-right
8	The Hill	1267	Center	33	Gateway Pundit	372	Right
9	Breitbart	1177	Right	34	American Mirror	368	Right
10	Politico	1092	Center-left	35	ABC News	367	Center-left
11	LA Times	1030	Center-left	36	McClatchy DC	355	Center-right
12	New York Post	1009	Right	37	InfoWars	338	Right
13	Wall Street Journal	1007	Center	38	YouTube	332	Right
14	CNN	968	Center-left	39	Market Watch	308	Center
15	USA Today	942	Center	40	New York Daily News	303	Center-left
16	Fox News	889	Right	41	Variety	276	Center
17	Hollywood Reporter	879	Center	42	The Daily Beast	270	Left
18	Mirror	841	Right	43	WND	238	Right
19	CBS News	817	Center-left	44	Deadline	213	Center
20	Reuters	798	Center	45	Miami Herald	200	Center-left
21	Guardian	794	Center-left	46	Smoking Gun	191	Center-right
22	Washington Examiner	750	Right	47	BBC	191	Center-left
23	CNBC	748	Center	48	Real Clear Politics	188	Center-right
24	The Sun	725	Right	49	Heat Street	182	Center-right
25	Washington Times	644	Right	50	Time	172	Center-left

■ Left ■ Center-left ■ Center ■ Center-right ■ Right

Table 28: Links to media sources from Drudge Report, May 2015 - November 2016

Drudge links to a wide range of media sources across the media spectrum. Many of the links, for example to stories from the New York Times or Washington Post, are not necessarily stories favorable to conservative causes. Unlike some right-wing sites, the Drudge Report provides its readers with a view of media stories coming from a broad range of sources. The selection of conservative media sources also covers a diverse set of sites. Breitbart is the right-wing site with the most inlinks followed by the New York Post and Fox News. The linking practices of Drudge are consistent with the hierarchy of influence in conservative media that we observe in this study based on the broader link economy and social media sharing patterns. While the overall structures of influence in conservative media cannot be ascribed primarily to the Drudge Report, it is certainly a significant contributing factor.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

82

The eclectic curation choices of the Drudge Report also veers into less reputable and conspiracy sites. Both InfoWars and the Gateway Pundit receive a substantial number of links, and World News Daily (WND) is in the top 50. Yet Drudge defies easy categorization. While Drudge lends legitimacy to conspiracy sites (and undoubtedly helps their business), it also keeps conservative readers abreast of stories and narratives emanating from sources across the political spectrum with many links to center-left media sources. If exposure to alternative points of view is a useful antidote to increasing polarization, then Drudge readers are well served. Yet the voting patterns of Drudge readers show no hints of divided loyalties. Voters who regularly got news about the campaign from the Drudge Report overwhelmingly voted for Trump. Only one percent of Clinton voters regularly got news from Drudge compared to 11 percent of Trump voters. These numbers are the same for Breitbart.[65]

The front page of the Drudge Report on November 7, 2016 at 12:02pm

---

65 http://www.journalism.org/2017/01/18/trump-clinton-voters-divided-in-their-main-source-for-election-news/

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

83

The long road to the election of Donald Trump on November 8, 2016, and the million-plus stories that chronicled this journey, saw many shifts in coverage. The journey included an unusual number of scandals, and, by most accounts, one of the most acrimonious and unconventional races in recent history. One element remained nearly constant. After Trump descended the escalator in Trump Tower to formally open his campaign with a speech excoriating Mexican immigrants, media coverage focused disproportionate attention on Trump. This pattern is clear in Figure 35; coverage of Trump exceeded that of Clinton for almost the entire 18 months, and often by a very large margin.
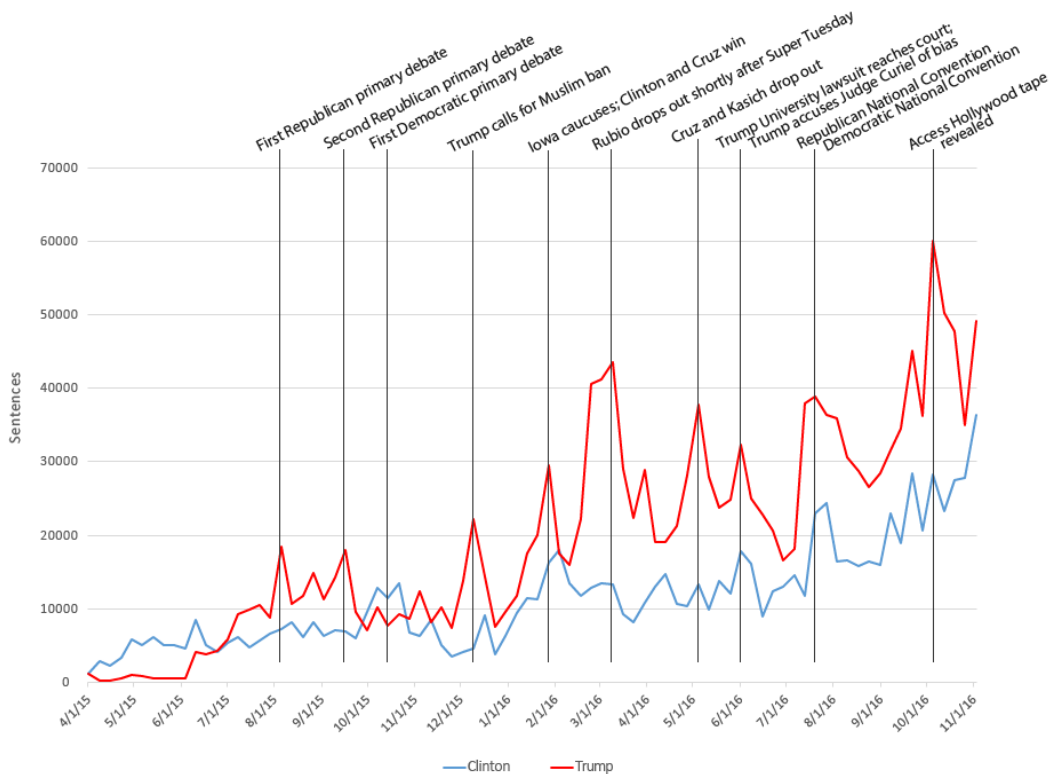
Figure 35: Media attention devoted to Trump and Clinton during election period[66]

The only exception is the time around the first Democratic primary debate in October 2015. This pattern held despite the intense coverage of scandals tied to Clinton. The coverage of Sanders and Cruz approached that of Clinton for brief periods in the spring of 2016 but never came close to the levels of attention directed at Trump.

66 The data underlying Figure 35 is based on matching individual sentences from the stories from a set of 50 prominent media sources collected via Media Cloud (the list is included in Appendix 2). This set of media sources, which we call mass market media, is derived from the list of the media sources that received the most inlinks from other media sources (this linking data is described later in more detail). This set of media sources is comprised primarily by traditional mainstream media organizations, but also includes popular new media organizations such as Breitbart.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

84

The majority of the spikes in coverage associated with Trump and Clinton (7 out of 10) are related to periodic campaign events, including debates, primary elections, and the party conventions. The other three were precipitated by media reporting (e.g., reporting on the Access Hollywood tape) and by Trump himself—for example, when in December 2015 he called for a ban on Muslims entering the U.S. As we will show in later sections, the ability of the Trump campaign to drive the media narrative had a major impact on the dynamics of the election cycle. This is true whether Trump was creating the news or responding to and deflecting negative reporting.

Link Economy Focus

The links between the online media sources that covered the elections provide us with a more focused and more authoritative perspective on election coverage—one that is shaped by the collective citations of journalists, opinion writers, pundits, and other producers of content. In this view, we see that the focus of media coverage on Trump was even more pronounced than it was by other measures (see Figure 36). Based on an analysis of the 100 most linked-to stories over the 18-month period, the ratio of stories focused on Trump compared with Clinton was approximately 7 to 1.[67]

Moreover, the vast majority of the most frequently linked-to stories within the mainstream media in the 18 months leading up to the election were negative and critical in tone. The most linked-to story was the Washington Post article describing the leaked Access Hollywood tape in which Trump was recorded having a lewd conversation about women. Two other stories describing Trump's behavior with women are in the top 20 along with a story about his proposed ban on Muslims entering the U.S., a story about his tax avoidance, and two stories focused on false claims that Trump had made. Five of the web pages on donaldjtrump.com also appear in the top 20, including his statements on immigration reform, Muslim immigration, health care policy, and tax reform. A majority of the inlinks to these pages, however, are from detractors, not supporters. In the link economy, the focus was primarily on Trump, and a majority of the attention was negative. Despite the negative coverage, the Trump campaign was more successful in driving the media agenda. Approximately half of the most popular stories that focused on Trump were in response to provocations and campaign statements by the Trump.

- DECEMBER 07, 2015 -

DONALD J. TRUMP STATEMENT ON PREVENTING MUSLIM IMMIGRATION

(New York, NY) December 7th, 2015, -- Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on. According to Pew Research, among others, there is great hatred towards Americans by large segments of the Muslim population. Most recently, a poll from the Center for Security Policy released data showing "25% of those polled agreed that violence against Americans here in the United States is justified as a part of the global jihad" and 51% of those polled, "agreed that Muslims in America should have the choice of being governed according to Shariah." Shariah authorizes such atrocities as murder against non-believers who won't convert, beheadings and more unthinkable acts that pose great harm to Americans, especially women.

The fourth most linked to story of the election. Donald J. Trump Statement on Preventing Muslim Immigration published on donaldjtrump.com as of November 8, 2016.

---

67 A study by Robert Patterson of the Shorenstein Center reports that Trump received 15 percent more media coverage than Clinton over the course of the election.

Story	Media Source	Media Inlinks
Trump recorded having extremely lewd conversation about women in 2005	Washington Post	325
General Election: Trump vs Clinton	RealClearPolitics	248
Show your support for Donald Trump	donaldjtrump.com	228
Immigration Reform	donaldjtrump.com	227
Statement on preventing Muslim immigration	donaldjtrump.com	177
Hillary for America	hillaryclinton.com	158
Two Women Say Donald Trump Touched Them Inappropriately	New York Times	152
Donald Trump: ban all Muslim travel to U.S.	CNN	151
Statement by FBI Director James B. Comey on the Investigation of Secretary Hillary Clinton's Use of a Personal E-Mail System	FBI.gov	149
TRANSCRIPT: Bernie Sanders meets with News Editorial Board	New York Daily News	146
Physically Attacked by Donald Trump a PEOPLE Writer's Own Harrowing Story	People	140
General Election: Trump vs Clinton vs. Johnson vs. Stein	RealClearPolitics	140
Donald Trump's false comments connecting Mexican Immigrants and crime	Washington Post	139
Healthcare Reform	donaldjtrump.com	129
Donald Trump's file	Politifact	123
Ex-Wife: Donald Trump Made Me Feel "Violated?" During Sex	The Daily Beast	129
Tax Reform	donaldjtrump.com	123
Crossing the Line: How Donald Trump Behaved With Women in Private	New York Times	129
Carson claimed West Point's 'scholarship' but never applied	Politico	123
Donald Trump Tax Records Show He Could Have Avoided Taxes for Nearly Two Decades	New York Times	111
Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve the Black Vote	The Nation	111
2016 Election Forecast	FiveThirtyEight	109
Bernie Sanders	berniesanders.com	108
Donald Trump stumbles on David Duke, KKK	CNN	107

Table 29: Most commonly cited stories on the open web

The Clinton campaign site is the sixth most linked-to site, but that represents the only web page among the most cited that came out of the Clinton campaign. The most frequently cited news stories about Clinton are also negative. The July 5 letter from FBI Director James Comey regarding the investigation of Clinton's use of a private email server was the most cited story related to Clinton. Although recommending that the Justice Department not bring charges against Clinton, the Comey letter concluded that Clinton and her colleagues were "extremely careless in their handling of very sensitive, highly classified information." Although no legal action was taken against Clinton, the political cost was high. The investigation into the mishandling of sensitive information fed into a persistent damaging frame that dogged her for the duration of the campaign.

While the media produced more critical coverage of Trump than of Clinton, the heavy emphasis on negative coverage of both candidates is unmistakable. This is entirely consistent with prior studies, which came to the same conclusion.[68] Readers who followed the election through the link economy and put their faith in this reporting are likely to have come away with a negative impression of both candidates.

---

68 See https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-general-election/
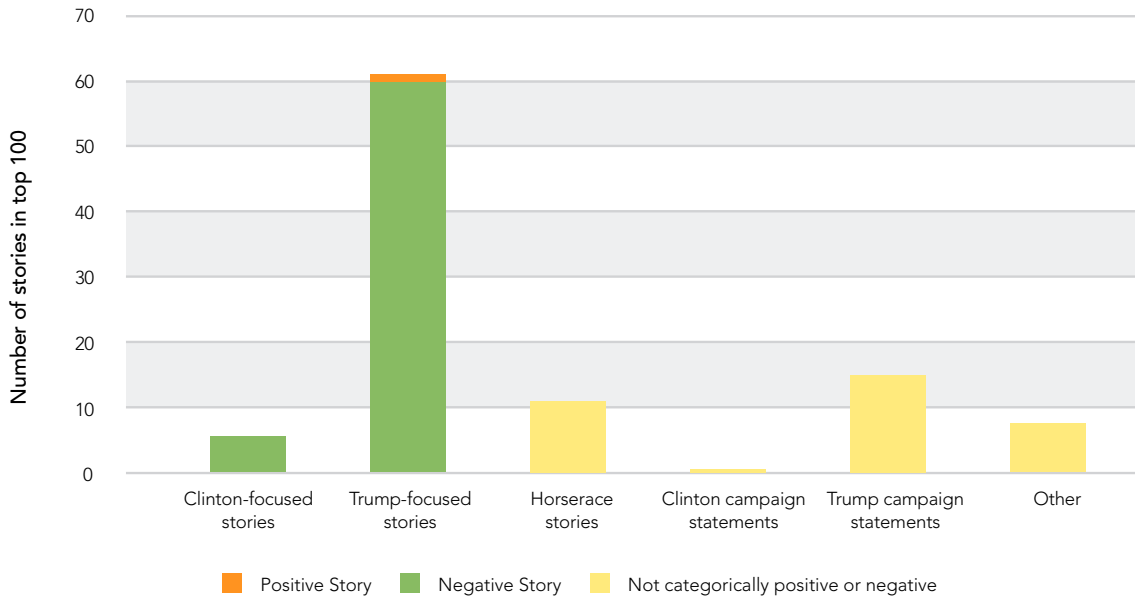
Figure 36: Valence and focus of the 100 most linked-to stories. Stories were hand-coded for topic and tone.

Given that the link economy is shaped primarily by the linking patterns of media sources that are more commonly shared among liberals than conservatives, the proportion of negative coverage among stories that discuss Trump is therefore not unexpected, but it is also driven in large part by controversies that Trump created. Much of this negative reporting is in direct response to the framing and narrative that Trump himself offered up.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

87

Topics & Scandals

By running queries against the Media Cloud data sets, we are able to compare the topical focus of media coverage.[69] Running queries over 12 topics and in conjunction with each candidate, we see in Figure 37 that coverage of two topics, immigration and Muslims, outpaced that of any of the other topics, followed by coverage of jobs and economy. The coverage of immigration and Muslims was primarily centered on Trump. The prominence of these topics quite clearly represents the success of the Trump campaign in influencing the agenda of campaign coverage, focusing on its core messages of fear and enmity toward immigrants and Muslims. Coverage surrounding the topic of race—a major media topic in the wake of police shootings and the Black Lives Matter movement—was roughly on par with coverage of trade. Other topics received little coverage in comparison, including healthcare, education, climate change, and the debate surrounding criminal justice and policing policy.
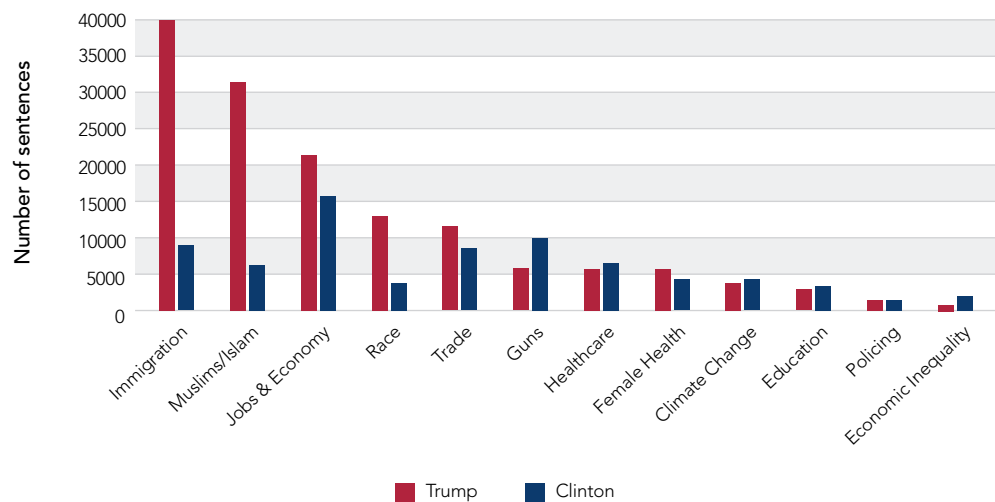

Figure 37: Coverage of selected topics by candidate

When we also include the scandals alongside those topics, we see that coverage of the Clinton emails—related issues far surpassed the other topics, including immigration (Figure 38). This evidence strongly supports the conclusion of prior accounts that a disproportionate share of media coverage was focused on the scandals that beset the Clinton campaign.[70] Although Trump received more overall media attention, the email-inflected scandal-oriented coverage (the private server, DNC emails, and the Podesta emails) garnered the most attention from mass media during the campaign, followed by the coverage of issues that defined the Trump campaign. Coverage of Clinton's position on issues accounted for the smallest proportion of coverage.

---

69 Like in Figure 35, the data underlying Figure 37 is based on matching individual sentences from the stories from a set of 50 prominent media sources ("mass market media") collected via Media Cloud (the list is included in Appendix 2).

70 http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-patterson-clinton-press-negative-coverage-20160921-snap-story.html; https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-general-election/
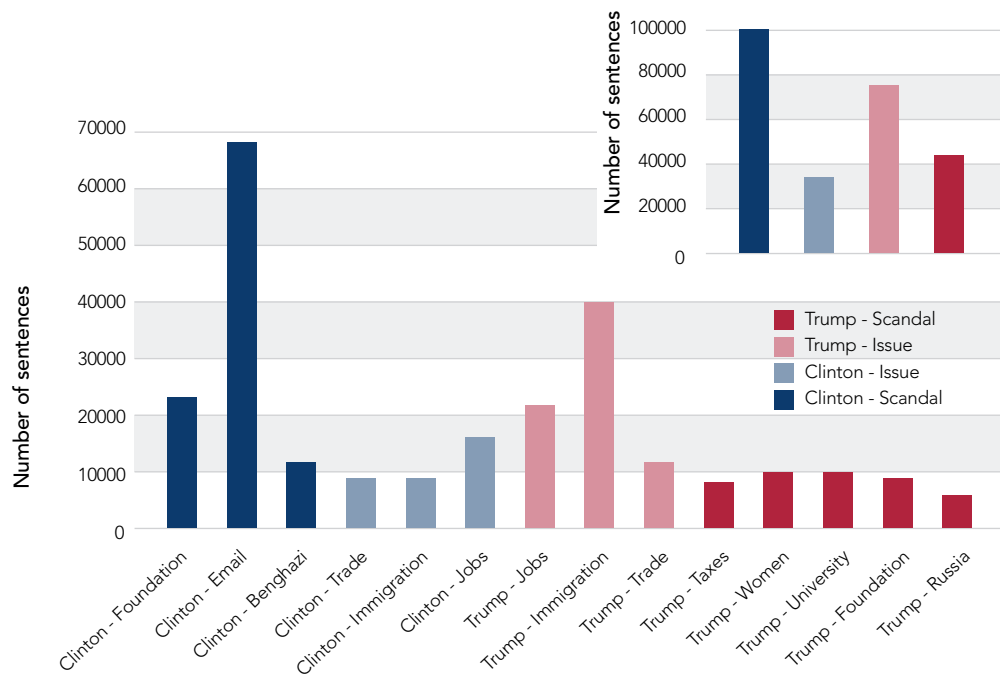
Figure 38: Attention given to scandals and issues separated by candidate, and, in inset, overall

Despite substantial coverage of scandals, the Trump campaign was successful in setting the terms of the debate, which focused more on his key issues than his shortcomings. In contrast, the media agenda around the Clinton campaign was defined by negative media coverage and by the effectiveness of her political opponents' efforts to depict her as a corrupt and self-serving establishment insider. Part of this may be explained by strategic decisions by the Clinton campaign to not assert a positive campaign narrative more forcefully.[71] Through most of the campaign, Clinton appeared to be poised to win by a comfortable margin in November. With the clarity of hindsight, many have pointed to the absence of a stronger positive vision as a core factor in Clinton's defeat. The campaign instead relied on a strategy, which appeared to be working at the time, of focusing on Trump's weaknesses as a candidate.

