

Øyvind Bugge Solheim, forsker II ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning og Kari Steen-Johnsen, forsker I ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning: The art of forging compelling narratives in times of crisis: youth electoral politics on TikTok

Abstrakt: TikTok has emerged as a powerful tool for reaching and mobilizing youth, who are otherwise less interested in institutional politics. This paper studies the TikTok communication of youth politicians in connection with the Norwegian municipal electoral campaign in 2023, with a particular focus on the ideological content expressed by right-wing politicians. Using the full set of TikTok data from youth politicians and youth parties in the campaign period, we ask the question of what topics are expressed and in what form, using narratives as a theoretical lens. The analysis shows that youth politicians centered on a limited set of political issues, and that various parties engaged in these to a varying degree. Right-wing politicians focused on economic issues and dominated these issues with a classic liberalistic narrative about individual freedom and the need to curb taxes. They also promoted a narrative about discrimination of boys within Norwegian society and linked it to wider cultural debates about censorship and silencing. In comparison, left wing politicians relied on traditional narratives about the state as key to solving societal problems, and on the need to continue the fight for women's rights. The analysis gives some keys to understand why the right wing was widely regarded as successful in their communication, and garnered strong electoral results, especially among boys

Anders Olof Larsson, professor ved Institutt for kommunikasjon ved Kristiana, Melanie Magin, professor i mediesosiologi ved NTNU og Eli Skogerbø, professor ved Institutt for medier og kommunikasjon, UiO: Preaching Through the Converted? Assessing the drivers of political engagement across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram

Abstrakt: Social media are essential communication channels for politicians. Securing the online engagement of followers (and their online friends) is important to secure the spread of the content provided beyond those who are already convinced. Taking a comparative cross-platform approach, the study at hand provides insights into the drivers of engagement in relation to the content provided by Norwegian political parties and politicians to Twitter, Facebook and Instagram during the 2021 national election campaign. We conceptualize the number of likes – a function common to all three platforms - as our dependent variable – and gauge for the influence of a variety of content-related variables. The empirical data for the study draws on a quantitative content analysis of the social media posts made by Norwegian political actors during the campaign. From this content analysis, we draw on variables gauging the presence of populist communication styles, calls for action (for followers to interact or to inform or mobilize themselves in relation to the campaign) and of the different topics dealt with during the campaign. The results show that calls to action generated more engagement on Twitter, highlighting its role in political and societal engagement, while similar actions on Facebook and Instagram led to fewer likes. Populist styles elicited more engagement on Facebook, with significant indicators concentrated on this platform. Regarding how users engaged with different policy issues, we find that platform functionalities and affordances significantly influenced engagement. Facebook's broad reach made it a preferred platform for political actors, while Twitter and Instagram were less effective for voter engagement and political information. Overall, the findings suggest that platform-specific factors play a crucial role in driving user engagement.

Hilmar Rommetvedt, forsker I ved NORCE, Jo Saglie, forsker I ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning, Signe Bock Seggaard, forsker I ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning:
Coalition formation in Norwegian municipalities: national blocs or local variation?

Abstrakt: Norway has a multi-party system with nine parties represented in the national parliament. These nine parties, together with local lists and minor parties, are also the main actors in municipal politics. The country's 357 municipalities vary considerably in size, from 700,000 to around 200 inhabitants. The Norwegian case is thus well suited for exploring variation in local coalition formation and comparing municipal and national coalitions. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research on local coalition formation in Norway. This is partly owing to the absence of formal governing coalitions in most municipalities, and partly because there is no regular collection of data on municipal party cooperation. In this paper, our aim is to explore whether local coalitions in Norway follow the national pattern of coalition formation, with alternation between a centre-left and a centre-right bloc. Moreover, we analyse the impact of municipal size. Given that politics in small municipalities more often may be characterized by personal relationships and pragmatic approaches rather than political ideology, we expect that coalitions across national bloc formations occur more in small than in large municipalities. Norwegian municipalities can choose between two models for organizing their executive branch. In the traditional model, the municipal council elects an executive committee by proportional representation. The alternative model – only used in Norway's three largest cities – is parliamentary rule, where a formal coalition – a city government – is formed and executive power is concentrated. The traditional model corresponds to a consensual model of democracy. Nevertheless, there is often a clear division between government and opposition also within this apparently consensual framework. The municipal council elects the mayor and the deputy mayor, and agreements between parties are often needed for these elections. Accordingly, the election of mayors creates a governing coalition (or single-party rule) and an opposition within the executive committee. The political element of this coalition formation nevertheless varies. In some cases, it is merely a technical cooperation to fill these posts, without any common policy objectives. In other cases, local coalition formation involves formalized policy agreements, or at least common policy intentions. We use three data sets to analyse our research questions. First, Statistics Norway collects data on the party affiliation of mayors and deputy mayors. We therefore use combinations of the mayor's and deputy mayor's party as a proxy for local coalitions, even though a coalition often includes more than two parties. These data are available for the period 1987–2023. Second, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities collected information on the parties that entered agreements on the election of mayors after the 2023 elections, covering all municipalities. This enables us to present a more nuanced picture of to what extent local coalition formation in Norway follows national party blocs or local idiosyncrasies. Third, we conduct a qualitative analysis of written agreements on mayoral elections in selected municipalities, to explore the policy elements of such agreements.

