

Social Media and Protest Participation: Evidence from Russia



Comments by Martin Gassebner

Difficult job to discuss this paper

- Exceptionally well done
- Extremely clever identification strategy
- Very believable magnitude of the results

- All comments that follow are thus nitpicking as I had to search very hard to come up with the “problems” in the first place...

Potential (additional) things one could do / have done

- Could you use geographic characteristics regarding broadband roll-out availability to predict the social network penetration?
- It would help to also show semi-elasticities for the magnitude of the effect.
- The notion that the information channel could also be pro-government comes relatively late
 - “fake news”; bots; monitoring of activity,

Potential alternative interpretations

- Could the more penetration = more pro-government votes not be driven by a “clash of generations”: old/traditional generation vs. “reform”/libertarian/young generation.
 - The more vocal the young are the more “mobilized” are the old
 - Does Table 6 vs. 7 really rule this out?
 - Is voting turnout increasing/higher in the penetrated cities???

Potential alternative interpretations

- Aren't Facebook vs VK very different users?
 - Facebook is an American icon
 - Thus what does the fragmentation really measure?

Minor (data) questions

- There is no verification of user provided places of residence in social networks !?
 - On Facebook in Germany many people refuse to give this information or deliberately give false information.
 - Is this also the case in Russia?
- Why not make use of the information for multiple protests in a city-week?

An idea for a further paragraph / new paper

- Did the protest activity have any predictive power for the elections in 2015
 - Since there apparently was a change in federal state budget allocation...