Given the focus of media coverage, it is no wonder that public opinion of Clinton would be entangled in the questions of privilege, access, and power associated with the email scandals, even for those who did not fully buy into the charges of corruption and dishonesty that the Trump campaign leveled against her. When Gallup conducted a survey over a two-month period in July to September 2016, they found that the topics the respondents most frequently associated with Clinton were the Clinton Foundation and email controversies. For Trump they were immigration and Mexico.[72] The electorate appears to have been paying attention to the media.

71 http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/blog/2016-election-study-published/
72 http://www.gallup.com/poll/195596/email-dominates-americans-heard-clinton.aspx

Immigration was a central topic in the 2016 campaign. For Donald Trump it was a cornerstone of his campaign and arguably the wedge issue that consolidated early support among his core followers and set his campaign on course for winning the GOP nomination. Immigration was the focus of Trump's speech when he announced his candidacy, stating:

> *The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. [Applause] Thank you. It's true, and these are the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.[73]*

In taking a hard line on immigration, Trump aligned himself with political groups that have long focused on the perceived dangers that immigrants pose to the safety and well-being of U.S. citizens. Trump brought these hard-line views into the forefront of U.S. politics and ultimately forced his GOP contenders to take a more nativist line on immigration during the campaign.

Prior to the 2016 election, immigration was seen as a particularly problematic issue for the GOP and their hopes to take the White House. The GOP's "autopsy" report after 2012 concluded that in order to win elections in the future, the Republican Party would have to reach out and win the support of the growing Hispanic portion of the electorate.[74] That report also specifically recommended that Republicans support comprehensive immigration reform. For GOP contenders, immigration offered a prisoner's dilemma of sorts: candidates who took a strong anti-immigration stance might increase their prospects in the primary election but in doing so would hurt their chances in the general election by alienating the growing portion of the electorate that opposes tighter immigration policies.[75] It was apparent that immigration would be a wedge issue in the 2016 election. Breitbart, for example, signaled many months before the start of the official campaign that the positions of GOP contenders on immigration would be closely scrutinized on this hot-button issue.[76]

During the general election, Trump's stance on immigration stood in stark contrast to those put forward by Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, who promoted comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to full citizenship, policies that prioritized keeping families together, the humane enforcement of immigration laws, and allowing immigrants to purchase health care under the Affordable Care Act.[77] Trump, on the other hand, called for building a wall along the southern U.S. border paid for by Mexico, tripling the number of immigration officers and deporting all undocumented immigrants, cracking down on 'sanctuary cities' that refuse to support federal deportation efforts, requiring employers to hire American workers first, ending birthright citizenship, and, following the San Bernardino shootings, banning foreign Muslims from entering

---

73 https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2015/06/17/trumps-mexican-rapists-will-keep-the-republican-party-out-of-the-white-house/?utm_term=.92719ad0dd89
74 https://www.scribd.com/doc/130999130/RNC-Growth-Opportunity-Book-2013
75 http://www.vox.com/2015/1/5/7494179/immigration-republican-president
76 http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/01/16/a-guide-to-2016-republican-candidates-positions-on-illegal-immigration/
77 https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/immigration-reform/; https://berniesanders.com/A-Fair-and-Humane-Immigration-Policy/

the United States.[78] Trump's proposed Muslim ban presented immigration as a central national security issue and resonated with a group of activists and conservatives who had long debated the economic and security dangers posed by Syrian immigrants. Trump's stance on immigration also resonated strongly with the white nationalists groups in the U.S. that oppose immigration on ethnic and cultural grounds.

In this section, we take a closer look at how immigration was discussed on the open web and Twitter between April 2015, two months before Trump announced his candidacy, and the election in November 2016. For this analysis, we focus our attention on a set of stories that include coverage of immigration. The data confirm that immigration was a key concern for conservatives online and that Breitbart emerged as a central node in the conservative discourse about immigration during the 18 months before the presidential election.
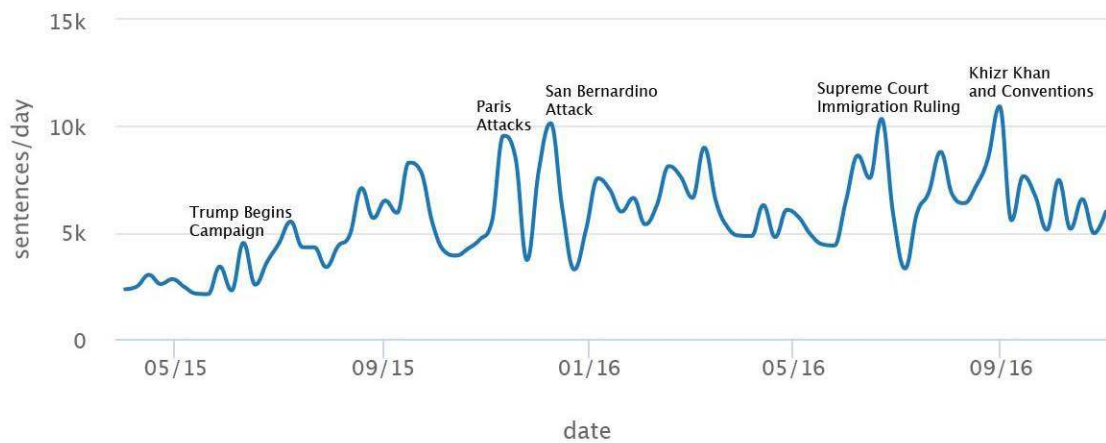
Figure 39: Number of sentences about immigration in open web media

Trump's immigration platform

As shown earlier in Figure 38, immigration was a prominent topic in the campaign, second only to Clinton's emails. Once Trump entered the race, immigration became a persistent topic of reporting and discussion, punctuated by several peaks of attention.

The largest peaks in coverage of immigration were driven by the Paris and San Bernardino terror attacks in November and December of 2015, the Supreme Court tie in U.S. v. Texas that effectively ended Obama's Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) immigration policy in June 2016 (Figure 39). The largest number of sentences about immigration revolved around Donald Trump's conflict with Gold Star father Khizr Khan in late August and early September of 2016.

---

78 https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions/immigration-reform; currently available at https://web.archive.org/web/20150819012409/https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions/immigration-reform

Figure 40: Focus of selected media sources on immigration

Breitbart devoted a significantly higher proportion of its coverage to immigration than the other media sources (Figure 40). Fox News, previously believed to play a central role in setting the conservative agenda and a kingmaker among up-and-coming Republican candidates, was less central in the immigration debate on the open web. Fox News had a more prominent presence in the immigration debate on Twitter but still lagged behind Breitbart. Breitbart published 2,300 stories on immigration in our open web data set, while Fox published just 1,128 (Table 30).
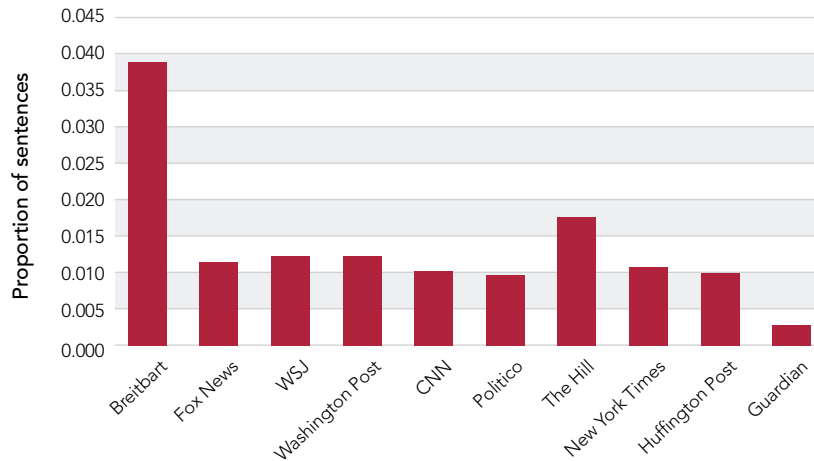
Looking next at the media sources that attracted the most links, a measure of attention within the immigration debate, Breitbart was the fourth most commonly cited media source, trailing only the Washington Post, New York Times, and Pew Research Center (Table 30). The Pew Research Center, which produces reports and surveys related to immigration, among other topics, was a key source of data and information for those on all sides of the immigration debate and was third overall by inlinks. Fox News was the 15th most popular by inlinks. As shown in Table 31, two of the top three and six of the top 20 most popular stories on the open web were published by Pew. The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), a group that advocates reduced immigration and that promotes policies very similar to those of the Trump campaign, was among the top 15 sources overall. CIS is known for espousing extreme positions on immigration, and the accuracy of their reports has been the subject of much criticism by scholars and fact-checking organizations.[79] The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled CIS a hate group.[80] Notably absent from this list is the Wall Street Journal, which was 11th in overall election coverage (see Table 6).

---

79 http://thehill.com/latino/328571-dhs-hires-incense-immigration-supporters

80 https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/03/23/hate-groups-center-immigration-studies-want-you-believe-they%E2%80%99re-mainstream

Media Source	Media Inlinks	Stories
Washington Post	723	2572
New York Times	719	2135
Pew Research Center	708	309
Breitbart	497	2300
Guardian	462	2795
Migration Policy Institute	412	357
Reuters	404	1169
Center for Immigration Studies	365	500
Politico	361	749
Wikipedia	346	776
CNN	338	1016
Huffington Post	328	1905
donaldjtrump.com	327	9
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	304	128
Fox News	297	1128
Vox	253	1027
USAToday	250	761
The Hill	242	509
Real Clear Politics	238	484
Washington Examiner	221	366

Table 30: Top media sources in the open Web immigration data by inlinks

The open web network map for the immigration topic demonstrates how important Breitbart was in terms of conservative discourse about immigration. Breitbart stands out as the central node on the conservative side of the network (Figure 41). These findings reinforce a theme that reappears in this study: the decreasing influence of traditional arbiters of conservative policy discourse, including Fox News and the Wall Street Journal. For immigration, this pattern is amplified.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

93

Story	Media Source	Inlink Count
Immigration Reform	donaldjtrump.com	249
More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S.	Pew Research Center	183
Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S., Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065	Pew Research Center	128
Hillary Clinton on immigration reform	hillaryclinton.com	124
U.S. plans raids to deport families who surged across border	Washington Post	114
SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR DONALD TRUMP	donaldjtrump.com	113
U.S. deportations of immigrants reach record high in 2013	Pew Research Center	97
Donald Trump's false comments connecting Mexican immigrants and crime	Washington Post	85
Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States	Migration Policy Institute	83
Executive Actions on Immigration	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	82
5 facts about illegal immigration in the U.S.	Pew Research Center	76
Center for Immigration Studies	Low-immigration, Pro-immigrant	Center for Immigration Studies	72
United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016	U.S. Customs and Border Protection	72
United States v. Texas	SCOTUSblog	69
Cuban immigration to U.S. surges as relations warm	Pew Research Center	68
Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	64
Gaps in Melania Trump's immigration story raise questions	Politico	64
U.S. border apprehensions of families and unaccompanied children jump dramatically	Pew Research Center	62
The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States	American Immigration Council	61
Trump: Undocumented Immigrants 'Have to Go'	MSNBC	55
Central American migrants face threat of violence after U.S. deportation	Guardian	54
Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero -- and Perhaps Less	Pew Research Center	52
Chinese Immigrants in the United States	Migration Policy Institute	48
Immigration policy: Review and decision this Term	SCOTUSblog	47
The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States	American Immigration Council	47
From A Stream To A Flood: Migrant Kids Overwhelm U.S. Border Agents	NPR	45
Here's Everyone Who's Immigrated to the U.S. Since 1820	Metrocosm	45
Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech	Real Clear Politics	43
The Budgetary and Economic Costs of Addressing Unauthorized Immigration: Alternative Strategies	American Action Forum	43
Average Time Pending Cases Have Been Waiting in Immigration Courts as of October 2016	Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse	43

Table 31: Top open web stories on immigration
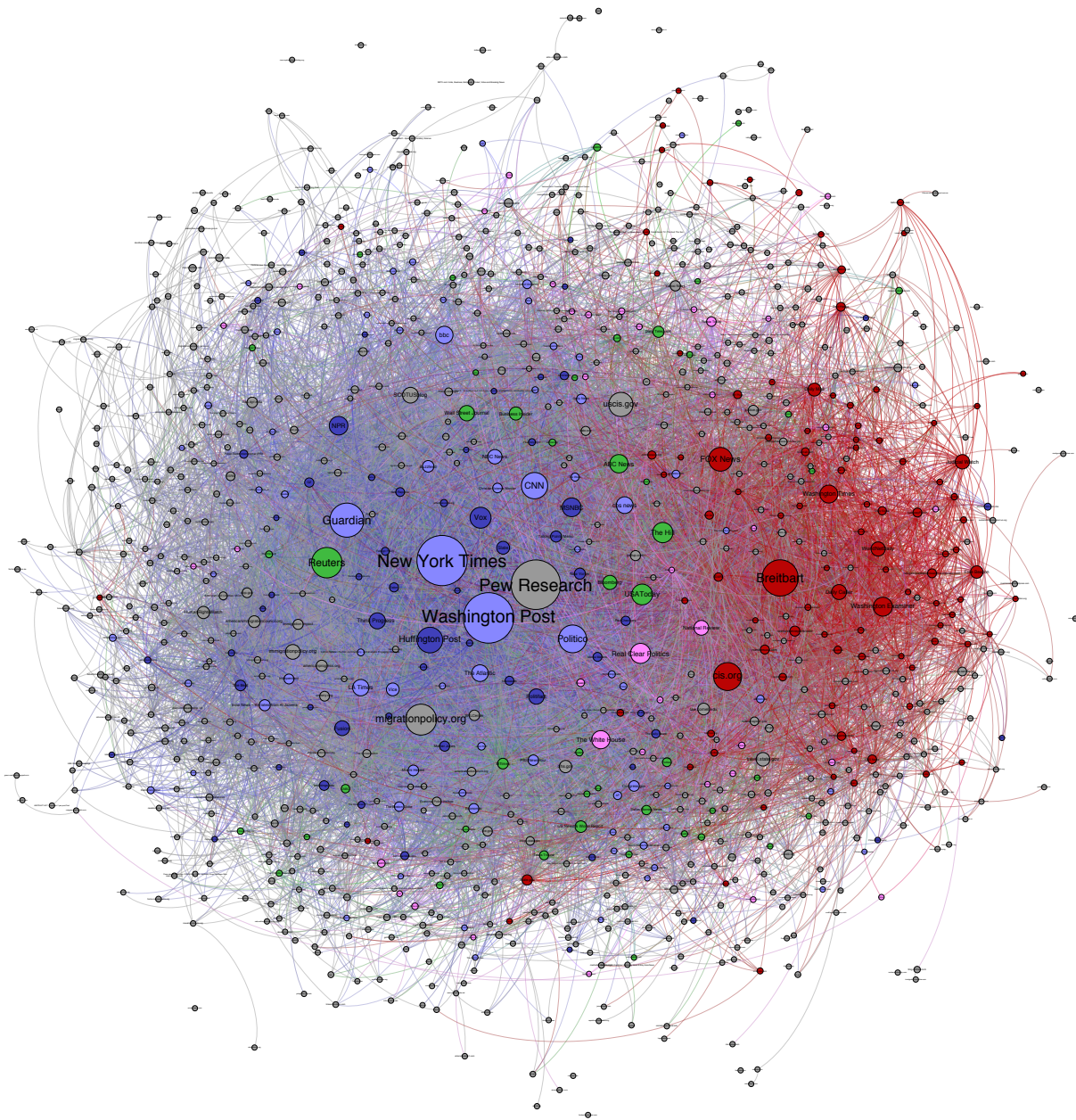
Figure 41: Network map based on inlinking for the topic of immigration (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)
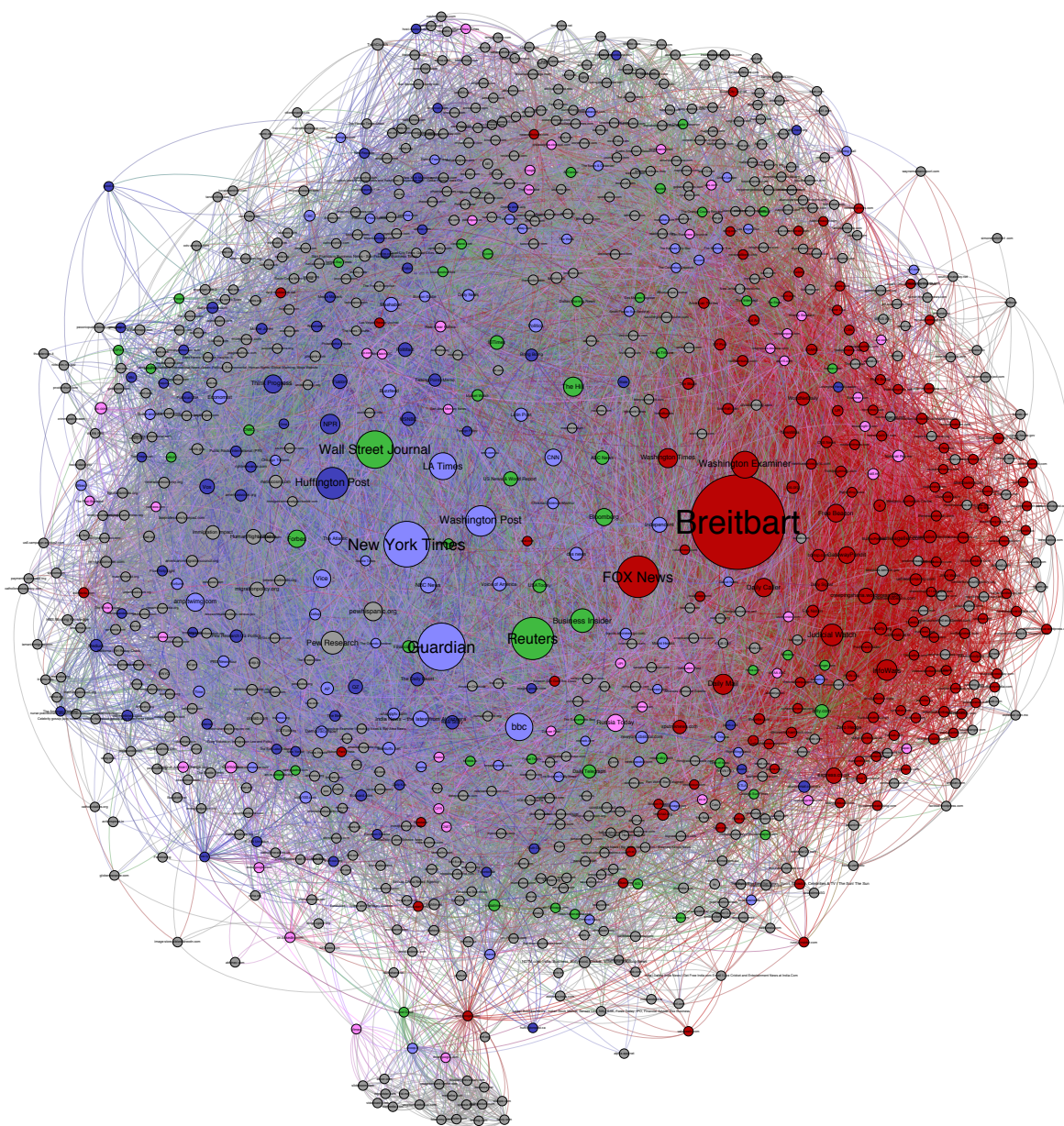
Figure 42: Network map based on Twitter sharing for the topic of immigration (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

Breitbart was even more influential in social media, according to our Twitter network data, where it was by far the most commonly shared media source (Table 32). This is also evident in the two network maps (Figures 41 and 42). Other outlets that served as the core of conservative media were also among the most shared sites on Twitter associated with immigration, including Fox News, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Examiner, the Washington Times, and the Daily Caller. Several less conventional sites are also there, including Judicial Watch and InfoWars. The liberal sources that were most prominent include the Guardian and Huffington Post.