Soran Hajo Dahl, stipendiat ved Institutt for politikk og forvaltning, UiB: Framing the Other Side: Partisan Conflict and the Legitimacy of Disagreement

Abstrakt: Is partisan animosity driven by substantive policy disagreement or by out-group animus tied to partisanship? While prior studies attempt to isolate these effects by

manipulating party cues and policy positions, they overlook how partisanship shapes interpretations of disagreement - specifically, the assumptions people make about why their opponents hold certain views. These inferences matter, as individuals are more willing to tolerate political disagreement when they believe their opponents have legitimate reasons for their positions. When certain rationales become associated with particular partisan identities, the same policy disagreement can carry very different connotations depending on the partisan affiliation of one's opponent. I test this claim through two studies on immigration attitudes in Norway. The first, a survey experiment with open-ended responses, shows that participants infer different arguments from opponents based on partisan affiliation, and rate those arguments' legitimacy accordingly. The second, a conjoint experiment, shows that reactions to opponents depend not just on partisanship or policy position, but also on the justification offered. Immigration skeptics are largely unaffected by either factor. Immigration proponents, by contrast, are highly sensitive to both - evaluating skeptics far more favorably when they are seen to offer certain justifications.

Lisanne de Blok, Assistant Professor ved Utrecht University School of Governance, Erika van Elsas, Assistant Professor ved Radboud University Department of Political Science og Atle Hausgjerd, forsker II ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning: Drifting apart? Polarization in Political Trust

Abstrakt: The debate on the so-called crisis of democracy has largely centered on a structural decline in trust in political institutions within countries and the extent to which these trends can be attributed to negative political performance. While this focus on average levels of political trust is valuable, it masks the distribution of trust within society. Polarization of political trust poses significant risks, including societal conflict over the legitimacy of political institutions and their policies. This research note examines whether citizens are increasingly diverging in their trust in national political institutions by analyzing survey data from the ESS (2002-2023). We map polarization of trust by European region (West, East, South, and the Nordic countries), assessing its different empirical manifestations. We look at the two common conceptualizations of polarization: as increasing divergence (variance and kurtosis), and as increased consolidation (explained variance by socio-demographics and party preference). Furthermore, we assess which groups move apart, and in which direction. The findings provide critical insights into the dynamics of trust polarization, with implications for understanding how societal divisions are challenging the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Anders Todal Jensen, professor ved Institutt for sosiologi og statsvitenskap, NTNU: Robust demokrati og blind tillit

Abstrakt: Etter Alman og Verbas studie har mange oppfattet politisk aktivisme utenfor valgkanalen som en viktig trussel mot demokratiet. Denne oppfatningen har blitt kritisert - men frykten for den uberegnelige og uregjerlige "massen" er åpenbart vekket igjen blant forkjemperne for det liberale demokratiet. Spørsmålet i paperet er om politisk aktivisme er "medisinen" som hindrer at mennesker med blind politisk tillit blir demokratiets fiender i vanskelige tider.

Atle Hausgjerd, forsker II ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning, Rune Karlsen, professor ved Institutt for medier og kommunikasjons, UiO og forsker I ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning og Kari Steen-Johnsen, Forsker I ved Institutt for samfunnsforskning: Generative AI and Opinion Formation: Evidence from a Survey Experiment on the British Electoral System

Abstrakt: The breakthrough of generative AI (GenAI) has sparked both optimism and concern about its societal impact. GenAI could disrupt how individuals are informed and form political beliefs, potentially intensifying polarization, misinformation, and political distrust in society. Alternatively, GenAI may democratize access to information, narrowing knowledge gaps and fostering better-informed citizens with well-informed opinions on vital societal issues (e.g. Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023; Schäfer, 2023).

This paper explores the role of GenAI in opinion formation through a survey experiment embedded in a representative survey of Norwegian citizens. We examine the impact of GenAI (ChatGPT) on the formation, change, and reinforcement of attitudes toward the British electoral system (BES). As BES is recognizable but non-salient to most Norwegians, attitudes toward it are relatively malleable. The experiment compares media, ChatGPT vs. Wikipedia and online newspapers, and the tone of information provided by ChatGPT (neutral vs. politically biased, tailored for different education levels). We hypothesize that the impact of these treatments is conditioned by trust in GenAI, cognitive biases, and cognitive skills.

Preliminary results indicate that one-third of respondents formed an opinion after exposure, with ChatGPT slightly less effective than Wikipedia in attitude formation. This underscores how people are quick to form an opinion based on relatively little information about an object, also from ChatGPT. Trust in AI influence opinion formation, however, levels of attitude formation is high in groups with no trust in GenAI. Politically biased ChatGPT responses polarized attitudes, depending on the respondent's ideology, emphasizing the role of AI in reinforcing political divides. These findings underscore the dual-edged nature of GenAI, which, like prior technological breakthroughs, has the potential to both democratize information and deepen societal divides.

In the recent past, rapid and consequential technological change—such as the rise of social media—democratized access to information and broke down old barriers to political participation, while simultaneously fueling developments in society that are currently driving us apart (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). Similarly, this study's findings highlight the disruptive potential of AI and the need for continued research into how GenAI can counteract rather than exacerbate societal divisions.