Media Source	Twitter shares	Stories	Facebook shares
Breitbart	50913	1767	15037
Guardian	22718	1222	7732
New York Times	21668	1484	19122
Reuters	19585	928	1058
Fox News	19267	1154	2436
Wall Street Journal	16744	595	1167
Pew	13397	172	274
Huffington Post	13243	793	4814
Washington Post	12574	904	7477
Yahoo! News	11793	1044	2906
BBC	10628	1155	5582
LA Times	10439	484	1157
Washington Examiner	10393	1836	1581
Business Insider	8443	263	918
Judicial Watch	7283	74	2495
InfoWars	6556	207	1996
Daily Mail	6445	959	5636
NPR	5993	338	2007
The Hill	5828	368	1911
Washington Times	2810	508	875
Daily Caller	5349	263	923
Think Progress	5151	202	97
Free Beacon	4945	73	472
Vice	4784	225	602
Forbes	4701	258	538

Table 32: Top immigration media sources on Twitter

Understanding the role of immigration in the 2016 election is complicated by the many facets of the issue and the distinct frames used to describe the topic, each of which resonated with different subsets of the electorate. A review of the Breitbart immigration stories shared most often on Twitter suggests that fear of Muslims and Islam, expressed both in cultural and physical security terms, was their primary frame for immigration. The Breitbart stories also included economic arguments, such as that immigrants fill jobs that would otherwise go to U.S. citizens, or that immigrants place a burden on government services and often end up on welfare. An additional line of argument was that immigrants endanger the physical safety of U.S. citizens: the Breitbart stories argued that immigrants are more likely to commit crimes or acts of terrorism or introduce dangerous communicable diseases. A related but distinct assertion was that immigrants are coming in sufficient numbers that they will impose their customs, culture, and religion on the U.S. This fear appears to be highest in relation to Muslim immigrants, as seen in fears that large Muslim communities would institute Sharia law in the towns they inhabit.

Table 33 shows that the Breitbart stories most frequently shared on Twitter fell predominantly into the categories of physical security and cultural assimilation. The headlines appear to have been designed to propagate fear of immigrants in general, but with a heavy Islamophobic focus. Among the top 20 most shared stories, nine referenced Muslims, five referenced crime or terrorism, two mentioned disease, and eight cited specific large numbers of immigrants. It is worth mentioning that the majority of immigrants to the U.S. come from non-Muslim nations, and that Muslims represent a minority of refugees, despite conflicts in Syria and Yemen.[81]

More Than 347,000 Convicted Criminal Immigrants At Large In U.S.
London's Islamist-Linked Mayor Tells U.S. Audience: 'Immigrants Shouldn't Assimilate'
Mexico Helping Unvetted African Migrants to U.S. Border, Many From Al-Shabaab Terror Hotbed
Six Diseases Return To U.S. as Migration Advocates Celebrate 'World Refugee Day'
Paul Ryan Says U.S. Must Admit Muslim Migrants, Sends Kids to Private School that Screens Them Out
Immigration to Swell U.S. Muslim Population to 6.2 Million
Under Secretary Clinton, U.S. Permanently Resettled 31,000 Somali Migrants
Killer Illegal Immigrant Entered U.S. as 'Unaccompanied Child'
Federal Data: U.S. Annually Admits Quarter Of A Million Muslim Migrants
No Assimilation Needed in U.S., Obama Tells Millions of Migrants
More than 30 Immigrants Admitted to the U.S. Recently Implicated in Terrorism
Jeff Sessions Pushes Back Against Hillary Clinton's 'Radical' Suggestion of a Global Right to Immigrate
EXCLUSIVE: Illegal Immigrant with Drug-Resistant TB to Be Released into U.S., say Arizona Reps
Ten Times in Past Two Years Terrorists Slipped Through Immigration Process into U.S.
In Wake of Orlando Shooting, Paul Ryan Pushes Business Deregulation; Says U.S. Can't Pause Muslim Migration
Only Ten Percent of Migrant Influx Has Reached Us So Far, Says German Minister
U.S. Resettled Nearly Three Quarters of a Million Migrants from Countries that Execute Gays
30 Million Illegal Immigrants in U.S., Says Mexico's Former Ambassador
Since 9/11 U.S. Has Accepted Over 2 Million Migrants from Majority Muslim Nations
Ryan's Strategy to 'Keep the American People Safe' Fails: U.S. to Issue Visas to 300,000 Muslim Migrants

Table 33: Most commonly shared Breitbart stories on immigration

This manner of framing the immigration topic was not unique to Breitbart. The most shared stories from the Gateway Pundit were:

Droves of African Migrants Amass at Mexican Border Waiting U.S. Asylum Under Secret Obama Pact
Obama Changes Law: Allows Immigrants with Blistering STDs and Leprosy into U.S.
Muslim Immigrant Arrested After Purchasing Firearm for ISIS Attack on U.S. Soil
Trump Was Right=> At Least Nine American Members of ISIS Were Immigrants to U.S.

---

81 https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2017/04/20/430736/facts-immigration-today-2017-edition/

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

98

Among the stories most shared on Twitter from Fox News were concerns over Haitian and 'flocking' African immigrants:

ICE spends millions flying illegal immigrant children across U.S.
Con game? Immigrants lying about abuse to stay in the U.S.
Mexico warns Texas not to refuse its immigrants' babies U.S. birth certificates
US, Mexican governments helping Haitian migrants enter country, lawmaker says
US immigration policies allow gangs to thrive in violence-plagued NY community, say critics
Mexico issuing transit visas to African migrants flocking to U.S.-Mexico border

To study the prevalence of different frames across a broader range of messages on Twitter, we employ a supervised learning algorithm built into the Crimson Hexagon platform. The results are similar. About 8 percent of 21,267,706 Tweets analyzed were supportive of existing immigration policies, and another 16 percent were neutral. A majority of the tweets, 66 percent, were opposed to immigration. Within the anti-immigration category, we subdivided messages into four categories to elucidate the specific anti-immigration message being shared: 1) security reasons, 2) economic reasons, 3) social reasons, and 4) other.

The security category included tweets that associated immigrants and immigration with crime, terrorism, drugs, and disease. The economic category included tweets that associated immigrants and immigration with welfare abuse, job poaching, additional government spending, and personal and societal economic decline. The social category included concerns related to cultural deterioration or subjugation, the degradation of the English language, a lack of assimilation, and fear of a demographic shift toward larger immigrant populations. Tweets were sorted into the "other" category if they were generically anti-immigration or if the reasons cited did not fit into the aforementioned categories.
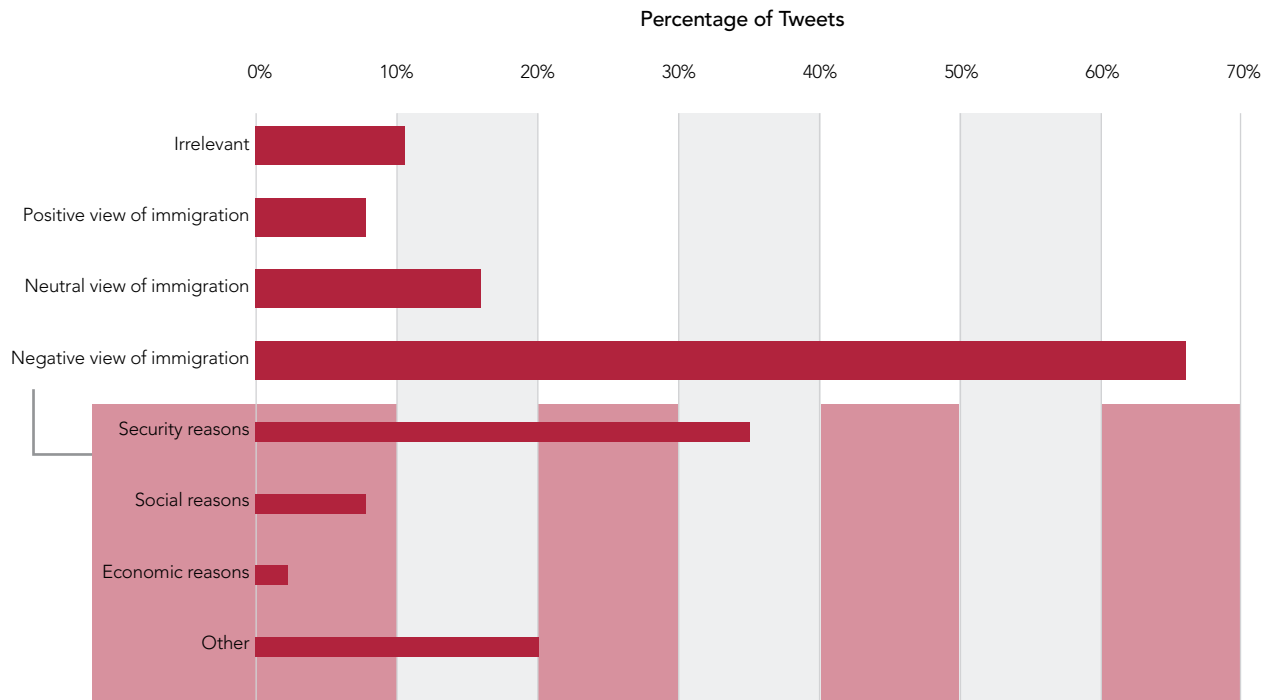
Percentage of Tweets

Figure 43: Breakdown of tweet sentiment related to immigration

Just over a third, 35 percent, of the total number of tweets analyzed were about security concerns related to immigration. Only 3 percent were linked to economic concerns, and 8 percent tied immigration to social decline. The "other" category accounted for 20 percent of tweets. This breakdown echoes that of links shared on social media, which, too, were largely negative and anti-immigration.

There is a broad and active debate over the underlying factors that fueled the intense anti-immigration sentiment during the 2016 campaign. The core of the debate is whether the anti-immigration fervor is rooted in economic uncertainty or in social and cultural forces driven, at least in part, by racism. Credible evidence has been presented for both explanations. Ultimately, it may be impossible to untangle the economic from the cultural given the complex ways in which they are interrelated. The results presented here suggest that social and cultural factors along with personal security fears gained more traction on social media, and that negative responses to immigration far surpassed positive or neutral messaging.

The Alt-Right & Immigration

The influence of the alt-right and white nationalists was a major concern during the 2016 campaign. Our data show that the alt-right and white nationalists had much less influence on the online conversation concerning immigration than is commonly believed. In our open web network, the alt-right and white nationalists do not occupy a central role. Vdare, a "race realism" site which had the most inlinks of any alt-right or white nationalist site, is far away from the center of the right cluster, in the top right corner of the map. This site also produced the most stories in our data among this group. None of the white nationalist sites were among the top 100 media sources by links. More than half of the alt-right and white nationalist sites in our data that published stories on immigration received zero or one links.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

100

The 2016 elections showed an unusual pattern of support for Trump. Some right-leaning outlets, most notably Breitbart, launched attacks targeted not only at Democrats and Trump's Republican rivals but also at media outlets that did not fully support Trump's candidacy. A review of the stories most widely shared during the primary season shows that Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, and Fox News were major targets of attack from Breitbart and related sites. The anti-elitist and anti-establishment narrative adopted by Trump and Breitbart led toward attacks on traditional institutions on both sides of the political spectrum.

Competition among the Republican contenders during the primaries had a strong impact on the shape of conservative media. Breitbart rose to serve as a focal point for Trump supporters and media organizations on the far right. This is arguably the largest recent change in the conservative media sphere, and the increasing role of Breitbart is clearly visible in our data. One important aspect that is less apparent in the network maps is the manner in which Breitbart served as a translator and bridge that helped to legitimate extreme views on topics such as immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments, bringing these views to a wider audience.

Breitbart and Fox News were the two principal poles of conservative media depicted in link economy maps. This structure remained stable over the duration of the election. Changes over time are more evident in the Twitter-based maps. Recall that the position of media sources on these maps is shaped by the proclivity for Twitter users to share media sources. The most engaged partisans on Twitter effectively voted on which media sources were complementary, as reflected in the maps by their proximity.

In October 2015, in the midst of the race for the GOP nomination, Fox News and Breitbart occupied similar areas of the map, with Fox News closer to the center and Breitbart farther to the right (Figure 44).
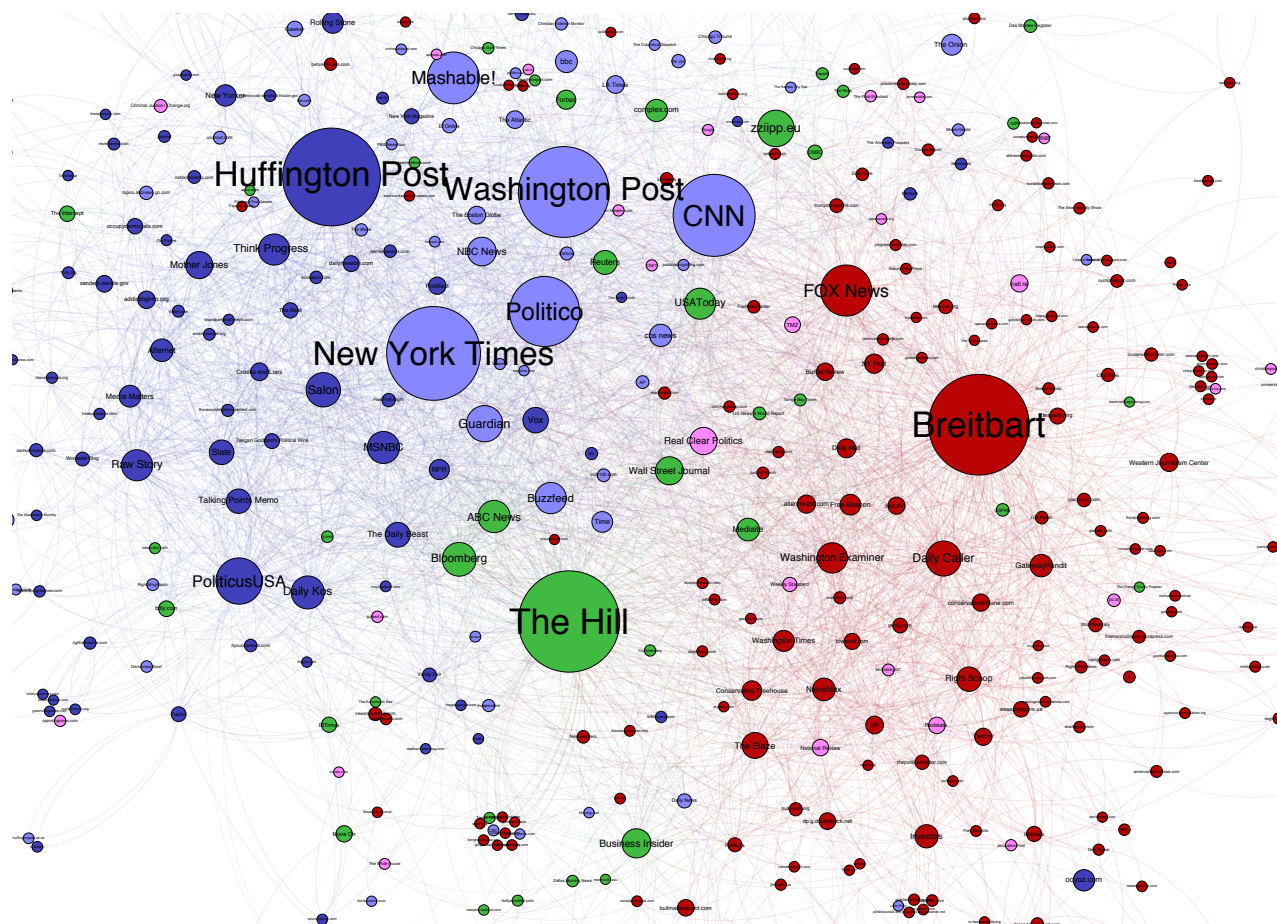
Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

101

Figure 44: Network map based on Twitter media sharing, October 2015 (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

By February, Breitbart had grown more prominent while Fox had declined. As seen in Figure 45, Fox News appears as a smaller node quite distant from the Breitbart-centered right. It reflects the fact that Fox News then received less Twitter attention than it did earlier or later in the campaign, and less attention in particular from users who also paid attention to the core Breitbart-centered sites. The March map is similar, and only over April and May did the overall attention paid to Fox and attention from Trump followers recover.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

102

This sidelining of Fox News in early 2016 coincided with sustained attacks against the network by Breitbart. The top 20 stories in the right-wing media ecology during January included, for example, "Trump Campaign Manager Reveals Fox News Debate Chief Has Daughter Working for Rubio." Many of the strongest attacks on Fox were linked to immigration. Within the immigration topic, the five most widely shared stories in which Breitbart referred to Fox were stories intended to brand Fox News as weak on immigration and to also unseat it as the central arbiter of conservative news. The narrative tied together Breitbart's stance on immigration with concerns about terrorism, Muslims, and corruption:

The Anti-Trump Network: Fox News Money Flows into Open Borders Group
NY Times Bombshell Scoop: Fox News Colluded with Rubio to Give Amnesty to Illegal Aliens
Google and Fox TV Invite Anti-Trump, Hitler-Citing, Muslim Advocate to Join Next GOP TV-Debate
Fox, Google Pick 1994 Illegal Immigrant To Ask Question In Iowa GOP Debate
Fox News At Facebook Meeting Is Misdirection: Murdoch and Zuckerberg Are Deeply Connected Over Immigration

The repeated theme of conspiracy, corruption, and media betrayal is palpable in these highly shared Breitbart headlines linking Fox News, Rubio, and illegal immigration.

These sustained attacks likely contributed to the apparent decline in the standing of Fox News among the most conservative voters. As Breitbart trumpeted at the time,[82] a survey reported that in February 2016 the perception of Fox News among conservative audiences was at its lowest point in more than three years.[83]

NY TIMES BOMBSHELL SCOOP: FOX NEWS COLLUDED WITH RUBIO TO GIVE AMNESTY TO ILLEGAL ALIENS

by **BREITBART NEWS**
27 Feb 2016

Breitbart ties media, Rubio, and immigration together

82 http://www.breitbart.com/big-journalism/2016/02/27/trump-effect-fox-news-channels-brand-takes-50-hit-among-republicans/
83 http://www.brandindex.com/article/fox-news-hits-more-two-year-perception-low-republicans%E2%80%8B

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University
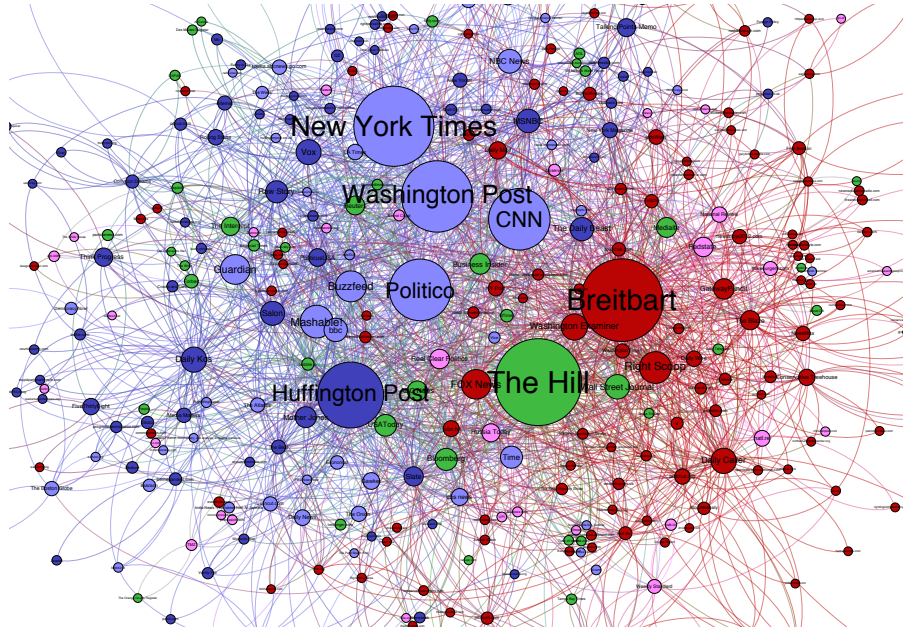
103

Figure 45: Network map based on Twitter media sharing, February 2016 (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

Our maps show that as the primaries ended, attention to Fox recovered and Fox became more closely integrated with Breitbart and the remainder of the right-wing media sphere. The primary target of the right-wing media then became all other traditional media. While the prominence of different media sources in the right-wing sphere varies when assessed by shares on Facebook and Twitter, the content and core structure, with Breitbart at the center, is stable across platforms. Even in the highly charged pre-election months, media sources outside the Breitbart-centered universe formed a tightly interconnected attention network, with major traditional mass-media and professional sources at the core. The right, by contrast, formed its own insular sphere centered on Breitbart.
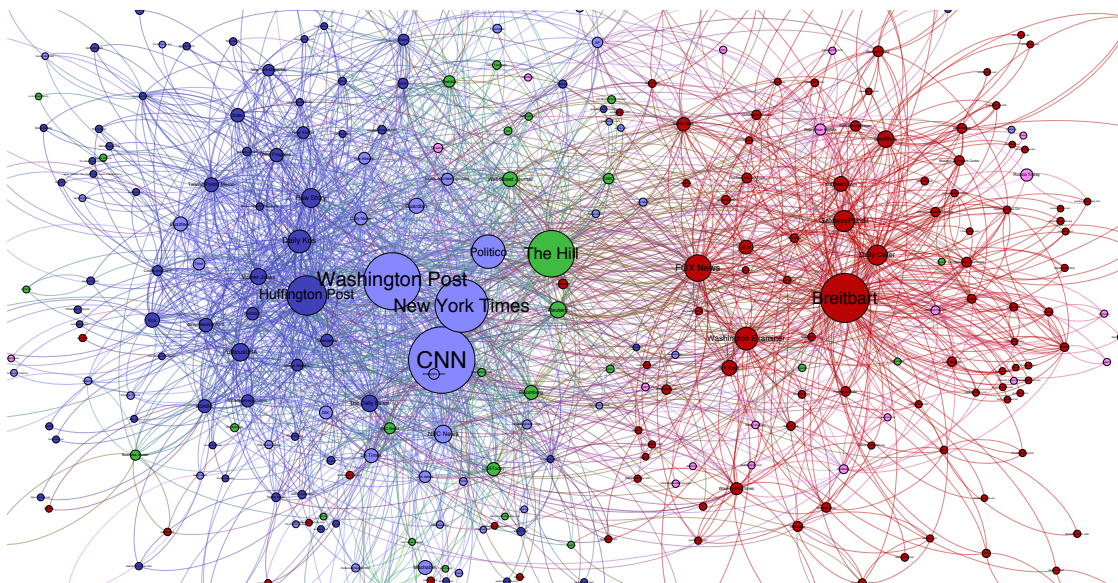

Figure 46: Network map based on Twitter media sharing, September 2016 (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

Over the summer and fall of 2016, the Clinton Foundation became a focus of media attention.[84] The Clinton Foundation story played two distinct roles. First, it focused attention after the Democratic Convention on allegations of Hillary Clinton's corruption, which proved an irresistible topic for traditional professional media seeking to establish their political independence. Second, it provided a key narrative within the right-wing media ecosystem to establish belief in both the personal corruption of Hillary Clinton and the "fact" that she had sold out U.S. policy interests to historical and current strategic adversaries: Russia and Islamists.

These dynamics originated within right-wing media, and their uptake by mainstream media reinforced the credibility of the far right's paranoid conspiracy theories. While the influence of this right-wing narrative around the Clinton Foundation on mainstream agenda setting was likely more important in influencing the outcome of the election, the dynamics within the right-wing media ecosystem likely better explain the stability of support for President Trump among his core supporters. This legitimation of a conspiracy narrative may help explain the president's own perspective on the world, given his apparent reliance on right-wing media as his primary source of news.

---

84 To explore the emergence of this topic, we created a subtopic in Media Cloud by searching the election topic for all stories that mention "Clinton Foundation" and treating the subtopic as if it exists only in those stories.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

105

Capturing Mainstream Media: Steve Bannon Harnesses the New York Times

July 2016 ended with the Democratic National Convention, with the normal post-convention bump in polls enhanced by the Khizr Khan speech and the controversy over Donald Trump's response to it. Hillary Clinton's poll advantage was at the highest it would ultimately be. Over the course of August, however, the topic of conversation had shifted to the Clinton Foundation, and in particular to allegations that Hillary Clinton had offered quid-pro-quo favors on State Department policy in exchange for donations to the Clinton Foundation. A review of the number of sentences related to scandals for either candidate shows quite clearly that the Clinton Foundation story had early prominence in April and May 2015, and then lay mostly dormant until it picked up in August. The story's re-emergence damaged Clinton, leading to her steady decline in the polls until the debates and the damaging Hollywood Access video improved her standing.
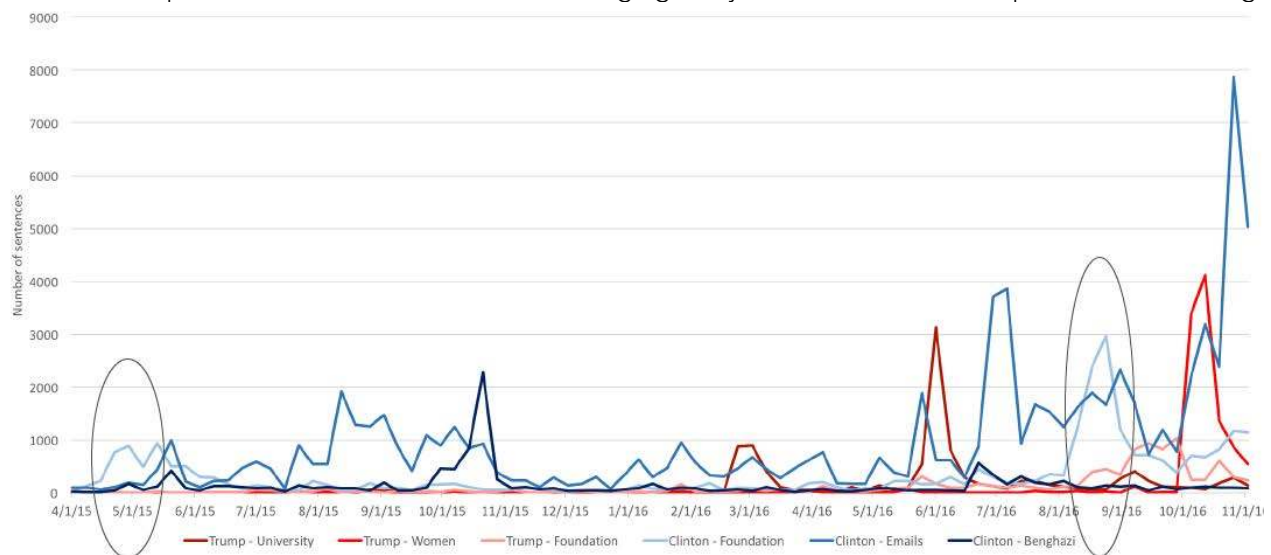

Figure 47: Sentences covering various topics over the course of the campaign in open web media. Clinton Foundation spikes are circled. The highest overall peaks correspond to Benghazi, Trump and women, and Clinton's emails.

The Clinton Foundation claims were not new. They were based primarily on a book titled *Clinton Cash: The Untold Story of How and Why Foreign Governments and Businesses Helped Make Bill and Hillary Rich*, published in May 2015 and represented in Figure 47 by the early spike in attention. Breitbart at the time described the author, Peter Schweizer, as "Breitbart Senior Editor at Large."[85] Schweizer was a co-founder with Steve Bannon of the organization that funded his research on the book, the Government Accountability Institute (GAI).[86] The GAI is, in turn, funded by Robert Mercer, an investor in Breitbart and a super PAC donor to the Trump campaign.[87] At the time the book was published, it received wide coverage. Most prominently, the New York Times published an extensive piece based on the research materials in an advance copy of the book, titled *Cash Flowed to Clinton Foundation Amid Russian Uranium Deal*.[88] Buried in the tenth paragraph of the story was this admission: "Whether the donations played any role in the approval of the uranium deal is unknown. But the episode underscores the special ethical challenges presented by the Clinton Foundation, headed by a former president who relied heavily on foreign cash to accumulate $250 million in assets even as his wife helped steer American foreign policy as secretary of state,

Third most linked-to article from the New York Times, based on an advanced copy of Clinton Cash

presiding over decisions with the potential to benefit the foundation's donors." Needless to say, it was the clear insinuation of corruption in the headline, not the buried admission that no evidence of corruption was in fact uncovered, that made the April 2015 story one of the Times' most tweeted stories during the summer of 2016.

Most shared Breitbart story on Facebook in May 2015

Despite the Times' "scoop," most of the discussion of the Clinton Foundation during the first wave of coverage, in the spring of 2015, centered in the right-wing media sphere. Breitbart, Free Beacon, the Washington Examiner, Fox News, Hot Air, Newsbusters, and the Daily Caller were among the top 10 sites mentioning the Clinton Foundation in May 2015, together with Politico, Yahoo News, and The Hill; the Times narrowly missed the top 10. By June 2015, the stories that continued to circulate did so almost exclusively in the right-wing media sphere. Despite not making the top 10 in number of stories, the New York Times was the third most shared site on Facebook in May of 2015, while all other top 10 sites were right-wing media. The Times' story about the Russian uranium deal was the reason, and it was the second most shared story on Facebook surrounding the Clinton

85 *Hillary Clinton's Brother Defends Haiti Gold Mine Deal: 'I Raise Money for a Lot of People.'* http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/03/20/hillary-clintons-brother-defends-gold-mine-deal-i-raise-money-for-a-lot-of-people/

86 Robert O'Harrow, Jr., Trump adviser received salary from charity while steering Breitbart News, Nov. 23, 2016, Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/trump-adviser-received-salary-from-charity-while-steering-breitbart-news/2016/11/22/75340778-af8a-11e6-8616-52b15787add0_story.html?utm_term=.56095a257fad.

87 Carrie Levin, *Reclusive mega-donor fueling Donald Trump's White House hopes* https://www.publicintegrity.org/2016/10/07/20307/reclusive-mega-donor-fueling-donald-trumps-white-house-hopes

88 Jo Becker and Mike McIntire, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/24/us/cash-flowed-to-clinton-foundation-as-russians-pressed-for-control-of-uranium-company.html?_r=0.

Foundation in May of 2015. The most shared link was a petition launched by Judicial Watch, to "Demand Answers on Clinton corruption."

One major role of stories from the Times and other traditional professional media was to offer legitimacy to the claims made by Schweitzer in *Clinton Cash*. Breitbart's top three most shared stories on Facebook in May 2015 were titled:

11 Explosive Clinton Cash Facts Mainstream Media Confirm are Accurate
REVEALED: Washington Post Uncovers 1,100 Hidden Foreign 'Clinton Cash' Donations
Devastating Timeline Reveals the Transfer of Half of U.S. Uranium Output to Russia as Hillary Clinton's Foundation Bags $145 Million

These stories relied on the Times story for confirmation. As the Trump campaign sought to resurface the Clinton Foundation allegations, that early 2015 New York Times story became the second most shared story about the Clinton Foundation on Facebook in August 2016.

How did this year-and-a-half-old story become so central to the campaign in August 2016? On the eve of the Democratic Convention, on July 23, Breitbart launched the movie version of Schweitzer's *Clinton Cash*, a version edited to appeal to supporters of Bernie Sanders. The site's announcement makes this intention as clear as can be. In its initial report on the release, Breitbart quoted MSNBC and the Guardian as sources asserting that the movie was "devastating" or "designed to stir up trouble" at the convention. The Breitbart story emphasized that "The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, ABC News, and other Establishment Media have verified and confirmed the book's explosive revelations that Hillary Clinton auctioned State Department policies to foreign Clinton Foundation donors and benefactors who then paid Bill Clinton tens of millions of dollars in speaking fees."[89, 90] Breitbart approvingly embraced Time magazine's report that it was "aimed at persuading liberals" and "likely to leave on-the-fence Clinton supporters who see it feeling more unsure about casting a vote for her." Throughout August, alongside the New York Times uranium story, the freely available YouTube distribution of *Clinton Cash* was the next most shared link about the Clinton Foundation on Facebook.

On July 15, 2016, Representative Marsha Blackburn sent a letter cosigned by 64 of her House Republican colleagues to the heads of the FBI, FTC, and IRS demanding that they investigate the allegations of corruption at the Clinton Foundation. A week later, the commissioner of the IRS wrote a perfunctory response, informing the representative that he had forwarded the letter to the IRS office responsible for examining exempt organizations.[91] Four days later, on July 26, the second day of the Democratic Convention, the Daily Caller reported on this letter under the headline "EXCLUSIVE: IRS Launches Investigation Of Clinton Foundation."[92] The next day, Fox News, crediting the Daily Caller's "exclusive," reported under the headline "IRS looking into Clinton Foundation 'pay-to-play' claims" that "The IRS confirmed in a letter it is looking into claims of 'pay-to-play' practices at the Clinton Foundation, after dozens of Republican lawmakers requested a review of potential 'criminal conduct' at the organization founded by the family at the center of this week's Democratic National Convention."

89 http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/04/26/11-explosive-clinton-cash-facts-mainstream-media-confirm-are-accurate/

90 Free Global Broadcast of '*Clinton Cash*' Documentary Online at Breitbart.com, http://www.breitbart.com/2016-presidential-race/2016/07/22/global-airing-clinton-cash-documentary-breitbart-email-sign/.

91 Letter from IRS Commissioner John A. Koskinen to Representative Marsha Blackburn, July 22, 2016. https://www.scribd.com/document/319384834/IRS-Response-Clinton-Foundation-July-2016. The entire relevant text of the letter was ""We have forwarded the information you submitted to our Exempt Organizations Examinations Program in Dallas. This program considers all referrals and will send you a separate acknowledgment letter when it receives your information."

92 http://dailycaller.com/2016/07/26/exclusive-irs-launches-investigation-of-clinton-foundation/.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

108

On July 29, the New York Post published an editorial asking why Hillary hadn't boasted about the foundation at the convention. The Post speculated that it was because the foundation was being investigated by the FBI over "intersections" between the foundation and the State Department, "like her role in handing Russia exclusive mining rights to 20 percent of U.S. uranium reserves via a company that donated millions to the foundation."[93] This editorial was, in turn, referred to by Fox News[94] and Breitbart.[95] The next day Fox News reported that "'*Clinton Cash*' Author Doubts IRS Will Thoroughly Investigate Clinton Foundation."[96] The pattern here is important and distinct. The stories are repeated and linked to internally within the network of sites, so that they receive reinforcement through repetition and variation of sources. In combination, these tend to give the story credence, as well as to reinforce recall. This aspect of a network of sites reciprocally citing each other and reinforcing each other characterizes what we understand as network propaganda.

The central role of the Daily Caller, and the legitimating role of the New York Times 2015 story, become clear on the map of the Clinton Foundation stories in the last week of July 2016 (Figure 48). The distinct separation usually evident between the right-wing media sphere and the rest is gone, and instead the Daily Caller, Breitbart, and Fox are all clustered around the New York Times and are linking to its 2015 coverage as a source of validation for their current set of stories. The large Scribd node represents links to the IRS letter in response to the Blackburn letter.
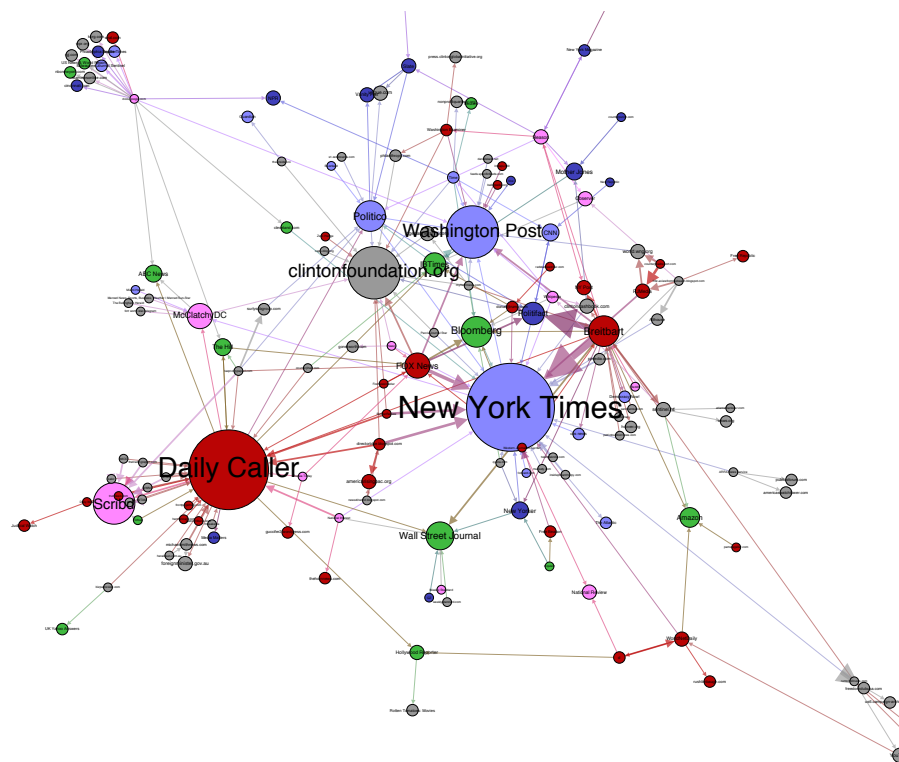
Figure 48: Online linking practices for stories about the Clinton Foundation during the Democratic Convention, July 25 to August 1, 2016 (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

---

93 http://nypost.com/2016/07/29/why-didnt-the-democrats-even-mention-the-clinton-foundation/.

94 http://nation.foxnews.com/2016/07/30/why-didn-t-democrats-even-mention-clinton-foundation

95 http://www.breitbart.com/2016-presidential-race/2016/07/30/ny-post-why-didnt-the-democrats-even-mention-the-clinton-foundation

96 http://insider.foxnews.com/2016/07/30/irs-launches-investigation-clinton-foundation-clinton-cash-author-reacts.

The direction and size of the links in the map also show the extent to which Breitbart and Fox linked to the Daily Caller and also how all of them linked to the New York Times and the Washington Post to legitimate the claims. The selective and strategic use of media usually criticized by the right is highlighted by the links from Breitbart, Fox News, and the Trump campaign site to PolitiFact during this week in late July 2016. These links primarily focused on an April 2015 PolitiFact assertion that a specific claim in Schweitzer's book was truthful: Bill Clinton was indeed paid $500,000 or more for a total of 13 speeches, only two of which occurred while Hillary was not secretary of state. Needless to say, the links from right-wing sources to PolitiFact did not include a June 30, 2016, report that Trump's claim that Clinton was paid to approve the Russian uranium deal was mostly false.[97]

If we look at the number of sentences that mentioned the Clinton Foundation or *Clinton Cash* over the period from mid-July to mid-September, when this issue was most salient, the pattern becomes clear: Right-wing media coverage of this topic was more extensive during this period and generally preceded coverage by other parts of the media ecosystem by a day or two. And, perhaps counterintuitively, the most pronounced effect was on center-left media—that is, mostly traditional professional media coded by our partisan retweet metric as having been tweeted at a roughly 3:2 ratio by Hillary supporters and Trump supporters.
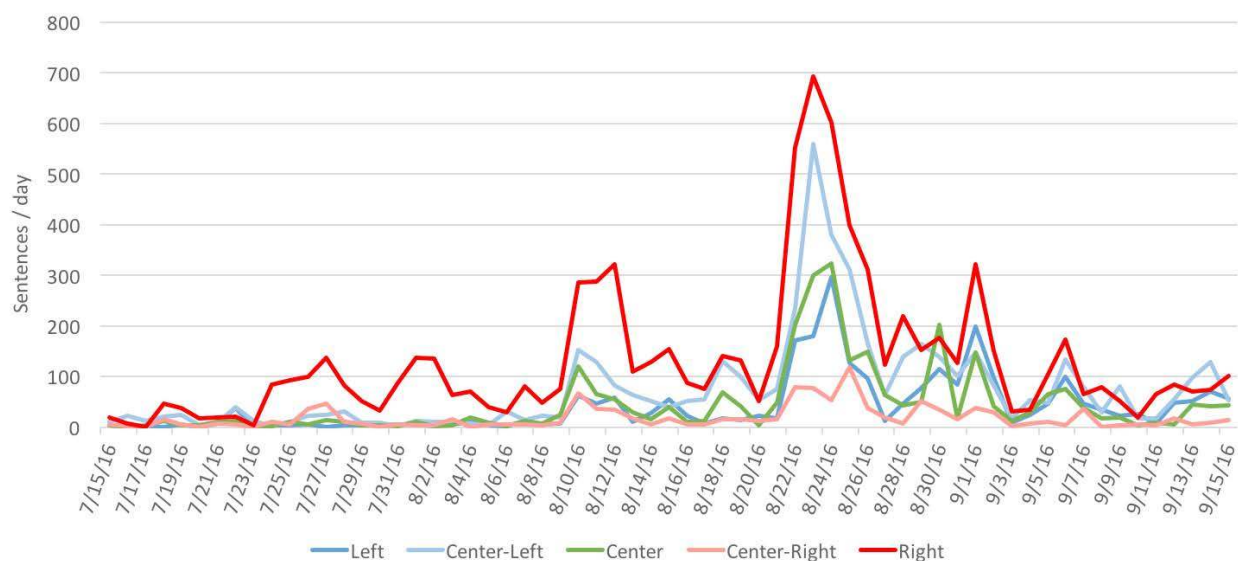
Figure 49: Sentences mentioning Clinton Foundation or Clinton Cash in open web media from mid-July to mid-September, 2016

We see the first bump in right-wing coverage corresponding to the July 23 release of *Clinton Cash*. It can be seen more clearly if we zoom in on the period just before the August 9 bump.

97 http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jun/30/donald-trump/donald-trump-inaccurately-suggests-clinton-got-pai/.
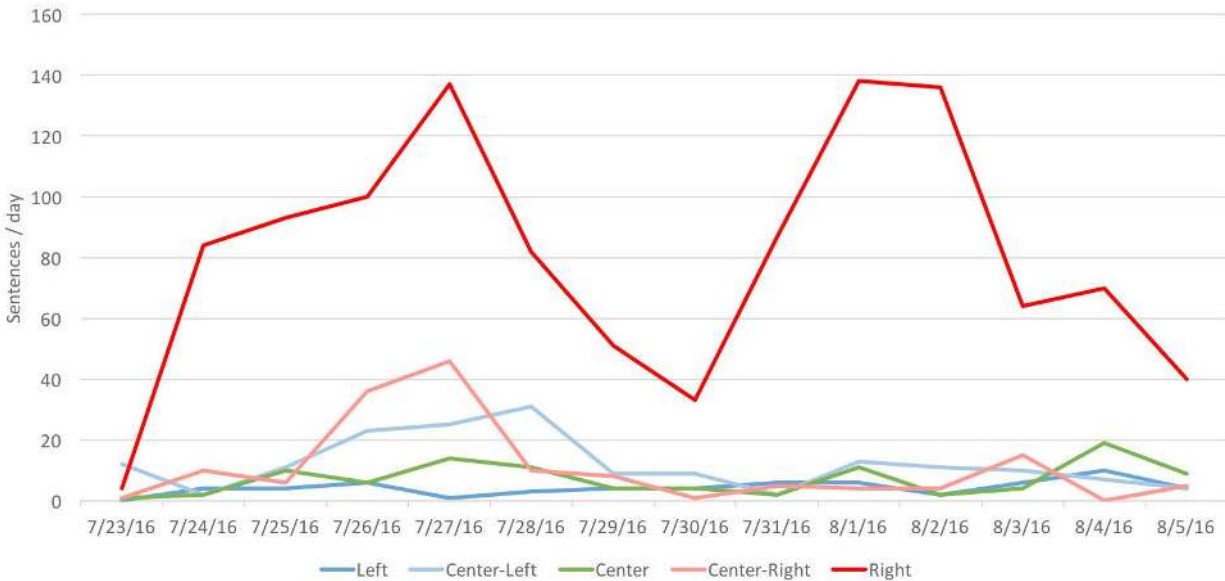
Figure 50: Sentences mentioning Clinton Foundation or Clinton Cash in open web media from July 23 to August 5, 2016

Because these graphs describe the number of sentences across media quintiles that were *published* on these days, it does not include the influence of stories published much earlier in the campaign period that were linked to—most importantly, the New York Times story about the Uranium One deal. This influence comes across very clearly when we observe the word cloud that typifies the right-wing media discussion of the Clinton Foundation: the most distinct word in these media is "uranium."

Figure 51: Words used most frequently by right and center-left open web media mentioning Clinton Foundation or Clinton Cash from July 23 to August 5, 2016

As the sentence-count line chart (Figure 49) makes clear, the next major movement in the story occurred August 7–9, 2016. On August 7, the Rebuilding America super PAC published a 30-second television ad reviving the allegations—an ad that the Washington Post fact-checking process gave three Pinocchios.[98] On August 9, Judicial Watch, a nonprofit that had been litigating in search of Clinton corruption stories since 1994 and was being funded primarily by the Scaife foundations (founded by Richard Mellon Scaife, whom the New York Times described as "one of the leading financiers of the right-wing effort to bring down the

---

98 Pro-Trump ad suggests Clinton Foundation donations contributed to Clintons' net worth https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/08/10/pro-trump-ad-suggests-clinton-foundation-donations-contributed-to-clintons-net-worth/?utm_term=.c91243d03dc7

Clintons"[99]) released a batch of emails it had obtained through Freedom of Information Act litigation. Judicial Watch alleged that these emails exposed specific communications from Doug Band to Huma Abedin and Cheryl Mills at the State Department seeking special access for Gilbert Chagoury, whom Judicial Watch describes in its press release as "a close friend of former President Bill Clinton and a top donor to the Clinton Foundation."[100] As this visualization of the words shared across the right and the center-left makes plain, these allegations, the names, and the Judicial Watch litigation to release emails were shared across the media ecosystem.

● **Right**

schweizer peter breitbart scandal pay-to-play comey pledged underway teneo washington documentary bestselling crime criminal lynch fox russian uranium james loretta judge then-secretary caller document racketeering launch consulting giuliani laundering prosecutor shady jeanine troubling america's calling russia

● **Center Left**

conservative overlap family's lawsuit renewed interacting controversial reward pac entities adviser staffers scrutiny super economic improper election cozy inappropriate wins shed sellers 1990s president's benghazi accusing attacking gop griffin rnc interviewed disclosure trusted lobbyists links fernando

Figure 52: Words used most frequently by right and center-left open web media mentioning Clinton Foundation or Clinton Cash from August 7 to August 15, 2016

The Internet Archive's selection of television transcripts[101] indicates that television coverage that mentioned the Clinton Foundation before August 10 was seen almost purely on Fox News, Fox Business, and local television Fox affiliates. After August 10, CNN joined the Fox networks, but on local channels the story remained primarily the focus of Fox affiliates.
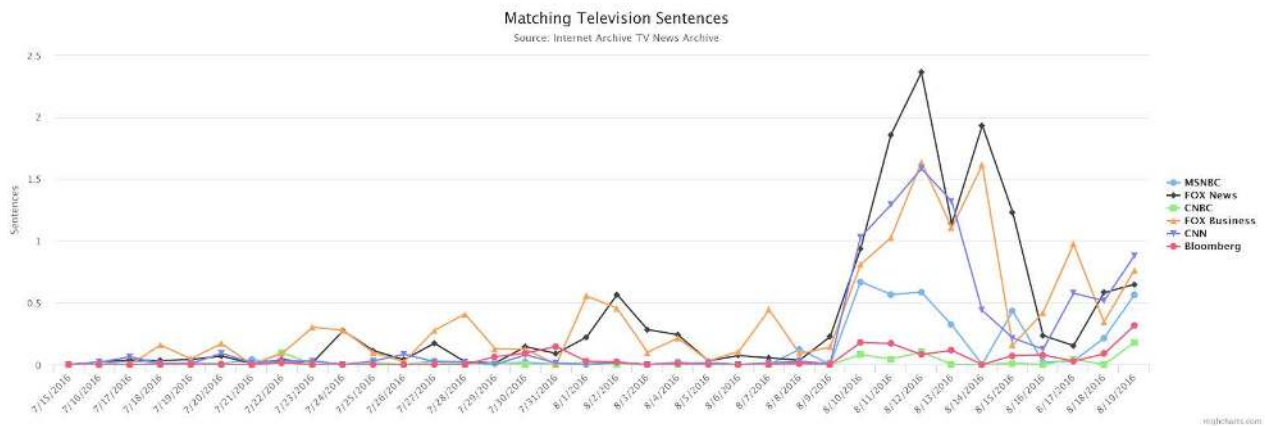
Figure 53: Television mentions of Clinton Foundation by national networks from July 15 to August 19, 2016

99 https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/us/politics/judicial-watch-hillary-clinton.html.

100 http://www.judicialwatch.org/press-room/press-releases/judicial-watch-uncovers-new-batch-hillary-clinton-emails/.

101 Analysis by the GDELT Project using data from the Internet Archive Television News Archive.

Figure 54: Television mentions of Clinton Foundation by network affiliates from July 15 to August 19, 2016

By August 18, although coverage had declined, the reporting seems to have raised enough questions to inspire a formal response: Bill Clinton announced that the foundation would stop taking foreign donations if Hillary Clinton was elected president.[102] Bill Clinton's promise did little to quiet the story. On August 22, Donald Trump publicly called for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the claims of a corrupt quid-pro-quo relationship between the State Department and the Clinton Foundation. That same day Bill Clinton published a more detailed letter stating that if Hillary was elected, the foundation would cease accepting foreign donations and transition out of operations that depended on matching funds from countries where its programs operated, and that he would step down from a position on the foundation's board and stop raising funds for the foundation.[103] Also on August 22, Judicial Watch released a second batch of emails. This string of events attracted even more coverage, including in a broad range of sources outside the right-wing sphere.

The number of sentences referring to the Clinton Foundation was well over twice as large August 22 to 26 as it had been during the prior August 10 to 12 peak. Television coverage, too, was substantially higher (except at the outlier Fox News affiliate in Raleigh, North Carolina, which had covered the first round extensively), and this time, among the national networks, CNN and MSNBC covered the story as much as Fox News did. CBS and the other networks' local affiliates also covered the story extensively.

---

102 http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/291911-clinton-foundation-to-alter-donation-rules-if-hillary

103 https://www.clintonfoundation.org/blog/2016/08/22/empowering-people-build-better-futures-themselves-their-families-and-their

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

113

Figure 55: Television mentions of Clinton Foundation by national networks from July 30 to August 31, 2016
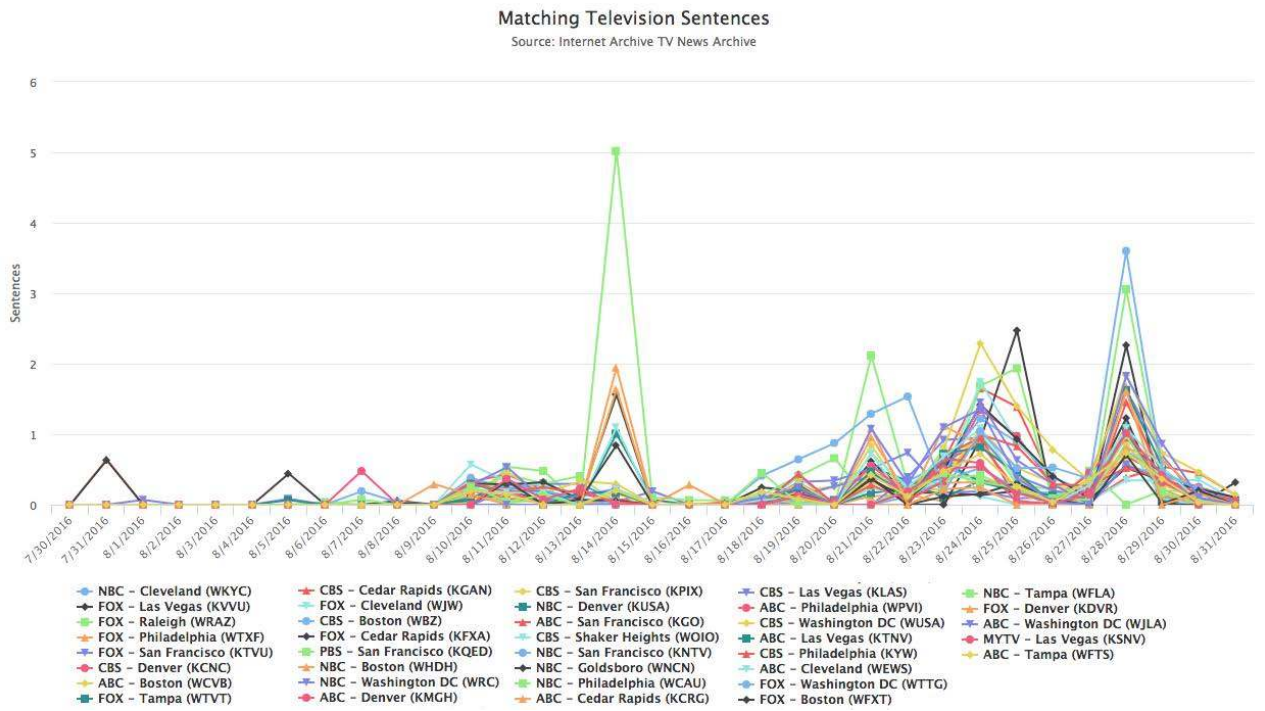
Figure 56: Television mentions of Clinton Foundation by network affiliates from July 30 to August 31, 2016

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

114

Matching Television Sentences
Source: Internet Archive TV News Archive

- FOX – Cedar Rapids (KFXA): **2.4735**
- PBS – San Francisco (KQED): **1.9359**
- CBS – Washington DC (WUSA): **1.401**
- CBS – Cedar Rapids (KGAN): **1.3877**
- CBS – Denver (KCNC): **0.977**
- NBC – Goldsboro (WNCN): **0.9303**
- CBS – Shaker Heights (WOIO): **0.892**
- CBS – Boston (WBZ): **0.8873**
- CBS – Philadelphia (KYW): **0.8299**
- CBS – Las Vegas (KLAS): **0.6312**

- CBS – San Francisco (KPIX): **0.5218**
- FOX – Washington DC (WTTG): **0.519**
- ABC – Las Vegas (KTNV): **0.4535**
- ABC – Cedar Rapids (KCRG): **0.4217**
- NBC – Washington DC (WRC): **0.4078**
- ABC – Washington DC (WJLA): **0.377**
- ABC – Cleveland (WEWS): **0.3453**
- FOX – Boston (WFXT): **0.3076**
- FOX – Raleigh (WRAZ): **0.2907**
- NBC – Boston (WHDH): **0.2692**

- ABC – Tampa (WFTS): **0.2546**
- FOX – Philadelphia (WTXF): **0.2529**
- NBC – Tampa (WFLA): **0.235**
- NBC – San Francisco (KNTV): **0.2184**
- ABC – Denver (KMGH): **0.211**
- FOX – Las Vegas (KVVU): **0.1953**
- NBC – Denver (KUSA): **0.1951**
- NBC – Philadelphia (WCAU): **0.1936**
- FOX – Tampa (WTVT): **0.1909**
- NBC – Cleveland (WKYC): **0.1748**

- MYTV – Las Vegas (KSNV): **0.1691**
- ABC – Boston (WCVB): **0.1645**
- FOX – San Francisco (KTVU): **0.0898**
- ABC – San Francisco (KGO): **0.0583**
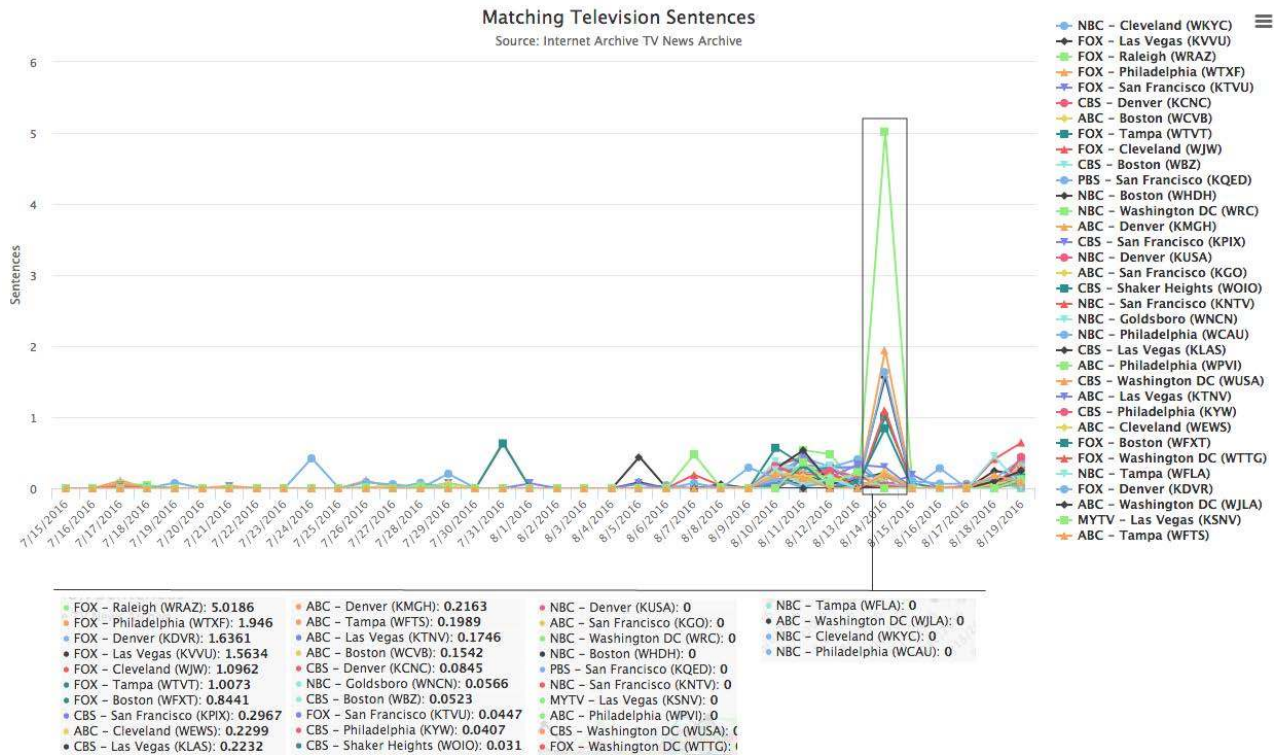- ABC – Philadelphia (WPVI): **0.0354**
- FOX – Cleveland (WJW): **0**
- FOX – Denver (KDVR): **0**

Figure 57: Television mentions of Clinton Foundation by network affiliates from July 30 to August 31, 2016; August 25 values highlighted

A map of media attention August 22 to 26 shows that while the New York Times and the Washington Post continued to be major nodes, Judicial Watch played a key role in the narrative with its new trove of emails obtained under FOIA. CNN and Politico, which were generally prominent in the debates but had not been during the earlier spike in interest in the Clinton Foundation on August 9–10, took a more prominent role. So did the AP and the Wall Street Journal, neither of which previously played a very significant role. The most linked-to stories in the New York Times on those days included a general background story covering the Bill Clinton announcement about his stepping down if Hillary was elected, the Trump campaign's emphasis on the foundation, and a story on the Judicial Watch email release.
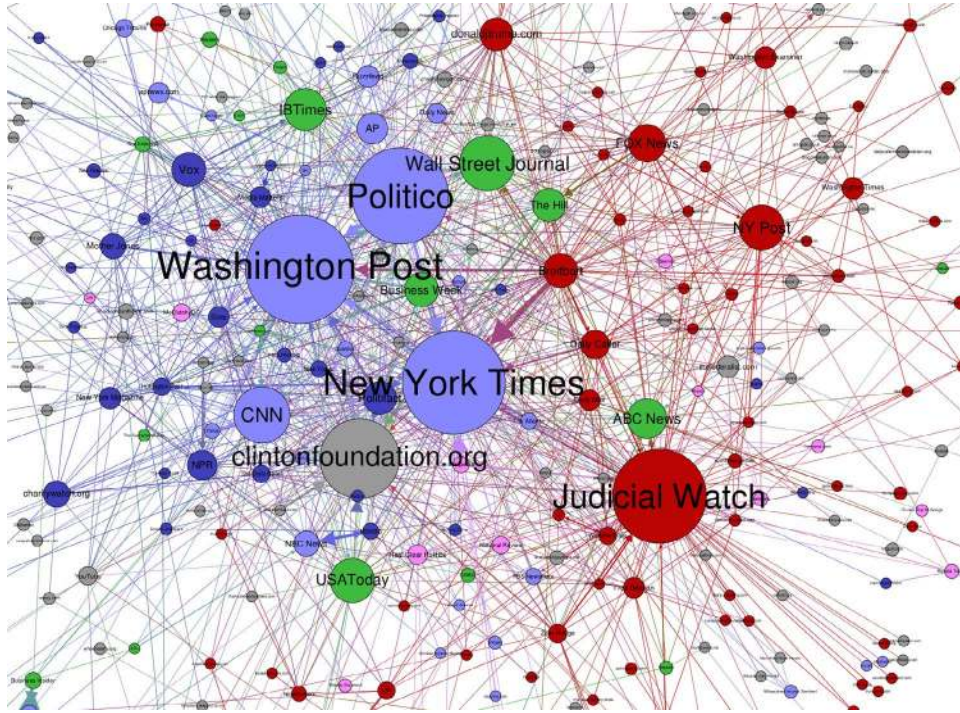
Figure 58: Directed linking behavior of media sources within the Clinton Foundation topic from August 22 to August 29, 2016
(explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

The social media attention, by contrast, centered on Judicial Watch and, to a lesser extent, Breitbart, as Figure 59, with nodes sized by Facebook shares, makes clear.
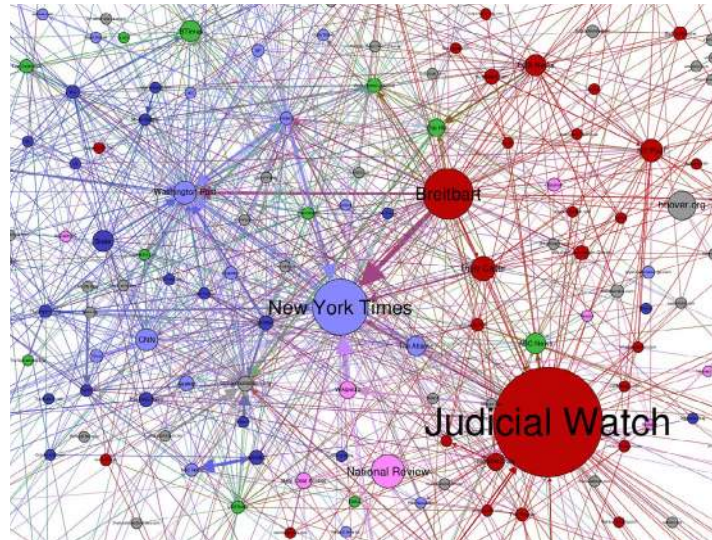
Figure 59: Directed linking behavior of media sources shared on social media within the Clinton Foundation topic from August 22 to August 29, 2016; nodes sized by Facebook shares (explore this map in higher resolution; warning, file is large)

The stories from traditional professional media over this period underscore the difficulty mainstream media faced in reporting on an issue of such sensitivity and complexity in the teeth of a sustained communications effort from a motivated party: the right-wing media ecosystem. The most linked-to and Facebook-shared story from the Washington Post, for example, was titled "Emails reveal how foundation donors got access to Clinton and her close aides at State Dept."[104] The opening paragraph read: "A sports executive who was a major donor to the Clinton Foundation and whose firm paid Bill Clinton millions of dollars in consulting fees wanted help getting a visa for a British soccer player with a criminal past." The *16th and 17th paragraphs* read:

> *There is no indication from the emails that Abedin intervened on behalf of Casey Wasserman, an L.A. sports executive who in 2009 asked Band for help getting a visa for a British soccer star trying to visit Las Vegas. Band indicated that the office of Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) had already declined to help, given the player's criminal record. A Boxer spokesman described the request to her office as "routine" but one with that Boxer did not assist, "given the facts of the case."*

> *"Makes me nervous to get involved but I'll ask," Abedin wrote to Band in May 2009 after he forwarded to her an email from Wasserman.*

> *Band responded: "then don't."*

The most linked-to and Facebook-shared story within the Clinton Foundation topic

---

104 http://wapo.st/2bxLDlH?tid=ss_tw-bottom&utm_term=.1674d0f26633

In other words, for those brave few who read past the intervening 15 paragraphs, the story would more accurately have begun: "Emails reveal that donors sought access, but Clinton aides refused them when they deemed the requests inappropriate." The fifth paragraph, which followed two more claims of potential conflicts, stated: "The emails show that, in these and similar cases, the donors did not always get what they wanted, particularly when they sought anything more than a meeting." This and many other stories used the three events—the Trump call for an investigation, the Judicial Watch email release, and the Bill Clinton email about his role in the foundation—together as evidence that the foundation was an appropriate focus of news coverage. Just as the New York Times had done with the Uranium One story, the Washington Post here led with the insinuation of potential corruption—a much juicier angle—rather than with the absence of evidence of actual wrongdoing, and then it buried that truthful concession deep in the middle of the story. This is simply the framing corollary to the "If it bleeds, it leads" maxim. In this case, Judicial Watch and the Trump campaign were doing what media activists have been doing forever: staging events that would motivate professional media as a way of setting the agenda. What we see here is a successful operation to put red meat too juicy to pass up in front of traditional media.
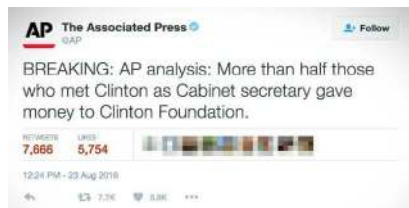
Associated Press tweet, August 23, 2016
(deleted two weeks later)

The fact that the traditional professional media were the targets of intentional manipulation does not absolve them of responsibility for checking the materials put in front of them, much less of supporting a Trump campaign narrative. In this regard, the Associated Press offers an example of particularly poor reporting. The unusually large presence of the AP as a node in the link economy that week is due to a story that appeared on Twitter as follows: "BREAKING AP Analysis: More than half those who met Clinton as Cabinet secretary gave money to Clinton Foundation." The study was quickly debunked, and within two weeks, the AP had issued a retraction of that assertion and deleted the tweet. The gist of the story was that the AP uncovered 154 people without official positions with whom Clinton had met, and of these 85 had connections with foundation donors. The AP story focused on Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunnus, an introduction to the Kennedy Center's chairman at a Kennedy Center awards ceremony, and a conversation with the head of the MAC Cosmetics AIDS charity arm about raising funds for an AIDS education campaign. As one critic of the AP story put it the morning after the story came out: "The State Department is a big operation. So is the Clinton Foundation. The AP put a lot of work into this project. And it couldn't come up with anything that looks worse than helping a Nobel Prize winner, raising money to finance AIDS education, and doing an introduction for the chair of the Kennedy Center. It's kind of surprising."[105]

But as the preceding histograms make clear, by the time the AP issued the retraction of the headline (though not the story itself), the spikes in coverage had already occurred, and the story had made its impact. In particular, a big spike in television coverage on non-Fox-affiliated local television channels happened on August 24, immediately after the AP story and after New York Times and Washington Post stories on August 22 and 23. This coverage, in turn, brought the issue to a broader public.

The critical lesson of this chapter of the Clinton Foundation story is that the manipulation was not a result of Facebook fake news or of the fragmentation of public discourse. Precisely because the majority of Americans do not get their news from Facebook or from the right-wing media ecosystem, it was necessary for the actors

---

105 Matthew Yglesias, The AP's big expose on Hillary meeting with Clinton Foundation donors is a mess. https://www.vox.com/2016/8/24/12618446/ap-clinton-foundation-meeting (Aug. 24, 2016).

on the right—Bannon and Schweitzer through GAI, Breitbart, Fox, the Daily Caller, and Judicial Watch—to frame a story that was attractive enough for mainstream media to cover, and to cause mainstream voters to doubt Hillary Clinton's integrity. There simply are not enough voters who get their news largely from the right-wing media ecosystem to win an election. Right-wing media must harness broader parts of the ecosystem to achieve their strategic goals. In this case, they kept the story alive with several distinct media "hits"—the release of a book while offering careful "exclusive" access to major newspapers; a film; multiple releases of email dumps; and responses by political actors to these media events (from the congressional representatives' letter to the IRS to Donald Trump's public statements). Right-wing media succeeded in pushing the Clinton Foundation to the front of the public agenda precisely at the moment when Clinton would have been anticipated to (and indeed did) receive her biggest bounce in the polls: immediately after the Democratic convention.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

119

Clinton Foundation Within the Right-Wing Ecosystem: Saudis, Muslims, & Russians

As the link map from the last week of August 2016 makes clear, the Daily Caller played a significant role in setting the agenda around the Clinton Foundation (Figure 60). A comparison of the network maps in July, August, September, and October of 2016 of the Clinton Foundation subtopic of our data set, showing only the right-wing stories about the Clinton Foundation, demonstrates how the stories linked to one another (Figure 59). The maps show quite clearly that in August, when mainstream media were focused on the Clinton Foundation story, the right-wing media were more sparsely connected, directing most of their attention to, linking to, and amplifying the legitimating stories in the mainstream press. In July, September, and October, by contrast, the right-wing network was more densely interconnected, and the Daily Caller and Breitbart played a particularly central role.
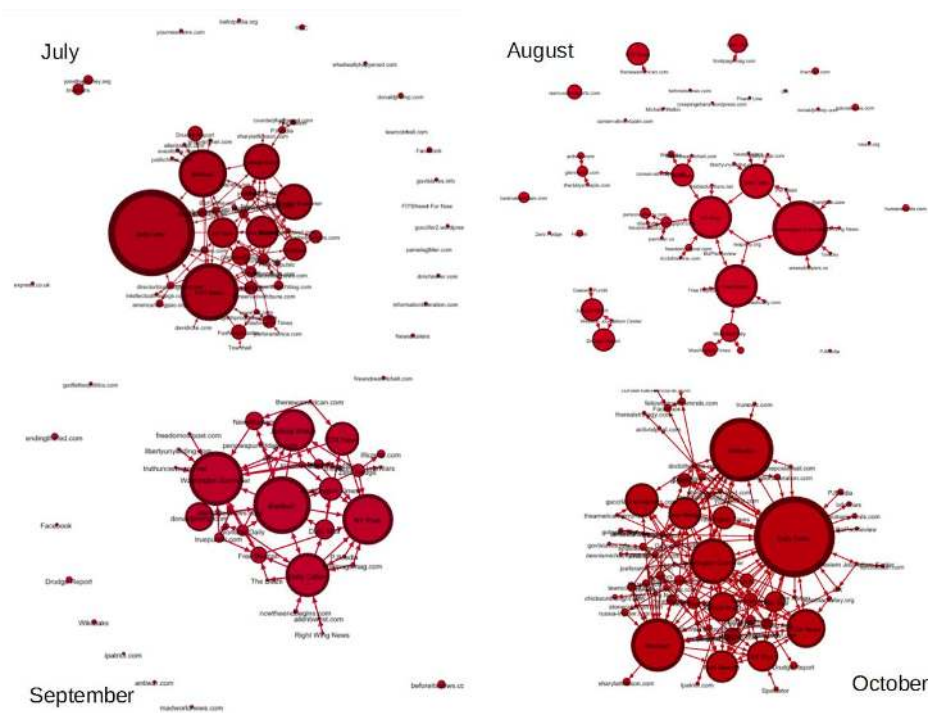
Figure 60: Directed linking behavior of right-wing media sources within the Clinton Foundation topic during the months of July, August, September, and October, 2016

The Daily Caller in particular continued to play a key role in creating and disseminating stories that had little purchase outside the right-wing media ecosystem but that stoked the belief among core Trump followers that what Clinton did was not merely questionable but criminal and treasonous. In a campaign that expressed deep anti-Muslim sentiment, a repeated theme was that Hillary Clinton was seriously in hock to Muslim nations. It is here that the stories become a more explicit disinformation campaign.

On July 13, 2016, just as the focus on the Clinton Foundation was about to intensify, the Daily Caller published what would become one of its most highly tweeted stories, *New Ties Emerge Between Clinton And Mysterious Islamic Cleric.* Above the fold, the story is breathless:

POLITICS

New Ties Emerge Between Clinton And Mysterious Islamic Cleric
9:29 PM 07/13/2016

CHUCK ROSS
Reporter

A newly-released email and lobbying documents filed with Congress reveals new ties between Clintonworld and members of a network operated by a mysterious Islamic cleric from Turkey. Connections between Clinton and acolytes of the imam, Fethullah Gulen, could muddle the complex relationship between the U.S. and Turkey, a key NATO ally, if the former secretary of state wins the White House.[106]

Daily Caller

The story goes on to weave Clinton Foundation donations into a tapestry of insinuations of corruption and influence by Gulenists in the Clinton Foundation and State Department. Many of the discrete incidents reported are likely factual. Reading carefully and skeptically below the fold reveals a loosely connected set of observations about a network that threatened Erdogan in Turkey but that was likely more Western-oriented and less Islamic in its political orientation than Erdogan's own party. The overall tenor and import, however, was intended to produce a belief that Clinton was working closely with a subversive Islamic cleric.

The most tweeted stories in October from the Daily Caller make its stance clear and are consistent with our observations about the immigration subtopic and the overall prominence of anti-Muslim stories in the right-wing quintile. The most tweeted story was headlined "Clinton Charity Got Up To $56 Million From Nations That Are Anti-Women, Gays," accompanied by the following image and describing various contributions to the foundation from the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia.

POLITICS

THE DAILY CALLER NEWS FOUNDATION

From left to right: United Arab Emirates' Foreign Minister Abdallah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs Yussef bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled al-Hamad Al-Sabah, US Secretary of State Hillary

Clinton Charity Got Up To $56 Million From Nations That Are Anti-Women, Gays

KATHRYN WATSON
Reporter

12:56 PM 10/20/2016

Image shared by the Daily Caller alongside the article "Clinton Charity Got Up To $56 Million From Nations That Are Anti-Women, Gays"

---

106 http://dailycaller.com/2016/07/13/new-ties-emerge-between-clinton-and-mysterious-islamic-cleric/.

The second most tweeted story ran under the headline "WIKILEAKS: Here's How The Clinton's Free Private Jet Scam Works."[107] It offered a case study in how disinformation is created by weaving bits and pieces of evidence into a fundamentally misleading presentation that, again, implied connections between Hillary Clinton and "shady" Muslims. Above the fold, it read:

Ira Magaziner, the CEO of the Clinton Health Access Initiative, asked former President Bill Clinton to thank Morocco's King Mohammed VI for "offering his plane to the conference in Ethiopia."

"CHAI would like to request that President Clinton call Sheik Mohammed to thank him for offering his plane to the conference in Ethiopia," Magaziner gushed in a November 22, 2011 email released by WikiLeaks.[108]

Clinton frequently has expected free, luxurious private jet travel during his post-presidential life. Clinton, his wife and daughter have artfully secured free air travel and luxurious accommodations since they left the White House. It's an effective way to accept gifts of great value without declaring them for the Clinton Foundation.

Daily Caller

"It's highly illegal and it's likely that the owners of these aircraft took tax deductions as a gift to the Clinton Foundation," Charles Ortel, a Wall Street analyst and critic of the Clinton Foundation, told The Daily Caller News Foundation.

Later in the same story, the Daily Caller reported: "In the Moroccan case, Clinton was able to fly for free, jetting 3,367 miles from Rabat, Morocco, to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the King's specially equipped 747-400 jumbo jet." Further along it made this seemingly incriminating statement: "But neither the Clinton Foundation nor CHAI have listed any 'non-cash contributions' — such as free jumbo jet travel — on their 2011 tax return for the free use of the aircraft."

Reading the actual email on which the story is based makes clear that the story is pure bunk. The email, part of WikiLeaks' Podesta emails dump,[109] included the quoted words, but stated nearly the opposite of what the story implies:

CHAI would like to request that President Clinton call Sheik Mohammed to thank him for offering his plane to the conference in Ethiopia **and expressing regrets that President Clinton's schedule does not permit him to attend the conference***. (emphasis added)*

In other words, according to the email, there was no flight and Bill Clinton did not go to the conference. Moreover, the email says that the offer came from "Sheikh Mohammed," not "King Mohammed," two very

---

107 http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/31/wikileaks-heres-how-the-clintons-free-private-jet-scam-works/

108 https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/38048

109 https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/38048.

different people. If anything in the Daily Caller story is true, it is likely that the person the story describes as "Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Al-Amoudi," a businessman who is not the king of Morocco but whom the story describes as organizing the conference in Ethiopia, offered the flight. But leaving King Mohammed of Morocco out of the story would have made it harder to weave in the factoid that "Not including the flight, King Mohammed has donated at least $28 million to the Clinton Foundation."

Here, as elsewhere in the campaign, emails played a critical role as concrete, material "evidence" for fantasized conspiracy. As Hofstadter already saw in his classic study of the paranoid style in American politics,

> *A final characteristic of the paranoid style is related to the quality of its pedantry. One of the impressive things about paranoid literature is the contrast between its fantasied conclusions and the almost touching concern with factuality it invariably shows. It produces heroic strivings for evidence to prove that the unbelievable is the only thing that can be believed.*

> *But respectable paranoid literature not only starts from certain moral commitments that can indeed be justified but also carefully and all but obsessively accumulates "evidence." The difference between this "evidence" and that commonly employed by others is that it seems less a means of entering into normal political controversy than a means of warding off the profane intrusion of the secular political world. The paranoid seems to have little expectation of actually convincing a hostile world, but he can accumulate evidence in order to protect his cherished convictions from it.[110]*

The ability to scour emails for "evidence" and to locate, quote, and link to actual secret documents offers a paradise for paranoid logic. In large bodies of documentation, almost anything can be found in writing if one is engaged in motivated observation and reasoning. The fact that the emails were private and were pried loose from unwilling hands (whether through FOIA or hacking) enhanced their claim to veracity. Precisely because they were private conversations among the conspirators that the conspirators wished to deny the public, the emails became totems of truth in the paranoid imagination of the world.

Another major feature of network propaganda is the repetition of claims and statements so that they become familiar and easily recalled. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the next most tweeted story was "Hillary's Two Official Favors To Morocco Resulted In $28 Million For Clinton Foundation."[111] The major part of the story was an utterly unsubstantiated and unsourced claim that in 2011 Clinton had gotten EPA head Lisa Jackson to try to shut down Mosaic Fertilizer, described as America's largest phosphate mining company, in exchange for a $15 million donation to the Clinton Foundation from King Mohammed VI of Morocco, ostensibly to benefit Morocco's state-owned phosphate company. The only evidence of Clinton's supposed overwhelming control over Jackson, which would allow the secretary of state, without any authority and contrary to law, to direct a regulatory action by an agency, was that two years later, in 2013, Jackson would join the board of the Clinton Foundation. As the foundation's disclosure form shows, Jackson was paid exactly $0 for this "reward."[112]

The Daily Caller story did not offer any details as to what regulatory action Jackson supposedly took at the behest of Hillary Clinton. The article reported vaguely, "The regulatory assault against the U.S. phosphate agency began in earnest when Jackson launched a barrage of intimidating regulatory initiatives against

---

110 https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/6/.

111 http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/31/hillarys-two-official-favors-to-morocco-resulted-in-28-million-for-clinton-foundation/.

112 Clinton Foundation Form 990 for 2013, p. 7. https://www.clintonfoundation.org/sites/default/files/clinton_foundation_report_public_11-19-14.pdf.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

123

Mosaic." Indeed, the article noted that there had been environmental concerns about phosphate production since 1979, "but the EPA did little to address concerns related to phosphates until Jackson's 2011 moves." Jackson's and Clinton's power was supposedly so great that "the regulatory assault on the U.S. phosphate industry encompassed several agencies" including the Department of Homeland Security. And, to top it all, the EPA threatened Superfund penalties that could have bankrupted Mosaic. The story offered nothing to explain how an interdepartmental intervention like this could all have originated with the secretary of state based on a personal relationship. It did not note that the Department of Justice Environment and Natural Resources Division had described in its "Accomplishment Report" for fiscal year 2010 a consent decree with Mosaic to spend $30 million to update its site in Uncle Sam, Louisiana, and "cease sulphuric acid production in Bartow, Florida."[113] Nor did it mention that in 2015 Mosaic agreed to a consent decree with the Department of Justice, the EPA, and the EPA's state equivalents in Florida and Louisiana to establish a $1.8 billion fund to clean up hazardous waste at six Florida and two Louisiana sites.[114] The idea that multi-agency cooperation on this level between departments with strong histories of independence would arise from the request of a secretary with no authority in the matter, be sustained years after both she and Lisa Jackson had left government, and result in such a large court-approved settlement is nothing short of fantastical. It is typical of the paranoid style of reasoning in American politics that such conspiracies loom, and fear and distrust are used to bridge the yawning gaps in logic and evidence.

Despite the absence of detail or evidence, the story quoted two Republican representatives, Dennis Ross, whose district includes a Mosaic facility, and Marsha Blackburn, who had initiated the letter to the IRS on which the Daily Caller began its reporting in late July. According to the story, Ross said, "An environmental concern never existed. This targeting was all done as a payback to Morocco for donating millions of dollars to the Clinton Foundation," Blackburn said, "These facts seem to reveal the possibility of more pay-to-play activities at the Clinton Foundation." And yet, again, less than a year earlier Mosaic had agreed to create a $1.8 billion cleanup fund in a consent decree not only with the EPA but with the Department of Justice and the Florida and Louisiana environmental agencies as well.

The sheer implausibility of the story did not prevent other outlets from repeating it. Fox News published the story essentially unchanged,[115] whereas more extreme outlets led with the subtext, as in this headline: "LEAK – Muslims Paid Hillary $28 MILLION To Do THIS, It's SICK."[116] The anti-Muslim theme was reinforced in the next most tweeted the Daily Caller story about the Clinton Foundation in October, "Here's A (Dirty) Laundry List Of The Clinton Foundation's Most Questionable Foreign Donations."[117] Other than the Russian donation said to have been tied to the Uranium One deal, all the foreign donations, seven of them, were from Muslim-majority countries—Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Indonesia, Algeria, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman.

---

113 https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/enrd/legacy/2015/04/13/ACCOMPLISHMENT_REPORT_2010_FINAL_5_18_11_Internet-508.pdf.

114 Department of Justice Press Release, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/major-fertilizer-producer-mosaic-fertilizer-llc-ensure-proper-handling-storage-and-disposal; EPA announcement, https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/mosaic-fertilizer-llc-settlement.

115 http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/10/31/hillary-8217-s-two-official-favors-to-morocco-resulted-in-28-million-for-clinton-foundation.html.

116 http://conservativefighters.com/news/leak-muslims-paid-hillary-28-million-sick/; http://www.angrypatriotmovement.com/muslims-paid-hillary-28-million/.

117 http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/23/heres-a-dirty-laundry-list-of-the-clinton-foundations-most-questionable-foreign-donations/.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

124

The Daily Caller story most linked to (as opposed to most tweeted) in October 2016 was "Hillary In Leaked Email: Saudi Arabia And Qatar Are Funding ISIS," which exposes another characteristic of network propaganda: the reworking of stories into a shared folklore.[118] The story itself was entirely reasonable in its basic frame. The Daily Caller cited an email from Clinton to Podesta, gleaned from the Podesta emails cache, in which she outlined a plan to defeat ISIS. This anti-ISIS plan emphasized arming the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government with heavier weapons than had been done in the past, supporting special operations, and seeking help for the Free Syrian Army or similar moderate paramilitary groups in Syria. She added: "While this military/paramilitary operation is moving forward, we need to use our diplomatic and more traditional intelligence assets to bring pressure on the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region." Focusing on this language, the Daily Caller story reminded its readers that Qatar and Saudi Arabia had both donated to the Clinton Foundation and reported that "The Clinton campaign has not replied to a Daily Caller inquiry about whether the Clinton Foundation will return donations from these two nations that, according to Hillary Clinton, fund ISIS."

That story became the foundation of the most Facebook-shared October story on endingthefed.com, the site that filled five of the top 10 spots on BuzzFeed's list of most widely shared "fake news" stories: "IT'S OVER: Hillary's ISIS Email Just Leaked & It's Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined."[119] This is perhaps the clearest example of the resurgence of the paranoid style in American politics. It opens with the sentence "Today Wikileaks released what is, by far, the most devastating leak of the entire campaign. This makes Trump's dirty talk video look like an episode of Barney and Friends." Offering a screenshot of the email from the WikiLeaks site, the story states:

Ending the Fed
The most Facebook-shared story in October 2016.

Assange promised his latest batch of leaks would lead to the indictment of Hillary, and it looks like he was not kidding. The email proves Hillary knew and was complicit in the funding and arming of ISIS by our 'allies' Saudi Arabia and Qatar!

The media is yet to report on this, even though Wikileaks has a 10 year history of being 100% accurate in their leaks, never once releasing info that proved to be false.

…Can you guess why?

Maybe it has something to do with the fact that The Saudi's brag about funding 20% of Hillary's Presidential campaign, and along with Qatar, are among the largest donors to the CLINTON FOUNDATION.

---

118 http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/10/hillary-in-leaked-email-saudi-arabia-and-qatar-are-funding-isis/.

119 http://endingthefed.com/its-over-hillarys-isis-email-just-leaked-its-worse-than-anyone-could-have-imagined.html.

While the original Daily Caller article presented a plausible framing—Clinton should return donations given by governments that were also supporting ISIS—the Ending the Fed story ramped it up, claiming that the email proved that "Hillary knew and was complicit in the funding and arming of ISIS by our 'allies' Saudi Arabia and Qatar." Not only that, it alleged that the media were not reporting on this because the Saudis bragged that they funded 20 percent of Clinton's presidential campaign and were among the largest donors to the Clinton Foundation. One can read the paragraph as many times as one wishes and still come up short in explaining how a series of non sequiturs adds up to the idea that Hillary Clinton admitted to funding and running ISIS. However, the repeated insinuations that the Clinton Foundation was a funnel through which various Muslim governments (especially Saudi Arabia) got Clinton to do their bidding, and the intentional conflation of foundation donations and personal speaking fees with pay-to-play corruption, had long been circulating throughout the right-wing media environment.

The 20 percent funding claim originated in a June 14 story on zerohedge.com[120] and was repeated and amplified that same day by Fox News[121] and InfoWars.[122] The origin of the story raises many questions. Apparently on Sunday, June 12, the Jordanian Petra News Agency published a story claiming that the then–Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had provided an "exclusive" interview in which he claimed that Saudi Arabia had provided 20 percent of the Clinton campaign's funds. The report was soon removed, and the Petra News Agency issued a press release asserting that its system had been hacked and that the hack was the source of the bogus report.[123] Before the story was removed, however, it was captured by a Washington-based think tank, the Institute for Gulf Affairs, whose focus is the Saudi government's human rights violations and the cozy relationship between the U.S. and the Saudi royal family. The story was then published on June 13 in Middle East Eye (MEE),[124] a U.K.-based site that describes itself as independent but is reported by a wide range of outlets to have diverse and conflicting political interests.[125]

Despite MEE's retraction of the story, it had been picked up by Zerohedge and amplified through the network of paranoid right-wing sites. RT also reported on the hack and the story, emphasizing the angle that MEE had reported that it had been pointed to the Jordanian agency's error by the Podesta Group, co-founded by John Podesta, which counts Saudi Arabia as a lucrative client.[126] Like the emails, a document that was published and then removed offers a peek into occult knowledge that confirms conspiracy. Making the accusation by planting such a document in a remote site would offer it enormous credibility within the network of conspiracy theorists. Certainly, it is not impossible that the young, soon-to-be-elevated Crown Prince made a strategic error in an interview with the Jordanian news agency, and Saudi diplomatic power was brought to bear to release a bogus retraction and hacking story. For this to be the case, one would

120 http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2016-06-13/saudi-arabia-has-funded-20-hillarys-presidential-campaign-saudi-crown-prince-claims.

121 http://nation.foxnews.com/2016/06/14/saudi-arabia-has-funded-20-hillarys-presidential-campaign-saudi-crown-prince-claims.

122 https://www.infowars.com/saudi-arabia-has-funded-20-of-hillarys-presidential-campaign-saudi-crown-prince-claims/

123 http://www.petra.gov.jo/Public_News/Nws_NewsDetails.aspx?lang=2&site_id=1&NewsID=257423&CatID=13. The denial is oddly worded, never quite saying that the story was never there, or that the story itself was untrue. Nor does the denial accept that the site was successfully hacked, stating only that there was an attempted hack.

124 http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/deleted-official-report-says-saudi-key-funder-hillary-clinton-presidential-campaign-223282807

125 The editor of the site, David Hearst, was previously an editor at The Guardian, and the site has consistently refused to disclose its donors. Other members of its staff and its sole registered director have been the basis of criticism from a wide array of sites—from Saudi (http://www.ikhwan.whoswho/en/archives/854) and UAE media, to Breitbart (http://www.breitbart.com/london/2014/06/19/the-national-muslim-brotherhood-its-uk-connections-and-media-attacks-on-the-uae/) to the U.K.-based Jewish News, (http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/font-of-hatred-how-hamas-relies-on-two-uk-websites/) all claiming one basis or another for tying MEE to Qatar or the Muslim Brotherhood.

126 https://www.rt.com/usa/346658-clinton-donations-saudi-denial/

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

126

have to assume that the prince in fact made such an embarrassing mistake and was nonetheless elevated to Crown Prince within a few months, and that, contrary to law, the Clinton Foundation in fact received tens of millions of dollars in donations from a foreign government.

The alternative explanation is that the Jordanian agency was in fact hacked by someone who intended to harm both the Saudi government and the Clinton campaign. Such a hack would be similar to the hack of the Qatari news agency, which has variously been blamed on Russia[127] or the UAE.[128] Unlike the Qatari hack, however, the Jordanian hack has not been reported on by any agency or journalists—but an interested reporter would presumably look for a party with an interest in harming both entities. Even if a Muslim or Arab adversary aimed the original hack primarily at the Saudi government, its importation into the U.S. campaign fed into a strong racist, anti-Muslim narrative, as the image that accompanied InfoWars' report on the Zerohedge story underscores.[129]

A June 14, 2016, InfoWars story reporting on Zerohedge's story that links Clinton's campaign to Saudi funding

Even if we accept that Ending the Fed (which ceased operations shortly after Trump's election) was a quintessential "fake news" site—designed to make money by producing clickbait to reap Facebook advertising dollars—it did not habitually make up stories out of whole cloth to serve as clickbait. It depended, instead, on an insulated ecosystem of sites—from Zerohedge to Fox News and InfoWars—that created, replicated, and offered credence to various elements of stories that could then be recombined into new, believable conspiracy theories. If Ending the Fed had a meaningful role in influencing the debate, it was the amplification of already circulating tropes whose currency and efficacy depend on their being broadly familiar and intuitively recognizable—like canonical folk tales—to their readers. Such sites should be considered

---

127 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/07/russian-hackers-qatar-crisis-fbi-inquiry-saudi-arabia-uae.

128 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/uae-hacked-qatari-government-sites-sparking-regional-upheaval-according-to-us-intelligence-officials/2017/07/16/00c46e54-698f-11e7-8eb5-cbccc2e7bfbf_story.html?utm_term=.822b8c330c22.

129 https://www.infowars.com/saudi-arabia-has-funded-20-of-hillarys-presidential-campaign-saudi-crown-prince-claims/.

important if there is measurable reason to think that their amplification contributed substantially to the effect produced by the network as a whole. The prominence of Ending the Fed on Facebook, coupled with the fact that a sizable group of voters used Facebook as a major source of news, suggest that such an amplification effect is at least possible. Measuring that influence, however would be difficult[130] because credibility in the field depends on embeddedness in an epistemic network, and truth or falsity will depend heavily on the familiarity and identity value of the elements of the story. If such stories were believed, it is almost certainly because the sustained effort to tie all these themes together was central to the Breitbart-centered media ecosystem, as the sixth most Facebook-shared Breitbart story of the entire 18-month period suggests: "Clinton Cash: Khizr Khan's Deep Legal, Financial Connections to Saudi Arabia, Hillary's Clinton Foundation Tie Terror, Immigration, Email Scandals Together." In the paranoid imagination, all threads tie together.

Network Propaganda & Disinformation

The Clinton Foundation case study represents a classic instance of a disinformation and propaganda campaign mediated through a network of allied media sources. By "propaganda" we mean the intentional use of communications to influence attitudes and behavior in a target population.[131] By "disinformation," borrowing from the legal definition of false advertising, we mean propaganda consisting of materially misleading information.

A disinformation campaign does not depend on wholly fabricated stories and does not emerge spontaneously from profit-seeking political clickbait sites. Rather, it mixes bits and pieces of facts, often anchored in partial readings of concrete documents that lend validity to the claims, with false insinuations, leaps of logic, and flat-out false statements.

The influence of the propaganda depends on repetition and validation within a network of sites. Higher-visibility sites—such as Fox News or Breitbart—will link to and validate lower-visibility sites. Hence the term "network propaganda" describes the result of this activity. The network aspect offers reinforcement through repetition and a sense of validation because the "knowledge" comes through cross-referencing multiple sites. The repetition also creates fluency with the shared narratives, which improves readers' recall and lessens the tendency to read the details critically.

Influence within the relatively insular right-wing network is not, however, sufficient to shift the political ground. For this, the network has to break out of its own sphere and influence the broader public agenda. A major feature we observed in the media coverage of the campaign as a whole—the focus on Clinton scandals and on immigration as the major topics—is powerfully visible in the Clinton case study: it is central to the success of a propaganda and disinformation campaign to set the agenda for the mainstream press and then rely on that press coverage as an external source of validation and accreditation.

One technique we saw in the context of immigration was "flooding the zone": producing large numbers of stories that offer opportunities for social media sharing and reinforcement. In the context of the Clinton

---

130 Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. *Social media and fake news in the 2016 election.* No. 23089. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017.

131 This core feature is shared across diverse classic definitions—from Laswell's "Propaganda is the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.", Harold D. Laswell, The Theory of Political Propaganda, Am. Pol. Sci. Rev. 21:627 (1927) to the Army field manual of Psyops definition of its goals to "Influence foreign populations by expressing information subjectively to influence attitudes and behavior, and to obtain compliance, noninterference, or other desired behavioral changes." https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-05-30.pdf.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

128

Foundation, the Daily Caller reporting and the many detailed tidbits about one email or another played much the same role. This general approach of generating a large number of stories to create a wave of attention has been documented elsewhere, in the context of Russian propaganda techniques.[132]

Visible only through the kind of close qualitative analysis we perform here, a disinformation campaign relies on "hacking" professional media. "Hacking" in this sense does not mean the actual computer hacks, such as those involved in the Podesta emails or the supposed Petra News Agency interview about Saudi funding; instead, it means creatively hijacking a complex ecosystem to generate effects intended by the hacker. The New York Times in particular was manipulated into playing a central role in validating the *Clinton Cash* propaganda campaign.

Reliance on mainstream media for validation, however, occurred throughout the campaign together with attacks on the media, such as President Trump's frequent references to "fake news." The insinuations of corruption and subservience we saw in Breitbart's attack on Fox News during the primary were used against the entire highly influential center-left and center during the election. These attacks have the dual benefit of "working the ref"—pushing traditional media to bend over backward to avoid being seen as partisan—while limiting the capacity of traditional journalism to fill its role as a neutral arbiter of the validity of fact-related claims, and inoculating the core target populations against corrective investigation and criticism.

A distinct line of propaganda focuses on partisan agenda setting and the reframing of publicly salient topics through a partisan lens. For example, at the height of the Hollywood Access video controversy surrounding Trump's treatment of women, the right-wing media focused on Bill Clinton's infidelity and the release of the Podesta emails to shift the conversation back to what they wanted to focus on. Since the inauguration of President Trump, we have continued to observe such practices at moments of discomfort for the president—for example, the Seth Rich story concocted to run interference for the Comey firing and the appointment of Robert Mueller. In the Clinton Foundation case study, the careful timing of the call from Congress to investigate the foundation, of Breitbart's release of the movie version of *Clinton Cash*, and of the release of FOIA-obtained emails by Judicial Watch—all surrounding the Democratic convention—are clear examples of a sustained and successful effort to seize the narrative at a moment of weakness for one's own side.

Finally, emotionally loaded messaging is central to network propaganda. In this report overall, it was most visible in the framing of anti-immigrant stories that focused on disease, crime, and terrorism. In the case study, some of the same xenophobic messaging was present, repeatedly tying suspicions of corruption to Islamophobia in the various story lines.

---

132 Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model, Rand Perspective (2016). https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE198/RAND_PE198.pdf.

The story of how the Clinton Foundation was played by the right-wing media ecosystem during the 2016 election included two chief dynamics and offers two lessons. The first dynamic was a master class in setting the public agenda. Like all opposition research and campaigning, this reflected highly partisan investigation, reporting, and manipulation and framing of facts to put a political opponent in the worst possible light. The remarkable aspect is that it was a campaign with such a deep and long trajectory, and that it began long before, and was independent of, the candidate's campaign. The original *Clinton Cash* book was published months before Breitbart, Bannon, or Mercer settled on Donald Trump as their candidate. The book was an independent effort to identify the clear Democratic front runner and create a campaign intervention irrespective of who the Republican candidate would be. The timing of the movie release most obviously, and also the congressional calls for investigation, appear to have been precisely calibrated to disrupt the normal post-convention bump of the opposing candidate. The apparent coordination among diverse groups— in particular, the Judicial Watch email releases and the Breitbart movie release—and the use of the right-wing media ecosystem to incubate and maintain the story until it took hold in the mainstream represent an important role that a partisan propaganda network can play vis-a-vis the broader public sphere. But the fundamental shift occurred only after the mainstream press picked up the story, legitimated it, and turned it from a proposed central item for the public agenda into the actual agenda item that became the one most widely discussed in August 2016.

The only countermeasure to this first dynamic that is consistent with the First Amendment is a highly vigilant professional press. Recognizing that the press is being hacked and that certain storylines are the opposition researcher's equivalent of clickbait for journalists is an absolute necessity for editors, even more than for line journalists. Receiving an "exclusive" from Peter Schweitzer and writing a story that paints Clinton in a negative light is the easy path for a journalist and an editor. Tracking down the funding and sponsorship of Schweitzer's research, and developing an investigative story about who is behind this assault and why it is being launched, is harder. It is, nonetheless, the fundamental professional responsibility of the press if it is to retain its unique role.

The second dynamic explored in this case study is propaganda and, in particular, disinformation. A sustained campaign of materially misleading political messaging was intended to shape its target population's attitudes and beliefs and to keep that group from engaging in critical reflection on the policy and political choices they faced. It leveraged basic psychological features of memory and belief formation—that repetition and familiarity improve recall and credibility—and basic features of a network of interlinked sites to create the appearance of facts reported in many diverse outlets. It generated a pool of memes that could be recombined for mutual reinforcement—images of Clinton among Arabs; a specific number, like 20 percent; a country, like Morocco, about which people know little but that evokes a generalized suspicion of Muslims. These were then made into stories that created a folklore, reinforcing in-group identity and denigrating the out-group. This dynamic is most clearly operative in the post-election right-wing media as they have continually sought to prop up the president while a series of scandals has erupted around him, through which he has received a barrage of criticism at home and abroad.

The challenge in combating this second dynamic, too, is that there are no easy fixes. If indeed Russia played a significant role in waging a propaganda war, certainly efforts to identify these interventions and expose

them in real time are important. To the extent that political clickbait can be shown to have had a measurable influence on beliefs, countermeasures by the leading platforms, Facebook and Google, may help. But if the fundamental challenge comes from inside the political system and consists of political communication within a major wing of the American political system, the solution is far from obvious. Regulatory efforts will, and should, face formidable First Amendment barriers. Technical limitations by private platforms may be legal but are hardly cause for celebration in a democracy. The primary answers will almost certainly come from within the political system itself. American conservatives who reject the radicalization of their party have a crucial role to play, although their marginalization during the primaries suggests that the job before them is not simple. Journalists who report in outlets attended to by audiences that may cross over between the parties and who do not solely attend to the right-wing media ecosystem also have a critical role to play in dispelling disinformation. Further, they must also avoid being lured into the agenda-setting dynamics that were so successful during the election. But the fundamental solution will be political. As long as extremist messaging and sensationalist disinformation continue to win elections while yielding rich advertising rewards to the networks that propagate them, the dynamic we observe here will likely continue unabated.

Moving out from this case study to our broader analysis of the media ecosystem, we see the resolution of an apparent paradox. While the ecosystem around Breitbart and other right-wing outlets constitutes a tightly insulated echo chamber, this isolated conversation proved immensely powerful in setting the broader agenda of the 2016 president campaign.

The explanation of the paradox is that the right-wing echo chamber allows for the development and recirculation of ideas, some of which are then actively shopped to the broader media conversation. If Donald Trump's support had been limited to readers of Breitbart, he would never have won the electoral college. By developing narratives that had currency in right-wing circles, and then both enticing and demanding coverage from center-left press, outlets like Breitbart were able to set the agenda for the election, focusing heavily on Clinton's scandals and on Trump's preferred talking points.

Our work offers some guidance for communications and political science scholars going forward. Given the profound influence of marginal information sources like the Daily Caller in indirectly setting the agenda for the New York Times, it is critical that we understand political media as an ecosystem, in which apparently small actors can have a powerful influence through synergistic or parasitic relationships with other actors. As the media landscape grows more complex, the only way to understand and anticipate manipulative strategies is to develop methods that examine the entirety of media, contextualizing individual stories within the complex but comprehensible whole.

The analysis and observations in this report are based upon several analytical approaches and multiple sources of data.

Open Web Stories & Media Sources

We relied primarily upon data collected and analyzed using the Media Cloud platform.[133] The starting point was a collection of approximately two million stories identified on the open web that were relevant to the election. We began the story collection process by running a seed query on the Media Cloud archive for stories published between May 1, 2015, and November 7, 2016, with one of several U.S. media collections (U.S. Regional Mainstream Media, U.S. Top Digital Native News, and U.S. Top Online News) and mentioning any candidate who was in first or second place at any point during the primary or general election (Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, John Kasich, Marco Rubio, Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, and Scott Walker).

In addition to these stories from the Media Cloud archive, we included all stories from the Twitter topic described below that mentioned one of the above-named candidates. These Twitter topic stories greatly diversified the web topic from its initial base of Media Cloud archive stories, resulting in doubling the ultimate size of the web topic from one million to two million stories.

Starting with that seed set of Media Cloud archive and Twitter topic stories, we then followed all the links from within the substantive content of these stories using an automated spider and added stories that included the same search terms. This recursive spidering process continued for 15 iterations, at which point an insignificant number of new stories were found. This corpus of stories served as the basis for tracking keywords and text over time and across different media sources. It was also used to study the linking patterns among the more than 70,000 media sources that were identified and the more than two million links between stories. These open web media sources included a broad range of media sites, campaign sites, sites for nonprofit organizations such as think tanks and advocacy organizations, government sites, company sites, and blogs.

In addition to the large election-focused set of stories, we created a series of smaller topic-specific story sets to separately track the coverage and debate on specific topics in parallel to coverage of the election. These included story sets focused on immigration, trade, jobs, income inequality, and Islam. In the body of the report, we draw on two of these smaller topics in the chapters that focus on immigration and the Clinton Foundation. To collect data for the immigration topic, we used the same data collection process as described above. The target query was any story that included the words (or variations of the words) "immigration" and "united states." For the Clinton Foundation topic, we started from the full election data set and identified the subset of stories that included the phrase "Clinton foundation." This subtopic consists of just under 40,000 stories.

---

133 mediacloud.org

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

132

Twitter Data

We collected and analyzed data from Twitter using several approaches. Using Crimson Hexagon,[134] we drew a random sample of 4.5 million tweets that matched the same search terms described above for the large election set: tweets that included the name of any of the major candidates. We also drew companion sets of tweets for each of the topically focused story sets.

From the general election and immigration Twitter data, we extracted and resolved all of the URLs that were shared in the tweets and created a Media Cloud topic consisting only of the stories pointed to by those URLs. The resulting general election Twitter topic consisted of nearly 900,000 stories, and the resulting immigration Twitter topic had almost 185,000 stories. No spidering was done on the Twitter topics, and instead of using hyperlinks as links between stories, we used same day, same user co-sharing (a link was created between each pair of stories that were shared by the same Twitter user on the same calendar day).

Facebook Data

To evaluate the sharing of stories on Facebook, we queried the Facebook application program interface to acquire data on the number of times each of the stories in our data set had been shared on Facebook. For the sharing of stories on Facebook, the API provides only counts across the life of the article and not data for defined time periods. For stories on the election published during the campaign, the sharing totals fairly accurately reflect the level of attention over the course of the election. For stories published prior to the campaign, the scores also include sharing that occurred before the study period and therefore overestimate attention during the election. When querying Facebook for sharing data, we generated a list of alternative URLs as well as any redirected URLs we discovered through the topic spidering process described above.

Media Partisanship Attention Scores

The stories extracted from Twitter via Crimson Hexagon were also used to create a candidate-focused partisanship attention score for the associated media sources. The partisanship scores served an important role in the analysis: they allowed us to identify and describe patterns of attention among supporters of the major party candidates for different media sources. In turn, we were able to glean the perspective these audiences received in terms of topics being covered, emphasized, and framed. We generated these partisan attention scores based on the frequency of sharing media sources among users who retweeted messages from either of the two general election candidates (@donaldjtrump and @hillaryclinton). The underlying data extracted for this purpose included 44,074 users and 206,955 of their tweets, which cited 5,798 media sources.

We then used the proportion of retweets associated with either candidate for each media source as a measure of candidate-centric partisanship. This metric is expressed on a -1.0 to 1.0 scale. A media source that was included only in the tweets of accounts that retweeted Hillary Clinton received a score of -1.0, and if found only in tweets of those who retweeted Trump, the media source was given a score of 1.0. For a media source that was included in tweets from equal numbers of accounts in both groups, the score is 0. This provides a continuous measure of candidate-centric partisan attention based on Twitter user behavior.

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

133

We then broke down this continuous measure of audience partisanship into even quintiles, which we labeled "left," "center-left", "center", "center-right", and "right." We used those quintiles extensively throughout the analysis, including to color all network maps.

This partisan attention metric is highly correlated with a partisan alignment measure estimated by researchers in 2015 using Facebook data (rho = 0.94).[135] This high correlation is striking given the differences in the measures. The Facebook measure derived the partisan alignment of users from the users' self-reports and the media attention from Facebook sharing and click-through behavior. Our user-partisanship measure is derived from behavior—the fact that a user retweeted one or the other major party candidate—not self-reporting, and our media attention metric is based on tweeting behavior. The high correlation between our partisan attention score and the Facebook study's partisan alignment score gives us substantial confidence that the measure we use reveals genuine partisan attention patterns, even though orientation toward candidates does not necessarily align with broader political partisanship on the liberal-conservative scale. Many conservatives and liberals were unhappy with their party's choice of candidate in 2016. We used these partisanship scores of media sources to provide context and help interpret the findings.

Network Mapping of Open Web Media Sources

Given the vast number of media sources and stories, we used network analysis and mapping to focus attention on the most commonly cited stories and sources. Based on the linking patterns between open web media sources, we produced network maps and tabulated the most frequently cited stories and media sources for different time periods. The analysis of the link economy provides a detailed perspective on key topics of the election and the interests and attention of the active participants in the debate. It also offers an aggregated measure of the most influential sources and stories. The study of linking patterns builds upon many prior studies.[136]

Analogous maps of media sources were also drawn using Twitter data, except that rather than using direct links between media sources, the network was formed by calculating the proclivity of Twitter users to cite different media sources: media sources that were frequently found to be included in the tweet streams of individual Twitter users were drawn together in the network, and media sources that were not cited by the same Twitter users are pushed apart. This provides a view of the election-related media sphere from the perspective of Twitter users. These two-mode networks (users and media sources) were then visualized as single-mode network maps (media sources only).

We used Gephi[137] to generate all network maps. Within Gephi, we used the ForceAtlas2 layout algorithm on all of the connected media sources in a given map. We then hid all but the top 900 media sources, plus ties, by inlinks for a given map. So for the overall election web map, we ran the layout algorithm on the approximately 40,000 sources that constituted the giant component of the network, and then we hid all but the top 900 media sources. We used weighted edges for all network maps, with the number of story links between stories within the given pair of media sources serving as the weight of a given edge.

135 Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic. "Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook." *Science* 348, no. 6239 (2015): 1130-1132.

136 See, for example, Adamic, Lada A., and Natalie Glance. "The political blogosphere and the 2004 U.S. election: divided they blog." In *Proceedings of the 3rd international workshop on Link discovery*, pp. 36-43. ACM, 2005.Hargittai, Eszter, Jason Gallo, and Matthew Kane. "Cross-ideological discussions among conservative and liberal bloggers." *Public Choice* 134, no. 1 (2008): 67-86. Etling, Bruce, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey. "Mapping the Arabic blogosphere: Politics and dissent online." *New Media & Society* 12, no. 8 (2010): 1225-1243.

137 gephi.org

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

134

Content Analysis

We used several methods to summarize and describe the content stories, media sources, and social media posts. For the review and description of the most linked-to open web stories and media sources and the most shared stories on Twitter, we hand-coded several stories to determine the topic of the stories and the stance with respect to the candidates.

Using the automated keyword search functionality of Media Cloud, we tracked the coverage of different topics over time by different media sets.

We used supervised machine-learning techniques in the analysis of the text of media stories related to immigration by means of the analytical toolkit provided by Crimson Hexagon. This system is based on training an automated system to categorize tweets that referenced immigration during the 18-month study period.

Using this broad suite of tools and approaches, we were able to track media coverage and digital communication over the course of the election period and assess how communities were formed around candidates and topics, how their conversations differed, the media sources they preferred, and how these media sources covered the issues. The analysis of content shared on Twitter offers an important complement to the open web analysis. Social media encompasses a markedly different set of participants and a fundamentally different structure for digital communication and debate. In addition to the analyses that aggregate data over the 18-month study period, we captured and analyzed the temporal changes and noted the differences in the agenda, framing, and composition of the various media spheres. The qualitative review of stories aids in the understanding and contextualization of the quantitative analysis. This mixed-methods approach follows in part the methodological approach adopted by Benkler et al. and Faris et al.[138]

138 Benkler, Yochai, Hal Roberts, Robert Faris, Alicia Solow-Niederman, and Bruce Etling. "Social mobilization and the networked public sphere: Mapping the SOPA-PIPA debate." *Political Communication* 32, no. 4 (2015): 594-624. Faris, Robert, Hal Roberts, Bruce Etling, Dalia Othman, and Yochai Benkler. "Net Neutrality| The Role of the Networked Public Sphere in the U.S. Net Neutrality Policy Debate." *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 26.

Washington Post

New York Times

CNN

Politico

Huffington Post

The Hill

Real Clear Politics

Wall Street Journal

Guardian

MSNBC

ABC News

USA Today

Bloomberg

The Atlantic NBC News

CBS News

Fox News

Vox

The Daily Beast

Breitbart

LA Times

NPR: National Public Radio

National Review

BuzzFeed

Slate

Yahoo! News

New York Daily News

Reuters News

Salon

Mother Jones

Washington Times

FiveThirtyEight

Business Insider

Washington Examiner

New York magazine

The New Yorker

Daily Caller

New York Post

Talking Points Memo

Associated Press

Think Progress

Daily Mail

US News & World Report

Forbes

Boston Globe

TIME

CNBC

Vanity Fair

Amazon

Rolling Stone

This list includes media sources that were in the top 100 by inlinks, Twitter shares, or Facebook shares. Major platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) are omitted from this list to allow for the comparison of separate media entities. Scores are rescaled to a 0 - 1 scale for each of the metrics.

Media source	Facebook shares	Twitter shares	Media inlinks	Partisanship score	Standardized scores 0-1			Facebook/ Twitter	Facebook/ inlinks	Twitter/ inlinks
					Facebook	Twitter	Inlinks			
Washington Post	63340095	37567	5100	-0.51	0.67	0.84	1.00	0.80	0.67	0.84
New York Times	94502060	41781	5026	-0.53	1.00	0.93	0.99	1.07	1.01	0.95
CNN	86916230	44776	4131	-0.36	0.92	1.00	0.81	0.92	1.14	1.24
The Hill	69241971	41919	2605	-0.05	0.73	0.94	0.51	0.78	1.45	1.85
Politico	11508775	27358	3866	-0.29	0.12	0.61	0.76	0.20	0.16	0.81
Breitbart	83528776	38467	1990	0.95	0.88	0.86	0.38	1.03	2.30	2.24
Huffington Post	72872079	33009	2963	-0.78	0.77	0.74	0.58	1.05	1.34	1.28
Wikipedia	825240	262	2437	0.25	0.01	0.00	0.47	1.84	0.02	0.01
Fox News	19861982	19532	1967	0.87	0.21	0.44	0.38	0.48	0.55	1.15
PoliticusUSA	27476591	12396	422	-0.90	0.29	0.28	0.07	1.05	3.94	3.74
Real Clear Politics	9116280	6129	2381	0.22	0.10	0.14	0.46	0.71	0.21	0.29
MSNBC	27307212	8578	1925	-0.67	0.29	0.19	0.37	1.52	0.78	0.51
Guardian	17566772	11151	2206	-0.61	0.19	0.25	0.43	0.75	0.43	0.58
NBC News	25210160	8316	1897	-0.50	0.27	0.18	0.37	1.44	0.73	0.50
Wall Street Journal	8473461	8244	2128	0.05	0.09	0.18	0.41	0.49	0.22	0.44
Vox	22412618	7497	1702	-0.84	0.24	0.17	0.33	1.42	0.72	0.51
Washington Examiner	8943934	11462	1295	0.82	0.09	0.25	0.25	0.37	0.38	1.03
Conservative Tribune	21750420	3473	166	0.94	0.23	0.08	0.02	3.01	10.00	3.32
Bloomberg	2572208	7825	2018	-0.24	0.03	0.17	0.39	0.15	0.07	0.45
Daily Kos	19275242	10511	701	-0.91	0.20	0.23	0.13	0.87	1.58	1.81
Gateway Pundit	20979941	8930	613	0.97	0.22	0.20	0.11	1.12	1.99	1.78
Daily Caller	17775190	10498	1390	0.88	0.19	0.23	0.27	0.80	0.71	0.88
Raw Story	20669336	9402	657	-0.88	0.22	0.21	0.12	1.05	1.82	1.74

ABC News	17490240	7283	1981	-0.24	0.18	0.16	0.38	1.14	0.48	0.42
Yahoo News	12221051	10219	1462	-0.15	0.13	0.23	0.28	0.57	0.46	0.81
US Uncut	19710912	1575	271	-0.48	0.21	0.03	0.04	6.15	4.76	0.77
Salon	13498730	9266	1340	-0.82	0.14	0.21	0.26	0.69	0.56	0.81
USA Today	10815069	8204	1921	-0.19	0.11	0.18	0.37	0.63	0.31	0.49
Truthfeed	17709033	2643	95	0.97	0.19	0.06	0.01	3.24	20.98	6.48
donaldjtrump.com	7200566	3177	1858	0.91	0.08	0.07	0.36	1.09	0.21	0.19
CBS News	7686114	4934	1829	-0.31	0.08	0.11	0.35	0.74	0.23	0.31
The Atlantic	8482058	2943	1680	-0.62	0.09	0.06	0.32	1.39	0.28	0.20
Mother Jones	12499779	8094	1259	-0.86	0.13	0.18	0.24	0.73	0.55	0.75
New Yorker	17008532	3487	1210	-0.81	0.18	0.08	0.23	2.34	0.78	0.33
The Daily Beast	11791173	7698	1666	-0.72	0.12	0.17	0.32	0.73	0.39	0.53
Occupy Democrats	16384451	1903	75	-0.92	0.17	0.04	0.00	4.20	34.94	8.32
Reuters	3541329	7641	1605	-0.20	0.04	0.17	0.31	0.22	0.12	0.55
Buzzfeed	7724638	7766	1476	-0.57	0.08	0.17	0.28	0.47	0.29	0.61
Addicting Info	15877365	2467	122	-0.90	0.17	0.05	0.01	3.12	11.75	3.77
hillaryclinton.com	8949951	2120	1561	-0.97	0.09	0.05	0.30	2.05	0.31	0.15
Think Progress	1755471	7749	1034	-0.91	0.02	0.17	0.19	0.11	0.09	0.88
Bipartisan Report	15264723	1953	57	-0.92	0.16	0.04	0.00	3.81	116.22	30.51
NPR	10515578	4166	1539	-0.70	0.11	0.09	0.29	1.21	0.38	0.31
Slate	15104196	6488	1410	-0.73	0.16	0.14	0.27	1.11	0.59	0.53
LA Times	5183178	4981	1536	-0.39	0.05	0.11	0.29	0.49	0.18	0.37
Western Journalism	14339637	2798	247	0.94	0.15	0.06	0.04	2.47	3.88	1.57
PolitiFact	6584311	3970	1489	-0.83	0.07	0.09	0.28	0.79	0.24	0.31
Daily Newsbin	14240528	3197	71	-0.93	0.15	0.07	0.00	2.14	36.13	16.86
Political Insider	13547892	1515	285	0.94	0.14	0.03	0.05	4.40	3.07	0.70
RT	3776252	6792	571	0.33	0.04	0.15	0.10	0.26	0.38	1.46
National Review	4958742	2895	1445	0.54	0.05	0.06	0.28	0.82	0.19	0.23
Time	12479489	6672	920	-0.48	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.89	0.76	0.86
Right Scoop	8027051	6572	309	0.80	0.08	0.15	0.05	0.58	1.65	2.84
New York Post	11036707	5072	1407	0.78	0.12	0.11	0.27	1.04	0.43	0.42
Business Insider	6301034	6553	1348	-0.06	0.07	0.15	0.26	0.46	0.26	0.56
Washington Times	5829039	4366	1396	0.76	0.06	0.10	0.27	0.64	0.23	0.36

BBC	8430087	6533	1043	-0.31	0.09	0.14	0.20	0.61	0.45	0.74
EndingtheFed	12233971	522	62	0.96	0.13	0.01	0.00	12.54	54.29	4.33
Daily News	9551461	3914	1354	-0.63	0.10	0.09	0.26	1.17	0.39	0.33
Talking Points Memo	6291778	6391	1052	-0.81	0.07	0.14	0.20	0.47	0.33	0.71
Daily Mail	9976685	5984	1352	0.71	0.11	0.13	0.26	0.79	0.41	0.51
Mediaite	5512621	5670	972	-0.25	0.06	0.13	0.18	0.46	0.32	0.69
berniesanders.com	6088026	1444	1296	-0.67	0.06	0.03	0.25	2.07	0.26	0.13
Rolling Stone	10431055	2967	856	-0.80	0.11	0.06	0.16	1.69	0.69	0.41
InfoWars	7598425	5342	473	0.93	0.08	0.12	0.08	0.68	0.95	1.41
FiveThirtyEight	3164599	2587	1177	-0.74	0.03	0.06	0.22	0.58	0.15	0.25
Fox News Insider	9317661	1746	570	0.85	0.10	0.04	0.10	2.61	0.95	0.37
New York magazine	4466605	2840	1173	-0.71	0.05	0.06	0.22	0.75	0.21	0.28
Media Matters	4005430	4512	693	-0.90	0.04	0.10	0.13	0.42	0.33	0.78
Young Cons	9225672	1125	136	0.92	0.10	0.02	0.02	4.09	5.71	1.40
redstatewatcher.com	9158744	724	50	0.91	0.10	0.01	0.00	6.51	96.45	14.81
Free Beacon	5099199	4351	749	0.88	0.05	0.10	0.14	0.56	0.39	0.69
RedState	3665845	4212	616	0.48	0.04	0.09	0.11	0.41	0.34	0.83
Forbes	3157813	3601	1037	0.02	0.03	0.08	0.20	0.42	0.17	0.40
ABC News	6841762	3998	394	-0.56	0.07	0.09	0.07	0.82	1.06	1.29
CNBC	2885154	2488	1025	0.12	0.03	0.05	0.19	0.55	0.16	0.28
Boston Globe	2662876	2020	990	-0.33	0.03	0.04	0.19	0.63	0.15	0.24
Reddit	355965	3603	655	0.20	0.00	0.08	0.12	0.04	0.03	0.66
The Onion	8404314	2426	116	-0.54	0.09	0.05	0.01	1.67	6.77	4.05
US News & World Report	1412250	1277	939	-0.20	0.01	0.03	0.18	0.53	0.08	0.15
AP	376322	2486	934	-0.46	0.00	0.05	0.18	0.06	0.02	0.31
Alternet	3301949	3434	609	-0.78	0.03	0.08	0.11	0.46	0.31	0.68
The Intercept	3427867	2625	850	0.09	0.04	0.06	0.16	0.62	0.23	0.36
BizPacReview	6505004	3379	147	0.98	0.07	0.07	0.02	0.92	3.56	3.86
Vanity Fair	1862796	1195	827	-0.68	0.02	0.03	0.15	0.76	0.12	0.16
Gawker	2208537	2426	825	-0.58	0.02	0.05	0.15	0.43	0.15	0.34
Vice	6623265	2084	566	-0.47	0.07	0.05	0.10	1.54	0.68	0.44
Newsweek	2381035	1652	795	-0.72	0.02	0.04	0.15	0.69	0.17	0.24
Chicago Tribune	2690886	1298	789	-0.35	0.03	0.03	0.15	1.01	0.19	0.19

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

139

WikiLeaks	660240	2432	781	0.95	0.01	0.05	0.14	0.12	0.04	0.37
IBTimes	1170391	1533	781	-0.09	0.01	0.03	0.14	0.36	0.08	0.23
Independent	4494445	2266	780	-0.42	0.05	0.05	0.14	0.95	0.33	0.34
Judicial Watch	6110312	1034	423	0.92	0.06	0.02	0.07	2.95	0.87	0.29
Daily Telegraph	1892747	1483	768	0.08	0.02	0.03	0.14	0.61	0.14	0.22
The Nation	1588549	2064	764	-0.81	0.02	0.04	0.14	0.36	0.12	0.32
townhall.com	4278546	2624	668	0.89	0.04	0.06	0.12	0.78	0.37	0.47
Des Moines Register	987658	924	729	-0.21	0.01	0.02	0.13	0.52	0.07	0.14
opensecrets.org	48257	241	678	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.03
tedcruz.org	4898576	1282	631	0.68	0.05	0.03	0.12	1.88	0.45	0.24
New Republic	1121107	1206	675	-0.68	0.01	0.03	0.12	0.44	0.09	0.21
The Week	1773347	1619	672	-0.51	0.02	0.03	0.12	0.52	0.15	0.28
Observer	4339146	1529	654	0.41	0.05	0.03	0.12	1.38	0.38	0.27
WorldNetDaily	3229366	2018	656	0.92	0.03	0.04	0.12	0.77	0.28	0.36
sanders.senate.gov	2444074	1860	648	-0.70	0.03	0.04	0.12	0.63	0.21	0.34
gallup.com	403847	279	648	-0.47	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.78	0.03	0.04
Hollywood Reporter	1127403	1336	639	0.13	0.01	0.03	0.12	0.40	0.10	0.24
People	441372	1432	636	-0.26	0.00	0.03	0.12	0.14	0.04	0.26
clintonfoundation.org	377389	62	622	-0.36	0.00	0.00	0.11	3.48	0.03	0.01
Zero Hedge	1400374	1738	558	0.78	0.01	0.04	0.10	0.38	0.14	0.37
CSPAN	139707	659	609	0.10	0.00	0.01	0.11	0.07	0.01	0.12
PBS NewsHour	1394508	560	604	-0.63	0.01	0.01	0.11	1.28	0.13	0.10
Weekly Standard	804317	1565	583	0.54	0.01	0.03	0.11	0.24	0.08	0.32
Inquisitr	2274680	1345	355	0.10	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.82	0.39	0.48
The Federalist	2217961	1407	571	0.50	0.02	0.03	0.10	0.76	0.22	0.29
FactCheck.org	947518	331	567	-0.68	0.01	0.01	0.10	1.58	0.09	0.06

Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election | Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

140